THE ROLE OF MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS IN THE RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AGAINST ASIAN AND BLACK PEOPLE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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DECLARATION

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Thesis Title: The Role of Media Representations in the Racial Discrimination Against Asian and Black People During the Covid-19 Pandemic.

I declare that "the role of media representations in the racial discrimination against Asian and black people during the covid-19 pandemic" is my own work and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references. I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.

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15 January 2024

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OKUCASHUNIWE

Lolu cwaningo luhlose ukuveza lokho okwakusakazwa abezindaba ngedlanzana labantu bebala elithi, ikakhulu abantu abaNsundu namaSulumani/ama-*Asian*, ngesikhathi sobhubhane lwe*COVID-19* emaphephandabeni aku-inthanethi kanye naku*X* (obebizwa ngokuthi u*Twitter* ngaphambilini). Lapha sigxile ekutheni abezindaba babe nesandla kanjani ekucwaseni ngokwebala nokubandlulula idlanzana labantu bebala elithile. Ngokuhlola amaphephandaba aku-inthanethi, amanethiwekhi ezindaba aku-inthanethi, kanye no*X*, ucwaningo luzophenya ngokucwasa okukhona nokungagqamile emithonjeni emikhulu yezindaba okwenzeka ngezindlela eziningi. Lolu cwaningo luphendule umbuzo obalulekile othi: Yiliphi iqhaza elabanjwa abezindaba ngokumelelene nokubandlululwa ngokobuhlanga kwabantu abangamaSulumani nabaNsundu ngesikhathi sobhubhane lwe*COVID-19*?

Amaphephandaba aku-inthanethi akhethelwe lolu cwaningo ahlanganisa (nakuba bekungenamkhawulo) i*New York Post*, i*New York Times* yase-*United States*, kanye ne*Guardian* yase-*United Kingdom*. Uhlaka lwetiyori lwalolu cwaningo lususelwe emibonweni esungulelwe ukubheka ngokucwasa ngokobuhlanga kwabezindaba: itiyori edidiyelwe ebheka ukusongelwa, ukuqonelana ngokobuzwe, ukubukwa njengongemuntu kanye nombono wobuhlanga, i-ejensi, itiyori ebhaka ubucayi bobuhlanga, itiyori ebhaka ukunotha kwabezindaba, itiyori yokungezwani ngokuthile, nobandlululo. Lawa matiyori ahlinzeka ngesisekelo sokuqonda nokuhlola ubukhona nezinga lokuhlukaniswa ngokobuhlanga ekuhlinzekweni kwezindaba.

Lolu cwaningo lusebenzise indlela yokuhlaziya exubile, luhlanganise ukuhlaziya ngokwezilinganiso kanye nangokwamaqophelo. Ukuhlaziywa kwengqikithi ngokwamaqophelo kugxile ekumelelweni kwabantu abaNsundu eMelika nabangamaSulimani ekusakazweni kwezindaba eziku-inthanethi kanye naku*X* ngesikhathi sobhubhane, kanti ukuhlaziya ngokwezilinganiso khona kuhlanganise indlela yokuhlolwa ukwenzeka kwezinto ziziphinda nengqikithi yamatemu obuhlanga kanye nezindaba ezibikwa abezindaba. Lolu cwaningo luhlanganisa ukuhlaziya

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ngokuqoqa ulwazi eqoqweni labantu ngokwezigameko ezibikiwe ze*COVID-19* kuze kuba kutholakala i-*Omicron variant*.

Inkinga ye*COVID-19* yaqhamuka nezinselelo kwezempilo nezomnotho emhlabeni jikelele. Noma kunjalo, imiphumela yobhubhane kubantu abangamaSulumani nabaNsundu eMelika, yakhomba okungaphezulu kwalokho okwenzeke kwezinye izindawo. Amatemu ahlabayo obuhlanga afana nelithi "*Kung flu*" kanye nelithi "*Wuhan virus*" abe nomthelela kubuqhwaga nasekubandlululeni, okuholele ekucwasweni kwale miphakathi.

Imiphumela iveza ukuthi imibiko yemithombo yezindaba ivame ukuchema kwezokucwasa ngokobuhlanga nalokho ukuyinkoleloze, kanye nezenzo zokucwasa okusobala nokucashile. Lolu cwaningo lugqamisa indlela imibiko yabezindaba abandisa ngayo izimo zokucwaswa ngokobuhlanga nokube nomthelela esimweni sokwesaba nokucwasa idlanzana labantu.

Lolu cwaningo lwengeza ukuqonda esinakho ngendima edlalwa abezindaba ekusabalaliseni ukubandlululwa ngokwebala, ukugcizelela ukwehluka kobudlelwane phakathi kwabezindaba, ukucwasa ngokwebala kanye nomphakathi. Lusebenza ukusihlinzeka ngokuhlukile ngendlela imithombo yabezindaba neyezokuxhumana eyayiveza ngayo idlanzana labantu bebala elithile ngesikhathi sobhubhane emhlabeni jikelele. Ukwengeza, ucwaningo lwenza izincomo okumele ziqashelwe abamanethiwekhi ezindaba, ukugcizelela isidingo sokwengezwa kwamazwi amelele ukuhlinzeka ngemibiko yezindaba eveza konke ngeqiniso.

Amagama amqoka

Ukuchema kwabezindaba*,* i*COVID-19,* ubhubhane, itiyori ebhaka ubucayi bobuhlanga, ukubukwa njengongemuntu, u*Twitter,* u*X,* ukucwaningwa kwengqikithi, iqophelo

ABSTRACT

This study explores the media coverage of minorities, specifically Black and Asian people, during the COVID-19 pandemic in online newspapers and X (previously called Twitter). It focuses on how the media has contributed to racism and discrimination against minority groups. By examining online newspapers, online news networks, and X, the research probes active and inactive racism in mass media in its many forms. This research addressed a fundamental question: What is the role of media representations in the racial discrimination against Asian and Black people during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The chosen online newspapers for this study included (but were not limited to) the New York Post, The New York Times in the United States, and The Guardian in the United Kingdom. The theoretical framework of this study is based on established theories on racism in the media: the integrated threat theory, hegemony, otherness and racial perception, agency, critical race theory, media richness theory, conflict theory, and prejudice. These theories provide a foundation for understanding and evaluating the existence and extent of a racial coverage divide.

Methodologically, this study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative analysis. The qualitative content analysis focused on the representation of Black and Asian Americans in online news coverage and X during the pandemic, while the quantitative analysis involved a systematic examination of the frequency and context of racial terms and narratives in media content. The study included a comprehensive cross-sectional analysis from the initial reported COVID-19 cases to the discovery of the Omicron variant.

The COVID-19 crisis led to global health and economic challenges. Nevertheless, for Asian and Black Americans, the pandemic's repercussions extended beyond the universal consequences. Racially insensitive terms like "Kung flu" and the "Wuhan

virus" contributed to bullying and discrimination, leading to the marginalization of these communities.

Key findings revealed that media representations often reinforced racial biases and stereotypes, with significant instances of both overt and covert racism. The study highlighted how certain media narratives exacerbated racial tensions and contributed to a climate of fear and prejudice against minority groups.

This study contributes to the understanding of the media's role in perpetuating racial discrimination, emphasizing the complex relationship between media, racism, and society. It serves as a unique contribution to how visible minorities were represented in news media and social media during the global pandemic. Additionally, the study makes notable recommendations for news networks, emphasizing the need for more representative voices to provide accurate and inclusive news reporting.

Keywords

Media bias, COVID-19, pandemic, critical race theory, otherness, Twitter, X, integrated threat theory, otherness, content analysis, qualitative

OPSOMMING

Hierdie studie ondersoek die mediadekking van minderhede, spesifiek swart mense en Asiërs, gedurende die COVID-19-pandemie in aanlyn koerante en op X (voorheen bekend as Twitter). Dit fokus op die manier waarop die media tot rassisme en diskriminasie teen minderheidsgroepe bygedra het. Aktiewe en onaktiewe rassisme in massamedia in sy vele gedaantes is by wyse van die bestudering van aanlyn koerante, aanlyn nuusnetwerke en X ondersoek. Hierdie navorsing het 'n fundamentele vraag aangeroer: Wat is die rol van media-uitbeeldings in rassediskriminasie teen Asiërs en swart mense gedurende die COVID-19-pandemie?

Die aanlyn koerante wat vir hierdie studie geselekteer is, het onder meer die New York Post, The New York Times in die Verenigde State en The Guardian in die Verenigde Koninkryk ingesluit. Die teoretiese raamwerk van die studie berus op gevestigde teorieë oor rassisme in die media: die geïntegreerde-bedreiging-teorie (*integrated threat theory*), hegemonie, andersheid en raspersepsie, agentskap (*agency*), kritiese rasteorie, die teorie oor mediarykheid, konflikteorie en vooroordeel. Hierdie teorieë bied 'n grondslag waarop die bestaan en omvang van 'n skeiding ten opsigte van rasberiggewing verstaan en beoordeel kan word.

Wat metodologie betref, is 'n gemengde-metode-benadering, wat die gebruik van beide kwalitatiewe en kwantitatiewe analise behels, vir die studie gevolg. Die kwalitatiewe inhoudsanalise het op die uitbeelding van swart en Asiatiese Amerikaners in aanlyn nuusdekking en op X tydens die pandemie gefokus. Die kwantitatiewe analise is by wyse van 'n sistematiese verkenning van die voorkoms en konteks van rasterme en -narratiewe in media-inhoud uitgevoer. Die studie het 'n omvattende deursnee-analise vanaf die eerste gerapporteerde COVID-19-gevalle tot die ontdekking van die Omikron-variant behels.

Die COVID-19-krisis het tot wêreldwye gesondheids- en ekonomiese uitdagings aanleiding gegee. Vir Asiatiese en swart Amerikaners het die gevolge van die pandemie

egter wyer as die algemene nagevolge gestrek. Ras-onsensitiewe terme soos "*Kung flu*" en "*Wuhan virus*" het tot afknouery en diskriminasie bygedra, wat tot die marginalisasie van hierdie gemeenskappe gelei het.

Sleutelbevindings van die studie het aan die lig gebring dat media-uitbeeldings dikwels rassevooroordeel en -stereotipes versterk het en dat beduidende gevalle van beide openlike en bedekte rassisme voorgekom het. Die studie het aangetoon hoe sekere media-narratiewe rassespanning aangeblaas het en tot 'n klimaat van vrees en vooroordeel teenoor minderheidsgroepe bygedra het.

Hierdie studie dra by tot insig in die rol wat die media in die voortsetting van rassediskriminasie speel en benadruk die komplekse verband tussen die media, rassisme en die samelewing. Dit dien as 'n eiesoortige bydrae tot die bestudering van die manier waarop sigbare minderhede tydens die pandemie in die nuusmedia en sosiale media uitgebeeld is. Daarbenewens bevat die studie belangrike aanbevelings vir nuusnetwerke. Die aanbevelings benadruk die behoefte aan stemme wat meer verteenwoordigend is ten einde akkurate en inklusiewe nuusberiggewing te verseker.

Sleutelwoorde

Media-vooroordeel, COVID-19, pandemie, kritiese rasteorie, andersheid, Twitter, X, geïntegreerde-bedreiging-teorie, inhoudsanalise, kwalitatiewe

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1.   INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic, which emerged in late 2019 in Wuhan, China, has had a profound global impact, leading to widespread lockdowns, restrictions, and vaccination campaigns. This thesis explores, analyzes, and synthesizes media and social media coverage from the onset of the pandemic through the emergence of the Omicron variant, with a specific focus on the representation of racial discrimination towards minorities, particularly Black and Asian people in the Western world and South Africa. The study examines how major international news outlets and social media platforms have portrayed and discussed issues of race and discrimination during the pandemic. The introduction provides a background to the study, outlines the research problem, and presents the key research objectives and questions. It also defines the scope and limitations of the study, setting the stage for a comprehensive analysis of media representation during this unprecedented global crisis.

1.2.   BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The COVID-19 pandemic, originating in China, led to a surge in anti-Asian sentiment and discrimination across the globe. Asian individuals were unfairly scapegoated for the spread of the virus, leading to a rise in hate crimes and xenophobic attacks. Simultaneously, Black individuals were disproportionately affected by the pandemic, both in terms of health outcomes and economic hardships. The media has often portrayed Black communities in a negative light, reinforcing harmful stereotypes and perpetuating systemic racism.

From early 2020, many American states were forced into isolation due to the outbreak of COVID-19. This physical isolation led many to rely heavily on social media platforms

for maintaining interactions and staying updated on current affairs. Authorities utilized social media to organize related posts, receive public feedback, and popularize their response approaches to the pandemic (Tessler, Choi & Kao, 2020). According to United Nations (2020) statistics, approximately 167 countries used social media platforms and national portals to share vital information about the pandemic as of April 2020. Consequently, social media has played a pivotal role in influencing public perceptions and communication during the crisis.

In recent years, the media has been a powerful tool for expressing public feelings and reactions to ongoing events. Research has revealed how the media has significantly contributed to acts of racism. Individuals from different ethnic backgrounds have been victimized online due to their appearance or accents (Schultz, Utz & Göritz, 2011). Discriminatory acts against Black and Asian people have been evident in media outlets, leading to misleading headlines. Wen et al. (2020) listed some of the headlines seen during this crisis, including "Chinese virus pandemonium." Since April 2020, many hashtags such as #WuhanVirus or #KungFlu have emerged (Coates, 2020). These posts have adversely affected the Asian community in the United States, fostering negative attitudes and violence against them as a response to fears of contracting COVID-19 (Schultz, Utz & Göritz, 2011).

Moreover, Black communities have faced disproportionate impacts from the pandemic, with higher rates of infection, severe illness, and death. Economic disparities have also been exacerbated, with Black individuals experiencing greater job losses and financial instability (Schultz, Utz & Göritz, 2011). The media's portrayal of Black people during the pandemic has often perpetuated negative stereotypes, further entrenching systemic racism and contributing to social and economic inequalities.

Despite existing research on the media's role in shaping public perception and its contribution to racial biases, there is a lack of comprehensive analysis that specifically focuses on the intersection of the COVID-19 pandemic, media representation, and racial discrimination towards Black and Asian communities. This study aims to fill this

gap by investigating how media coverage has shaped public perceptions of race and discrimination during the pandemic, thereby offering insights into the broader societal impacts of the pandemic. By understanding these dynamics, this research can inform media practices and policies aimed at reducing racial biases and promoting more equitable representation during global crises.

1.3.   THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Despite the substantial body of academic work on media representation during the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a noticeable gap in addressing how media coverage has sustained and perpetuated longstanding issues of racism and colonial attitudes towards minorities. Most academic writings have focused on health and economic issues, neglecting the critical examination of racial discrimination in media representations during this period. This oversight has left a significant gap in understanding the media's role in perpetuating racial biases and discrimination, particularly towards Asian and Black communities (Tessler, Choi, & Kao, 2020; Coates, 2020).

This study aims to fill this gap by investigating how media coverage has shaped public perceptions of race and discrimination during the pandemic. By analyzing media coverage, headlines, and narratives, the study seeks to uncover the ways in which harmful stereotypes were perpetuated and the impact they have had on these communities. Specifically, the research will explore how the media has engaged in acts of racism and other forms of prejudice towards individuals of Asian and Black origin since the commencement of the COVID-19 pandemic (Schultz, Utz, & Göritz, 2011; Wen et al., 2020).

Through content analysis, this study will highlight the role of the media in the representation of visible minorities (particularly Black and Asian people) during the pandemic. An evaluation and content analysis of the media's representation of minorities amidst the COVID-19 pandemic following the upsurge of concerns regarding

media representation and the prevalence of racial discrimination toward Asians and Black people in the USA will shed light on the means through which the media perpetuated the discrimination. For example, Asians were labeled as creators and spreaders of the virus, while Black people were questioned on their ability to handle the virus (Schultz, Utz, & Göritz, 2011).

By addressing these issues, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the media's role in perpetuating racial discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research is significant as it not only addresses a critical knowledge gap in academic literature but also offers insights that can inform media practices and policies aimed at reducing racial biases and promoting more equitable representation during global crises.

1.4. DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

This study utilised action verbs to describe coverage in mainstream online newspapers and X (previously known as Twitter[1]). For the purpose of this research, a select sample of online newspapers of various perceived political and social affiliations was utilised. Moreover, a blend of qualitative and quantitative research was employed to further examine the findings from a content analysis approach. This study examines, evaluates, analyses, and investigates the representation of Black and Asian people in the media and social media. Several theories were utilised to evaluate the findings. These include the integrated threat theory, hegemony, otherness, agency, critical race theory, media richness theory, conflict theory, and culture of prejudice.

This research is a blend of quantitative and qualitative research as it is focused on understanding and evaluating human behaviour. A qualitative research approach is an approach that entails gathering and analysing non-numerical data to comprehend opinions, behaviour, experiences, or concepts. Rather than a surface description, the primary aim of qualitative research is to gain a deeper understanding of a specific event or organisation (Boréus & Bergström, 2017). This study will be guided by the critical research paradigm as the media presents complex and multi-layered phenomena that are subject to multiple interpretations and best fit the research design. This research approach uses both quantitative and qualitative methods because the research questions focus on depth, and seek to unveil the thoughts, opinions, and motives of various sources and more specifically, opinions towards minorities or marginalised groups since the onset of the pandemic.

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[1] All references to Twitter have been updated to X and all references to tweets have been updated to posts in line with the social media platform's rebranding which took place in July 2023.

1.4.1. Time frame

The study was performed at one point in time as a cross-sectional study. This means that the necessary research for the study was collected once, although it can be repeated in future. Samples were collected from newspaper articles and included the analysis of language used in the chosen media sources.

1.4.2. Data collection techniques

A quantitative and qualitative content analysis of both online and print media will be done, as well as a thematic analysis that will reveal how the media represented minorities in the news. The data will be collected from online (X) and print (newspaper) media. The data collected will be unstructured. After the relevant sources have been collated, the content from the sources will be retrieved. The next step will involve the selection of samples, which will be two programmes a week during the chosen 12-month period (Downe-Wamboldt, 2012). To evaluate how media sources represent minorities, content from the media sources should be retrieved and analysed based on factors such as language and themes. Therefore, this technique suits the research topic. The data used for this study will be a mixture of secondary and primary data.

The data collection techniques include purposive sampling from the selected online and print media sources. Purposive sampling of content will enhance the reliability of the research as only the relevant content will be chosen; content that seeks to answer the research questions and is within the theoretic framework and chosen timeframe. The collection techniques will produce results that correspond to the profound characteristics, variations, and properties in the social and physical world. The reliability of this research also enhances its validity.

The study was performed just once, within the chosen period. The data collected integrate media sources covering racial or minority topics during the COVID-19 pandemic in China/Asia in November 2020, then proceed to how it hit Europe, the

United States of America, and the African continent. This study will include both dependent and independent variables, allowing for the assessment of media sources and their effect on human behaviour (acts of racism towards minorities). A variable is a phenomenon, object, or person that is being measured in research and is expected to vary within the context of the experiment (Kilpatrick, 1978).

1.4.3. The population and sampling methods

1.4.3.1. Target population

The target population for this study will be social media posts and newspaper articles, or any media material posted, written, or published within the chosen timeframe, i.e. from the emergence of COVID-19 up until 12 months after the first case was reported on media platforms.

1.4.3.2. Accessible population

The accessible population is newspapers, magazines, broadcasts, journals, and social media posts with content that relates to the representation of minorities, herein defined as Blacks and Asians, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.4.3.3. Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis for this study is the content with themes of racism or racial discrimination against Blacks and Asians as presented in the chosen accessible population. The unit of analysis is further narrowed down to the content that discusses minorities or marginalised groups amidst the pandemic.

1.4.3.4.   Sample method

The samples will be collected using purposive sampling, where particular attention will be paid to media sources that have detailed insights into racial discrimination. Sampled content will be retrieved from media sources. The newspapers, broadcasts, speeches, publications, and social media posts will be selected based on their reliability and relevance to the research topic. The samples will be selected twice a week, which in this case will be two programmes a week during the chosen period of one year (Downe-Wamboldt, 2012). The content will be assessed for its themes: language that gives insight on racial discrimination, and direct quotations that are connected thematically and are widely represented in the sample.

1.5.   RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How did the media cover race during the global COVID-19 pandemic?
2. In what ways did the media contribute to the discrimination of racial minorities since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. How did the media represent minorities during the COVID-19 pandemic?

1.6.   RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To analyze the media's coverage of race during the global COVID-19 pandemic.
2. To examine the media's role in perpetuating discrimination against racial minorities since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. To investigate the media's representation of minorities, particularly Asians and Black people, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.7. HYPOTHESIS

The study did not formulate a specific hypothesis due to the exploratory nature of the research questions and the use of mixed methods. The aim was to investigate and describe how the media portrayed and contributed to racial discrimination against

Asians and Black people during the COVID-19 pandemic, rather than to test a specific hypothesis. This approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of the topic, encompassing both qualitative and quantitative data to capture the complexity of media representation and its societal impacts.

The study aimed to uncover patterns and nuances in media coverage and their implications for racial dynamics during a global crisis by focusing on research questions instead of a hypothesis. This approach is aligned with the aim of generating insights and understanding rather than confirming or rejecting a predefined hypothesis (Downe-Wamboldt, 2012).

1.8 JUSTIFICATION FOR THE STUDY

This study addresses a critical gap in existing literature by examining how media coverage during the COVID-19 pandemic perpetuated racial discrimination against Black and Asian communities. The media plays a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions and attitudes, particularly during crises, influencing individual beliefs, social interactions, institutional policies, community norms, and public policies related to race. By investigating the media's role in portraying and contributing to racial biases, this research aims to promote greater understanding, challenge harmful stereotypes, hold media outlets accountable for biased practices, and contribute valuable insights to combatting discrimination and promoting unity across diverse communities.

1.9. KEY TERMS

- **Black people**: This term refers broadly to individuals of African descent, encompassing diverse cultural, ethnic, and national backgrounds.

- **Asian**: Refers to people of Asian descent, encompassing a wide range of ethnicities and national origins, including but not limited to East Asian, South Asian, and Southeast Asian communities.

- **Racism**: Systemic discrimination and prejudice against individuals or groups based on their race or ethnicity, often resulting in unequal treatment and social disadvantages.

- **Discrimination**: Unjust or prejudicial treatment of individuals or groups based on factors such as race, ethnicity, or nationality.

- Media Representation: The portrayal of individuals or groups in media content, which can shape public perception and attitudes

- **COVID-19 Pandemic**: The global outbreak of the novel coronavirus disease in 2019, leading to widespread health, social, and economic impacts.

- **Stereotypes**: Simplified and often exaggerated beliefs about a particular group of people, which can lead to prejudice and discrimination.

- **Prejudice**: Preconceived opinions or attitudes held towards individuals or groups based on their race, ethnicity, or other characteristics.

- **Ethnicity**: Cultural heritage and identity shared by a group of people, often defined by common ancestry, language, and traditions.

- **Hate Crimes**: Criminal acts motivated by prejudice or bias towards a specific group, often resulting in harm or violence.

- **Social Media**: Digital platforms and technologies used for creating and sharing content, which can amplify both positive and negative narratives about racial minorities.

- **Public Perception**: Collective beliefs, opinions, and attitudes held by society towards racial minorities, influenced by media representations and societal norms.

- **Xenophobia**: Fear or hostility towards people perceived as foreign or outsiders, often exacerbated during times of crisis like pandemics.

1.10. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The findings of this study will also be analysed within the broader context of a theoretical framework based on several models that will aid in establishing the link between media representation of minorities and racial discrimination. The theoretical framework serves as a guide to collect the most appropriate information for the study. By evaluating the present-day contributions of theories in the interpretation of media representation of racism and minorities, the findings can be viewed within the proper context. Racial discrimination exists in a broader context than the simple act in itself, due to a host of historical and contemporary systemic, cultural, and socio-economic implications.

1.10.1. Integrated threat theory

According to the integrated threat theory, acts of prejudice and discrimination are caused by feelings of threat and fear. These feelings of judgement and discrimination result from the beliefs and attitudes of individuals from an in-group toward those of the out-group. When members of the in-group are threatened by those of the out-group, they tend to develop adverse perceptions and attitudes, which come out as defence mechanisms (Stephan & Stephan, 2013).

Adverse sentiments have been evident from social media. Demonstrating how White individuals, as well as individuals from other groups, have expressed their feelings of hatred and fear towards Asians and Black minority groups out of fear of contracting the virus. The integrated threat theory explains how the in-group is developing such feelings because they feel threatened by the out-group. Since the virus is believed to have come from China, adverse feelings from other racial groups, such as Whites, have been developed out of fear (Stephan & Stephan, 2013).

From a decolonial angle, we also realise that some countries, such as South Africa, have high decolonising degrees through Africanisation, revealing prejudices and discrimination against the Black community. During the COVID-19 crisis, Africanisation has been demonstrated in various contexts. Undermining Africans 'ability to manage the crisis is a form of prejudice and discrimination that has been seen on various media platforms, and this has, in turn, influenced the growing cases of racism globally. This study, therefore, covers an important gap in the research.

1.10.2. Hegemony

Hegemony refers to the domination of one group over another without resistance. Hegemony is seen as efforts by the ruling class, intended to promote their self-interests ahead of those below them in the social hierarchy (Meghji & Niang, 2022). The ruling class promoted their own self-interest in the absence of obvious opposition; however, they utilised structural systems to diminish the determination of those below them. Negative media representation among both X and newspapers during the COVID-19 pandemic, stating that Asians were responsible for the spread of the virus and Black people were unable to handle the virus, is one such example of diminishing determination among perceived others.

1.10.3. Otherness

The concept of otherness emerges as a driving force behind many instances of racial discrimination. Defining certain groups as others can lead to the establishment of an us vs them mentality by establishing a group as different from oneself. Many practices in the western world have built a divide as they racialised the other (Hall, 1997). This study will examine how the theme was reflected in media representations of Black and Asian people during COVID-19. Particularly as the pandemic carried on and people looked for others to blame, growing tired of the virus and the onslaught of constant coverage.

Otherness, and how it is reflected in media representations, is intrinsically linked with racial perception. Newspapers and X serve as influential tools in shaping public opinion and perceptions, especially during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. They act as intermediaries between official information sources (such as government bodies and health organisations) and the public. However, the way the media chooses to frame, highlight, or downplay certain aspects of information can significantly influence how racial perceptions are formed and reinforced. Government information often reflects societal biases, and it was no different during the pandemic. For instance, early in the outbreak, some government officials and politicians used racially insensitive language, such as referring to the virus as the "Chinese virus" or "Wuhan virus". Such terminology, when propagated by the media, furthered the association of the virus with a specific racial or ethnic group, significantly impacting racial perceptions and enforcing the idea of "the other".

1.10.4. Agency

Agency is a concept defined by the initiation of action to target colonial rule (Coates, 2020). Contemporarily, and for its application in this study, it is present in the other's autonomy and their self-awareness of the need to change media representation of minorities.

1.10.5. Critical race theory

Critical race theory is a framework through which this study can examine racism in the full context of its historic and modern implications. The theory purports that racism continues to be present in the United States. Racial discrimination impacts the entire society due to how ingrained it is, not only in the lives of citizens but also in the legal policies and the structural and systemic basis of the United States (Mills & Godley, 2017).

1.10.6. Media richness theory

Media richness theory was constructed to analyse the power of the media to reinforce or dictate public opinion and how it is utilised. The foundation of this theory is that media richness consists of language cues, variety, public information, and the availability of prompt feedback (ChingLee & Salazar, 2023). The mode of communication will be selected based on equivocality and how effective the medium is in communicating messages to the public (Ishii, Lyons & Carr, 2019). The media's representation of minorities during the pandemic, through both newspaper and X sources, will be examined.

1.10.7. Conflict theory and prejudice

This study applies conflict theory to analyse the representation of Black and Asian people during the COVID-19 pandemic. Conflict theory, rooted in the United States history, helps examine the ongoing tensions between dominant groups (Whites) and minority groups like Black people, particularly when perceived threats arise. The theory emphasises racial inequality's origins, focusing on how power dynamics, including media control, perpetuate societal divisions. This lens highlights disparities in media representation due to White dominance, influencing negative depictions of minorities, and underscores the influential role of powerful individuals in shaping media content, functioning as a form of "gatekeeping".

1.11. THE STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study examines how the media actively engaged in acts of racism and prejudice towards individuals of Asian and Black origin during the COVID-19 pandemic. This exploration sheds light on a critical issue of media racism that warrants attention. The media significantly influences public opinion and attitudes, and when it perpetuates

negative stereotypes and discrimination against certain groups, it can have detrimental consequences on society.

A strength of this study lies in its provision of evidence demonstrating how the media contributed to the stigmatization and marginalization of Asian and Black individuals during the pandemic. Through the analysis of news coverage, social media posts, and other media forms, the study documented instances of racism and prejudice that might otherwise have gone unnoticed or unaddressed. Furthermore, the study highlights the urgency for media outlets and journalists to uphold greater accountability and responsibility. By drawing attention to harmful narratives, the study encourages reflection on media practices and their impact on marginalized communities.

However, this study has limitations. One limitation is its focus primarily on Asian and Black individuals, potentially overlooking the experiences of other marginalized groups. While acknowledging the specific forms of racism and prejudice faced by these communities is crucial, it is equally essential to recognize the intersectional nature of discrimination. Intersectionality underscores how multiple forms of oppression can intersect and compound, affecting individuals differently based on various social identities.

Additionally, the study's generalizability may be limited by its examination of a specific period or geographical region. Racism and prejudice manifest differently across global contexts, suggesting the importance of future research encompassing a broader range of experiences and perspectives.

1.12. BRIEF CHAPTER OUTLINE

1.12.1. Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter outlined the background of the study. Namely, the role of the media in the existence of racial discrimination towards Black and Asian minorities in the western

world and even South Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter outlined the research problem as well as the methodology employed in the research. The context, theoretical framework, and background of the research problem were presented alongside the questions the study endeavoured to answer with the strengths and limitations of the study addressed.

1.12.2. Chapter 2: Literature review

Chapter 2 identifies the relevant literature that was examined for the study. This chapter identifies the construction of news and how the deconstruction via content analysis tells the story of prejudices and the discrimination of minorities. A relevant background of the timeframe of the study is presented in this chapter in how the media has covered previous outbreaks as well as the necessary context of the COVID-19 pandemic at the time. This chapter demonstrates historical and contemporary evidence of the racialised nature of the response to pandemic outbreaks in the media.

1.12.3. Chapter 3: Theoretical framework

This chapter serves to illustrate the theoretical framework that provided additional context to the study's findings. The theories presented in Chapter 3 were used throughout the research to evaluate the existence and extent of racial stereotypes in each economic or social domain. The theoretical models established the link between media representations of minorities and racial discrimination as these frameworks will serve as a guide to collecting the most appropriate information required for the study.

1.12.4. Chapter 4: Methodology framework

By outlining the methodology framework, Chapter 4 explains the research approach, design, and sample collection method. Chapter 4 presents this alongside a transparent acknowledgement of the advantages, limitations, and ethical considerations associated with this methodology. The

, study timeframe, as well as the approaches applied by the researcher and the data analysis methods, are also presented in this chapter.

1.12.5. Chapter 5: Data analysis and results

This chapter provides background information on both the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the media coverage. Examples are given of racialised and discriminatory responses to the pandemic in print media (herein represented by newspapers accessed physically and online), and social media (herein represented by X). This chapter involved a qualitative analysis of posts on X and the tracked rise of such rhetoric from a cross-sectional analysis of X through a selection of key phrases. The findings are examined in the context of the connection to the study's themes as well as the theoretical framework.

1.12.6. Chapter 6: Reading the online press, who is to blame?

Chapter 6 delves into the analysis of how newspapers, encompassing both print media and X, covered the topic of race in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The examination spans various newspaper sources, tracing the coverage from the initial onset of COVID-19 to the emergence of the Omicron variant in South Africa. The chapter sheds light on the inherent bias within media reporting, particularly evident during the discovery of the COVID-19 virus. It emphasises the need for responsible reporting that includes recovery rates and contextualises risks rather than perpetuating hate and bias against specific societies in the name of precaution. The impact of media, political leaders, and social platforms during this period is discussed, highlighting the lasting effects on individuals 'thinking, beliefs, and attitudes towards racialised groups; underscoring the potential long-term consequences of the damage caused by media outlets during the pandemic.

1.12.7. Chapter 7: Conclusion

The seventh and final chapter of this paper summarises the main findings of the study. Chapter 7 reflects on the media's role in shaping perceptions and biases during the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter provides answers to the research questions as they were posed. This study investigated how the media contributes to the perpetuation of racial discrimination amid a global crisis. The findings derived from this research raise awareness about the influential role that the media plays in shaping societal perceptions and underscore the pressing requirement for media practices that are responsible and ethically sound.

1.13. CONCLUSION

This study explores how the media has actively been engaged in acts of racism and other forms of prejudice towards individuals of Asian and Black origin, since the commencement of the COVID-19 pandemic. It will highlight the construction of news and how the deconstruction, via content analysis, tells the story of prejudice and discrimination minorities (Black and Asian people) face as represented in news media coverage of COVID-19. This study will identify how media has contributed to racism and discrimination of Black and Asian individuals during the COVID-19 crisis. This includes traditional newspapers and online media, as well as social media in the form of X.

This study makes no assertions on the validity of the COVID-19 pandemic, nor will its validity be examined or discussed. Solutions will be provided to handle the issue at hand. More research on the matter should be performed and awareness created on racism and how it can be changed. News media should further be advised to avoid publishing pieces that highlight their views on these ethnic groups, and they should understand that they create a significant impact on the feelings as well as the opinions of the public. Global leaders also need to be called upon to help address this issue and employ more minorities in media corporations as journalists and decision-makers.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter covers an in-depth review of previous literature on mass media and the media's representation of minorities (Black and Asian people) during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study will highlight the construction of news and how the deconstruction via content analysis tells the story of prejudices and discrimination minorities (Black and Asian people) face as represented in the news media coverage of COVID-19 (Hertzberg, 2020). It will also identify how the media has contributed towards racism and discrimination among Black and Asian individuals during the COVID-19 crisis. This analysis covers traditional newspapers, online media, and X. The results will be instrumental in adding to the literature on the ideological construction of racism in today's mass media whilst also helping to fill a significant research gap, i.e., how media sources defy ethical principles by amplifying prejudice in a bid to sell their stories and seek relevance in this highly competitive field. It will also help establish whether the relationship between mass media representation and stigmatisation/violence targeting minorities is causal or correlational.

2.2. BACKGROUND

Currently, researchers such as Stechemesser, Wenz and Levermann (2020) are investigating and evaluating the apparent increase in incidents of racial discrimination towards minority groups. These authors 'recent empirical evidence shows that the ongoing SARS-COVID-19 outbreak has sparked violence, racism, and discrimination against minorities, more specifically the Asians and Black people living in the United States of America (Stechemesser, Wenz and Levermann, 2020). In the context of media representations and racial discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic,

Stechemesser, Wenz, and Levermann (2020) provide critical empirical evidence of increased incidents of racism towards Asians and Black people in the United States. Their research highlights the surge in violence and discrimination sparked by the pandemic, demonstrating how media-induced fear and misinformation can exacerbate societal prejudices. This aligns with the current research objectives by underscoring the significant role of media in shaping public perceptions and behaviors towards racial minorities, thereby supporting the examination of media coverage, its contribution to discrimination, and the representation of minorities during the pandemic. Reports of hate crimes towards these minorities are on the rise, with numbers surpassing 100 cases every day. According to the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), a significant percentage of marginalised people have reported wrongful or unfair workplace termination, physical violence, racial slurs, and extreme discrimination from other races, particularly Whites (Lewis, 2020).

These findings underscore the critical role of media in perpetuating racial prejudices and support the current research's examination of how media coverage during the pandemic has contributed to discrimination and shaped public perceptions of racial minorities. Meta-analytic studies have also discovered that Black and Asian people were the most threatened by discrimination, exclusion, biased discourse in relation to COVID-19, hostility, stigma, and other forms of negative treatment during the pandemic (Motta, Stecula & Farhart, 2020). These findings highlight the pervasive nature of media-fueled discrimination and align with the current research's objective to analyze media coverage and its role in perpetuating racism. By documenting these discriminatory practices, the present study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the media's contribution to the stigmatization and marginalization of these racial groups during the pandemic. However, the major problems lie with the government officials and the media representation of these minorities since the commencement of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This increase in hostility led to an increase in studies that were trying to determine the connection between the pandemic and what has been happening to minorities during

the pandemic. The increase in attention given to the global pandemic has led to greater interest in this issue which had previously only garnered interest in academic circles. Most of these reports of discrimination and bias have been treated as speculative and anecdotal, leading researchers to probe further into the matter in an attempt to diagnose and treat the problem. These studies contribute to the current research by providing empirical evidence and a foundation for understanding how the media's representation of racial minorities during the COVID-19 pandemic has perpetuated discrimination and hostility. By examining the findings of these studies, the current research aims to build on their insights and provide a more comprehensive analysis of the media's role in shaping public opinion and attitudes towards Asian and Black individuals during the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has gained publicity across all American states and nations and has sparked interest in all media platforms, thus creating pressure among journalists in a bid to seek relevance (Dhanani & Franz, 2020). It has, however, come to many researchers 'and activists 'attention that there is inherent stigmatisation by the media towards Black and Asian people. This has drastically increased since the outbreak of the pandemic and defies the ethical principles of the media industry. The primary principle of the media during a crisis such as a pandemic is to assist the public in problem definition, interpretation of causative agents, as well as recommendations for preventive measures (Bjørkdahl & Carlsen, 2017). Unfortunately, there has been an upsurge in public outcries regarding the role of the media. Some media outlets, according to researchers, scholars, activists, and relevant frameworks, have gradually digressed from their fundamental responsibility. This contributes to the current research by highlighting the gap between the media's ethical responsibilities and its actual practice during the pandemic. By examining these discrepancies, the current study aims to understand how media representations have contributed to racial discrimination and to what extent media coverage has influenced public perceptions and attitudes towards racial minorities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The role of the media is well understood. Given that the COVID-19 pandemic is unprecedented, the media outlets have been in unchartered territory. While this is expected, the global pandemic did not provide an excuse to pull back on the gains made in proper and fair representation in the media. The political climate has been hostile over the past couple of years. As the 2020 general elections in the United States coincided with the pandemic, it is no surprise that issues of racial equality would come to the fore.

The United Nations (UN) special rapporteur on minorities has expressed concerns in relation to discriminatory media reports towards minorities and, more specifically, the significant role of the media in racial discrimination (Kanaker, Abughazlih & Kasmani, 2020). As per Wen et al. (2020), in recent years, the mass media has been used as a tool to express people's feelings on various matters, as well as their reactions and thoughts on ongoing events. Mass media, in this case, entails television, magazines, radio, newspapers, and the internet. Mass media is viewed as the voice of the people and a reflection of what is happening in the real world. Misrepresentation in media therefore has the potential to damage existing ideas but also to fuel new stereotypes that could prove disastrous to the minorities who already have the odds disproportionally stacked against them. This insight is crucial for the current study as it underscores the powerful influence of media narratives on societal attitudes and the potential harm caused by biased reporting. By understanding these dynamics, the study aims to shed light on the mechanisms through which media contributes to racial discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic, thereby informing strategies for more equitable media practices.

It is against this backdrop that research conducted by Stechemesser, Wenz and Levermann (2020) revealed how the media has significantly contributed to acts of racism. In a bid to create interesting stories that would sell or help journalists gain recognition, a significant percentage of the media and mass media have found themselves answerable to racial bias within reports on the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic (Dhanani & Franz, 2020). Wen et al. (2020) believe that journalistic fluff is sometimes

excused, but blatant exaggerations have the potential to do more harm than good. In countries where racial tension is already running high, it could have dire consequences on educational opportunities and law enforcement interactions as a lot rests on the way impressions are created by civilians on racial relations.

The UN committee in charge of monitoring individuals 'and organisations 'compliance with the set regulations on racism by the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, reported that some media outlets used controversial language or words that provoke racial discrimination (Pew Research Centre's Social Demographic Trends Project, 2020). This language is not always outright, but the connotations around them leave room for interpretation, and there is evidence to show how some individuals misinterpret this language to spark violence.

In a UN report, the organisation's high commissioners, Filippo Grandi and Michele Bachelet, gave insights into cultural calamities that accompany such pandemics. They quoted, "When fear and uncertainty kick in, scapegoats are never far away" (Jurkowitz & Mitchell, 2020). Shortly after this, frequent crimes of hostility and anger towards people of East Asia were reported. There is a tendency to suggest a culpable guilty party who is then left vulnerable. As fear is such a powerful motivator, many will act with hostility towards the perceived enemy with the justification that they deserve it for their sinister plans. This insight is pivotal for the current study as it underscores the role of fear-driven narratives in fueling racial discrimination. By examining how the media propagated these narratives during the COVID-19 pandemic, the research aims to uncover the underlying mechanisms of media-fueled racism and provide a basis for more responsible media practices.

Not only is this harmful, but it is also disrespectful to the targeted victims, who seldom have a chance to defend themselves against the accusations leveraged against them. There is a possibility that the victims, on the receiving end of prejudice and violence, feel the need to retaliate. This vicious cycle eventually ends up affecting everyone

negatively. The media outlets that are accomplices in this cycle, fail to appreciate the destructive role that their narratives can play in making matters worse for minorities.

The media, in general, play a significant role in shaping people's attitudes and perceptions towards issues such as COVID-19 (Stechemesser, Wenz and Levermann, 2020). Many individuals from different ethnic backgrounds have been victimised online due to their appearance or accents (Schultz, Utz and Göritz, 2011). Although racial discrimination in the United States has been a problem since time immemorial, the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic has increased hate crimes and racial slurs against Black and Asian people. Whether this is due to increased frustrations with the tough conditions, or the increased polarisation brought about by the current ideological disagreements, is still unclear. The United Nations WGPAD (Working Group of experts on People of African Descent) has established that racial inequity and inequality have become widespread and are evident from discriminatory stereotypes and the media representations of minorities, particularly Asians and Black people (Motta, Stecula & Farhart, 2020).

A qualitative analysis conducted by Chen et al (2020), established that news media narratives and written codes focus more on the origin and geography of the pandemic, rather than the medical terminology when referring to the coronavirus. Chen et al (2020) claim that media platforms have become a playground for racism since the onset of the pandemic, due to the controversial narratives that have been presented throughout this period. When politicians or other influential figures use these terms, they reinforce the negative stereotypes and make it easier for people from the countries of origin to be viewed with contempt. A popular sinister term for COVID-19, used by various influential politicians and social media personalities, was "Kung flu".

Moreover, as per wen et al. (2020), structural and systemic racism in the news media became the order of the day, and media outlets created platforms for discrimination against Asians living in the United States of America. Asians find themselves on the receiving end of discrimination even though some have been born in the United States

and have little or no connection with their native Asian countries. The same holds in Canada and other parts of the world.

In parallel, Cho et al. (2021) discuss the differential treatment of Asian and Black populations in media coverage, revealing distinct patterns of representation and discrimination. They argue that while Asians were often portrayed as carriers of disease and threats to public health, Black communities faced a dual burden of health disparities and negative stereotyping linked to the pandemic. This differential treatment underscores broader societal biases entrenched within media representations during crisis periods.

Furthermore, Smith and Johnson (2020) provide a critical analysis of media framing techniques during public health emergencies. They argue that media outlets played a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions through selective reporting and sensationalist headlines, which framed Asian and Black communities as scapegoats rather than victims of systemic inequalities. This framing not only influenced public discourse but also perpetuated discriminatory practices in policy responses and social interactions.

As a result, empirical evidence shows that some media channels have also been used to spread conspiracy theories regarding Black and Asian people in connection to the COVID-19 disease, whilst taking advantage of the fact that media plays a significant role in defining health concerns (Vogt, 2020). For instance, since the origin of the virus was in Wuhan, China, where people are known to consume exotic foods, a considerable number of media sources published and presented conspiracies linking the virus to the Chinese 'consumption of meat from animals such as bats and snakes (Wen et al, 2020). Asians have been blamed for creating and spreading the coronavirus across different nations due to the negative sentiments spread by the mass media (Stechemesser, Wenz & Levermann, 2020). Anyone who looked Asian was linked to the outbreak in China, regardless of the fact that some originated from Cambodia, Taipei, and the Philippines.

Chen et al (2020) argue that these narratives encourage racism and negative attitudes towards Black and Asian people. The study posits that media language is often misinterpreted due to numerous theories and angles used when developing stories. Although referring to the virus by its origin, i.e. Chinese virus, may seem like a neutral term to some people, most people find it offensive when ethnicity is attached to the virus, thus leading to many controversies (Chen et al, 2020). Differences in the reasoning behind sentiments have caused racial bias in journalists 'reports. Asians, particularly the Chinese, have been portrayed as potential symbolic and realistic threats to Americans and the rest of the world. Journalists have been noted to amplify the origin of the virus —Wuhan, China — rather than the dynamics of the disease, its spreading mechanism, symptoms, and prevention measures (Wen et al, 2020).

The racist rhetoric corresponds with the increased ethnicity-based attacks towards minorities. Sutton, Renshaw, and Butts (2020) argue that media outlets are one of the leading contributory factors for xenophobia and racism due to negative stereotypes presented in media outlets. A study conducted by Stechemesser, Wenz and Levermann (2020) supports Chen et al (2020) by suggesting that there is an inherent link between media and anti-Asian and anti-Afro-American sentiments as the media represents these minorities as the major source of the virus. The study also shows that people use social media to spread hate towards Black and Asian people (Pew Research Centre's Social Demographic Trends Project, 2020).

The hatred that already existed towards the Black and Asian communities was therefore amplified by the negative association between them and COVID-19. Due to the devastating effect of the disease, there is a tendency to want to place the blame on someone. The negative representations of Black and Asian people in the media make them an easy target. By synthesizing these perspectives, the literature reveals a complex interplay between media representations, racial discrimination, and public health crises. It underscores the need for nuanced analyses that go beyond mere descriptions of media content to evaluate how such representations shape societal

attitudes, influence policy responses, and perpetuate or challenge systemic racism during global health emergencies.

2.2.1. Media headlines

Other discriminatory acts against Black and Asian people have been evident in some media outlets, which have developed misleading headlines. The headlines seem deliberately sensational to elicit a reaction from the viewers; they have been successful, given how they have gotten people to speak. One of the famous news headlines during the first half of 2020 was "the Chinese virus", which arose due to the remarks made by former president Donald Trump (de Melo & Figueiredo, 2021). Wen et al (2020) reveal some of the news headlines seen during this crisis, including "Chinese virus pandemonium". Coates (2020) adds to this by stating that since April 2020, many hashtags have been developed, such as #WuhanVirus or #KungFlu. Researchers and activists have passed their concerns on several misleading news headlines concerning the pandemic, such as "China kids stay home" or "The Chinese virus pandemonium". Such headlines have aroused major anti-Asian sentiments, which have led to violence against the Chinese. One recent example was a middle-aged man from Texas who attempted to kill a Chinese American family and their infant (Wen et al, 2020).

In addition, according to (Abd-Alrazaq et al, 2020). Negative headlines in news media have bred ill-treatment towards Asians and Black people living in the United States. During the COVID-19 pandemic, media representations significantly influenced public perceptions, exacerbating racial discrimination against Asian and Black communities. Abd-Alrazaq et al. (2020) highlight how negative media portrayals of Asians in the United States fostered unjustified fears and led to a surge in discriminatory incidents, ranging from verbal abuse to violent attacks. This scapegoating phenomenon extended globally, reflecting deep-seated societal prejudices that conflated ethnicity with disease culpability.

De Melo and Figueiredo (2021) conducted a comparative analysis of U.S. media headlines, revealing an ideological construction of discriminatory messages aimed at

Asians. The portrayal of Asians, particularly those of Chinese descent, as responsible for the virus's spread legitimized hate crimes and perpetuated harmful stereotypes. Jurkowitz and Mitchell (2020) further emphasize the impact of these narratives, noting how they fueled xenophobic sentiments and justified acts of violence against Asians across different countries.

In parallel, the media's selective framing during the pandemic not only heightened racial tensions but also obscured systemic issues of health inequities faced by Black communities. The disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Black Americans underscored longstanding disparities in healthcare access and socioeconomic opportunities, yet media coverage often sidelined these structural inequalities in favor of sensationalist narratives (Abd-Alrazaq et al., 2020).

Dhanani and Franz (2020) argue that the overwhelming focus on COVID-19-related news eclipsed other critical societal issues, including racial equality. The imposition of pandemic-related restrictions further restricted public discourse, allowing discriminatory narratives to flourish unchecked. This shift in media priorities marginalized discussions on racial justice, reinforcing existing inequalities and undermining efforts toward social cohesion.

Empirical studies, such as those by Abd-Alrazaq et al. (2020) and Dhanani and Franz (2020), demonstrate how media representations shape public attitudes and policy responses during crises. The media's role in amplifying racial prejudices not only perpetuated harm but also diverted attention from addressing systemic inequities. This synthesis underscores the interconnectedness of media influence, racial discrimination, and public health outcomes, emphasizing the urgent need for responsible media practices and critical literacy among audiences.

For instance, the Pew Research Centre's Social Demographic Trends Project carried out in 2020 revealed that Black people have also been victims of racial discrimination because they have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Compared to their White counterparts, Black people have experienced the illness twice as much. Media reports show that among those affected by the virus, Black people comprise half. Wen et al. (2020) seconded this by stating that three-quarters of the deaths experienced were Blacks. However, media outlets have represented these disparities as normal, since previous medical reports show that health disparities between White and Black people have long existed. The net effect of this means that Black and Asian people must contend with harder living conditions occasioned by the prejudice that they must deal with and the negative effects of COVID-19, which hit them worse than the rest of the population.

Psychological disorders among Black people have escalated (Wen et al, 2020). However, rather than amplifying the real causes of the health disparities, which include stigmatisation of minorities, lack of access to appropriate healthcare, and general attitudes of the minorities towards healthcare, most media outlets have resolved to focus on other factors such as poor living conditions and underlying diseases (Wen et al, 2020). Some media sources have tried to link race and ethnicity to the disparities, which led to racial bias towards minorities in the news media (Motta, Stecula & Farhart, 2020). This resulted in Black people being blamed for the disadvantages stacked against them, rather than their issues being looked at as valid and worthy of intervention.

According to a study done by Cho et al (2021), racial prejudice against minorities during COVID-19 has resulted in an increase in mental health disorders such as anxiety and depressive symptoms among Black and Asian people. As Per the World Health Organisation (WHO), the rates of mental health disorders among Black people have been twice as high as those of their White counterparts since January 2020 (Dhanani & Franz, 2020). It does not help that there was already a huge disparity among the different ethnicities, which has now been made worse due to racial prejudice. Being at a disadvantage, minorities have it harder than the rest of the population, hence the increased mental health challenges (Van Bortel et al.,2022). Furthermore, according to a UN report, minorities are dying disproportionately due to the pandemic compared to

their White counterparts (Razai et al 2021). These figures all tell the same story of a system that is working against some of its members. These studies underscore the critical need to address not only the immediate impacts of media representations but also the underlying systemic inequalities that perpetuate racial discrimination and health disparities. By integrating these insights, the current study can contribute to a deeper understanding of how media influences public perceptions and policy responses, thereby advocating for more inclusive and equitable media practices that promote social justice and health equity.

Data retrieved from the UK-based ICNARC (Intensive Care National Audit and Research Centre) showed that nearly 40% of COVID-19 patients are either Black or from other minority groups. Nonetheless, Abd-Alrazaq et al (2020) claim that the media does not present fair and accurate facts. Rather than presenting facts, most of the media language is tampered with to reflect a foul image of Black and Asian people to the public. The media has been shown to do this to protect the image of the ones who stand to benefit from these toxic narratives that have no regard for equality and fairness. Journalists from different media sources have amplified racism by insinuating that the pandemic should be blamed on Asians (Hertzberg, 2020). Most mass media sources have failed to establish the link between stress and immunity. Meta-analytic studies have proven that psychological stress, caused by fear and stigmatisation, suppresses immunity and alters the body's ability to fight diseases, making it the most profound explanation of the health disparities, but absent in 50% of the media reports (Zheng, Goh & Wen, 2020). This would explain the disproportionate effect of COVID-19.

In some regions, such as Brazil, research revealed that media reports have been inaccurate, and the mainstream media has failed to cover issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic (Coates, 2020). For countries like Brazil, which has a larger percentage of vulnerable minorities, the risk of infection has been significantly higher (de Melo & Figueiredo, 2021). The research established that when the total number of infected individuals surpassed half a million deaths (the regrettable mark) resulting from the pandemic, the Brazilian national news television channels and newspapers refrained

from covering issues regarding the pandemic (de Melo & Figueiredo, 2021). This systematic cover-up was no accident as it was widely reported in international news and by whistle-blowers. Despite the public protests and demonstrations, the mass media highlighted the worsening living conditions of vulnerable minorities, and the coverage only focused on undesirable themes such as poverty and violence. Analysts claim that the complete lack of media coverage of an event as significant as the pandemic is an adoption of a racist position which makes the lack of media coverage of COVID-19, to a considerable extent, racially biased (de Melo & Figueiredo, 2021). The racist undertones are there for everyone to see when a whole government is found to be hiding information or even misreporting it to save face.

Both print and online media have shown binary sentiment (duality) and homogeneity in their representation of Blacks and Asian Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic (Wen et al, 2020). For instance, during the brutal murder of George Floyd, an African American, by a White police officer, a substantial percentage of media outlets used the case to show that Whites are superior to their Black counterparts (Pew Research Centre's Social Demographic Trends Project, 2020). Newspapers and social media platforms represented Black people as being "vulnerable", particularly amidst the pandemic. In a bid to raise concerns about racial discrimination, Black people formed the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, which sought to carry out peaceful demonstrations to find justice for the Blacks who had been brutally murdered but, even with videos of his torture circulating, some mass media outlets portrayed inaccuracy in their reports (Hertzberg, 2020). Some media sources claim that there was no physical evidence that the victims were murdered. The reports have gone further to explain that the victim's autopsy showed that he had died from either poisoning or a drug (Fentanyl) overdose. The media outlets did not realise that they were relying on a conspiracy theory. George Floyd's case is a perfect example of racial stereotyping, prejudice, binarism, and the over-dominance of Whites (Jurkowitz & Mitchell, 2020). To date, there are still media outlets that attempt to justify the murder of George Floyd, which is quite unfortunate considering the damning evidence on record.

The studies by Abd-Alrazaq et al. (2020), Wen et al. (2020), and de Melo and Figueiredo (2021) reveal critical insights into the intersection of media representation, racial discrimination, and public health outcomes during the COVID-19 pandemic. Abd-Alrazaq et al. (2020) underscore the discrepancy between media narratives and factual reporting, highlighting how biased portrayals of Black and Asian communities perpetuate harmful stereotypes and exacerbate discriminatory attitudes. This misrepresentation not only distorts public perception but also overlooks crucial factors like the link between psychological stress and compromised immunity, as elucidated by Zheng, Goh, and Wen (2020). Wen et al. (2020) further expose the binary and homogenous portrayal of racial minorities in media coverage, which fails to address systemic issues such as healthcare disparities and the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on minority populations. Additionally, de Melo and Figueiredo's (2021) examination of media practices in Brazil reveals systemic biases and omissions in reporting, underscoring the global nature of media-driven racial discrimination during health crises. Integrating these insights into the current study can strengthen arguments about the pervasive influence of media bias on public health discourse and policy responses, advocating for more inclusive and accurate media representations that promote social justice and equity.

2.2.2. Media language

Media language has played a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions and exacerbating racial discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic. Research by Cho et al. (2021) and Abd-Alrazaq et al. (2020) highlights how media representations frequently employ derogatory language targeting Black, Asian, and other minority communities. Cho et al. (2021) observed that media coverage used written, verbal, and non-verbal cues that perpetuated discriminatory narratives, amplifying existing societal prejudices.

Abd-Alrazaq et al. (2020) utilized machine learning techniques such as Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) to analyze word frequencies in social media posts related to COVID-19. Their findings revealed clusters of content that disproportionately focused on attributing the virus to Chinese eating habits or military laboratories (Dhanani & Franz, 2020). Meta-analyses identified the use of terms like "bioweapon" and "political rivalry" as perpetuating racist sentiments (Jurkowitz & Mitchell, 2020), contributing to the stigmatization of Asian communities.

Moreover, Motta, Stecula, and Farhart (2020) argued that the excessive use of identifiers such as "Asian" or "Chinese" in media coverage constituted micro-aggressions, reinforcing negative stereotypes and racial ideologies. This linguistic framing not only marginalized these communities but also obscured broader structural issues, such as healthcare disparities and socio-economic inequalities.

The disparity in media coverage was also evident in the differential use of terms like "Black" versus "White," underscoring systemic biases within media portrayals (Motta, Stecula, & Farhart, 2020). This selective framing not only distorted public perception but also perpetuated racial inequalities by overlooking the diverse experiences and contributions of minority groups during the pandemic.

These studies collectively illustrate how media language shapes and perpetuates racial discrimination during health crises. By amplifying discriminatory narratives and reinforcing stereotypes, media representations not only influence public attitudes but also contribute to systemic inequalities. Integrating these insights into broader discussions on media ethics and representation is crucial for fostering more inclusive and responsible media practices that promote social justice and equity.

2.2.3. Social media posts

Since early 2020, many states have been forced into isolation due to the outbreak of COVID-19. This physical isolation had a considerable number of people relying on mass

media or social media platforms to interact and remain up to date on current affairs (de Melo & Figueiredo, 2021). Additionally, authorities have been seen to make use of situational information to organise related posts on their social media platforms to receive feedback from the public and to popularise their response approaches to the pandemic (Tessler, Choi & Kao, 2020). According to the United Nations (2020) statistics, as of April 2020 there were approximately 167 countries using social media platforms and national portals to share vital information with the public about the pandemic and, as a result, social media played a vital role in influencing the perceptions of the public and their communication amidst the crisis (Vogt, 2020).

As mentioned earlier, social media posts have revealed the depth of current racial discrimination. Racially offensive posts concerning the pandemic began back in 2020 when the first case of COVID-19 was reported in Wuhan, China. People began hashtags on X such as #BlameChina, #ChinaCoronaVirus #ChinaVirus and #ChinaLiedPeopleDied (Abd-Alrazaq et al, 2020). In one instance, Mike Pompeo, a State Secretary in the United States, used the words "Wuhan virus", which sparked major debates, public outcry, and encouragement of hate speech towards the Chinese. As of May 2020, just six months after the declaration of COVID-19 as a global pandemic, there were 72,500 posts with the hashtag #Wuhanvirus or #kungflu on X and Instagram. The United States FBI reported that hostility against Asian and Black people, as well as these discriminatory social media posts closely correlated with a drastic increase in physical attacks targeted at Asian and Black people (Dhanani & Franz, 2020). Former President Donald Trump's posts on the virus in 2020 also give insight into the representation of Asians amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Television and newspaper sources were quick to highlight Donald Trump's racist remarks, whilst other media voiced either their support or were opposed to his statements.

Additionally, Jurkowitz and Mitchell's (2020) study shows that some influencers have fuelled COVID-19 conspiracy theories from conservative news sites. A good example is the *Washington Times*, which insinuated in one of its reports that the coronavirus might

be a secret biological weapon used by Beijing to sabotage its territorial rivals and political enemies (Croucher, Nguyen & Rahmani, 2020). However, many activists argue that the *Washington Times* 'sentiments were enhanced by former president Donald Trump's remarks on the SARS pandemic (Abd-Alrazaq et al, 2020). Another example is when the Philippines showed hostility towards Asians through their responses to the pandemic. Recently, a famous blogger shared pictorial evidence in the form of a screenshot wherein a driver refrained from serving Chinese customers claiming that they had the "Wuhan virus". Instead of condemning the driver's actions and declaring them impermissible, the blogger's relinquished caption posed the question, "Too harsh? Or is that fair enough?" (Jurkowitz & Mitchell, 2020).

2.3. LOOKING TO THE PAST: HOW THE MEDIA COVERED SIMILAR EVENTS

Over the years, there have been events resembling the COVID-19 pandemic and have equally received mixed reactions and responses from the media as well as the public. It is possible to look at the media coverage of these events and find differences and/or similarities in how the media handled the information then and now. The high-end risks connected to pandemics and their fast-spreading nature have often evoked speculation in media across the globe (Tai et al, 2021). Experts concluded that the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic is similar to other pandemics, such as the Spanish Flu of 1918, the SARS outbreak of 2003–2004, the Ebola outbreak of 2014–2015, and the H1N1 Swine Flu in 2009 when looking at the origin, public's reaction, economic and social outcomes, as well as media coverage. For instance, media coverage was fundamental during the Spanish Flu and H1N1 Swine Flu epidemic in 2009, particularly in advocating for self-isolation and social distancing as well as disseminating information on the infection trajectories, symptoms, rates of infection, and prevention measures (Klemm, Das, & Hartmann, 2016). However, there were numerous conspiracy theories surrounding the disease, which consequently led to confusion and inaccuracy in reports which in turn, led to violence and stigmatisation of the minorities and those adversely affected by the pandemic (de Melo & Figueiredo, 2021).

2.3.1. The Spanish Flu of 1918

The Spanish Flu of 1918 (also known as influenza) was caused by a type A virus and has symptoms similar to those of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. It was lethal and claimed the lives of 680,000 across the globe between 1918 and 1919 (Pieri, 2019). Mathematical modelling studies revealed that, just like in other pandemics, the media functions significantly impacted the diseases 'transmission rates. An analysis was done which revealed that during the Spanish Flu of 1918, there was racial bias in news coverage since, like other events, minorities were disproportionately affected (Pieri, 2019). Similarly, rather than a focused approach towards coverage of important dimensions of the disease — such as the number of infections, peak time, modes of transmission, preventative measures, number of hospital beds, and vaccination — 60% of the media outlets focused on the origin of the pandemic and its inherent link to ethnicity and racial differences.

Most of the nations that took part in World War I were reluctant to reveal the rate of outbreaks in their country and its impact. This was due to the fear of political influence from rivals (Pieri, 2019). However, as mentioned earlier, a lack of media coverage is a form of racial discrimination. This is because it is the responsibility of the media to inform the public of serious crimes such as pandemics and epidemics. Disseminating truthful, reliable, and credible information can help enhance the minimisation of harm, which is one of the major principles of media ethics. Negative and positive representations of minorities have a greater impact on the thoughts, attitudes, and perceptions of the public concerning a crisis. Positive representations attract positive attitudes towards minorities, whereas negative attitudes attract physical violence and verbal harassment.

During the Spanish Flu outbreak, different media sources had different conspiracy theories regarding the pandemic, which caused extreme confusion, with the leading deceptive theory being that it originated from Spain or the Iberian Peninsula due to its

name the "Spanish Flu". This led to negative stereotyping towards the people of Spain when, in fact, the name referred to the countries involved in World War I. In the United States and other nations across Europe, mass media outlets often referred to the pandemic as the "Spanish Lady", whereas people from Spain believed that the disease was passed on to them by the French, thus branding it the "French Flu".

This mix-up of information caused inaccuracy in newspapers and sparked racial wars between people (Pieri, 2019). Since researchers and scholars have not yet found the exact origin of the Spanish Flu, social response towards the disease was based on the blame game, and the minorities in China, Spain, and France were victimised and violently stigmatised for being the potential source of the virus. A recent report compiled by the World Health Organisation showed that there is an inherent link between the Spanish Flu and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic as both potentially trace their origin to China (McCauley, Minsky & Viswanath, 2018). This has furthered racial stereotypes even in the current pandemic. Xenophobia attacks were also prevalent during the Spanish Flu outbreak, as has been the case with other pandemics in history where individuals or groups of people were attacked due to their race or ethnicity in relation to a pandemic.

2.3.2. SARS 2003–2004 pandemic

A serious and infectious respiratory disease hit many nations in 2003. The mass media portrayed the outbreak as a revolution and was referred to as the 21st-century plague. The origin of the pandemic was China, although it spread to other areas, including Hong Kong, Toronto, and Singapore, within a few days (Pieri, 2019). Although the disease was curbed within a brief period and had minimal impact the Chinese were blamed for spreading the virus. The Asians received intense stigmatisation and prejudice. Confusion struck media outlets due to numerous conspiracy theories concerning the SARS outbreak. As a result, the WHO developed regulations through international surveillance mechanisms to receive all information from both official media channels

and new media, such as social media, to regulate and ensure that the information disseminated is accurate and less biased (Pieri, 2019).

Initially, according to Pieri (2019), the Chinese authorities sought to limit news coverage of the SARS pandemic as it would lead to widespread speculation. Consequently, the disease unknowingly spread to Hong Kong and Singapore, yet the Chinese television news and newspapers did not air any concerns or inform the public and neighbouring nations of the danger and fatality of the SARS crisis (Monson, 2017). The lack of media coverage led to mismanagement of the disease, and this led to the spread of the disease to other destinations. Among the countries severely affected were Vietnam and Canada. The silence went on until a whistle-blower, a retired healthcare professional who disobeyed the Chinese authorities 'commands, addressed the issue on a social platform and created awareness of the dangers of the disease (Monson, 2017). Therefore, the lack of transparency and media coverage can be interpreted as indicative of deficiencies in the Chinese media systems, which diverge from the ethical principles upheld by media in the US and other Western countries. In contrast to Western media ethics, the absence of these standards in the Chinese media implies a failure to fulfil their responsibility, highlighting a deviation from the principles of media ethics. The SARS pandemic closely resembles the coronavirus pandemic. After the SARS outbreak in 2003, researchers predicted a similar event in the future, which could be the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.3.3. The H1N1 pandemic

The H1N1 flu is a condition that mimics the seasonal flu and is a respiratory disease caused by the influenza virus on the H1N1 strain. Psychological research shows that people often blame other individuals or a group of people for crises, to ease their tension and fear. The H1N1 flu pandemic that struck nations in April 2009 was one of the major crises in history as it caused worldwide tension and claimed many lives (Klemm, Das, & Hartmann, 2016). Meta-analytic studies show that news reports published in the United States since the commencement of the flu caused major havoc

(Bjørkdahl & Carlsen, 2017). Latinos and Mexicans who were residents of the United States were adversely affected by stigmatisation from non-Latinos. According to the mass media reports and posts, the perpetrators of the stigmatisation claimed that Latinos and Mexicans carried the virus because the reports stated that the disease was contracted from Mexican pig farms (McCauley, Minsky & Viswanath, 2018).

The results of the study done by McCauley, Minsky and Viswanath (2018) revealed that themes emerging from the coding and analysis of the news media showed ideological construction of racial bias. The Latinos and Mexicans showed more flu-related stress levels compared to their counterparts, the Whites. Although Latinos reported more use of positive coping strategies, the United States media had a significant impact on the rise in verbal harassment and physical violence towards Mexicans and Latinos (McCauley, Minsky & Viswanath, 2018). Bjørkdahl and Carlsen (2017) argue that the media creates a "third-person effect". By conceptualising the pandemic as a fearful and dreadful phenomenon, the public automatically develops intense fear. The Latinos and Mexicans were portrayed as people to be feared. The media outlets presented them as being vulnerable and ignorant to contracting and spreading a deadly disease. The Latinos and Mexicans were presented as threats, and thus, there were numerous reports of xenophobic attacks towards these minorities in the United States (McCauley, Minsky & Viswanath, 2018).

The media reports were overly exaggerated and sensationalised. Critics argue that precision is often neglected when scientific sentiments are introduced. For instance, the Norwegian news media used theoretical metaphors. For this comparison, we focus on *Stavanger Aftenblad* and *Bergens Tidende*: two Norwegian regional newspapers whose headlines on the pandemic contradicted each other. At one point, the *Bergens Tidende* news study's headlines labelled the COVID-19 pandemic as lethal and gave the public a reason to fret (Klemm, Das & Hartmann, 2016). An article written in the *Stavanger* news study, on the other hand, quoted, "[T]here's a lot of psychology, but the experience from the avian flu tells us that neither consumers nor companies were particularly frightened"

(Bjørkdahl & Carlsen, 2017) which assured the public that there was no reason to fear but gave paradoxical reasons as to why people should not fear the disease.

According to press releases, daily reports, and op-ed newspapers, the Mexicans were portrayed as a threat to the rest of the public. This representation of minorities amidst the pandemic resembles the case in the current COVID-19 pandemic, where conspiracy theories are a major problem in both the print and online media. Even more unfortunate is the fact that the Chinese are blamed for the development and spread of the disease and are therefore conceptualised to be great threats to the public (Klemm, Das & Hartmann, 2016).

2.3.4. Ebola

Ebola is a highly infectious and lethal disease that is characterised by severe bleeding and fever caused by the Ebola virus. It is transmitted from one person to another through body contact Pieri (2019). In history, it has been recorded as the most dangerous and dreadful epidemic ever experienced due to its symptoms and the dynamics of the disease. Considering the case of Ebola in 2014–2015, sociological research conducted by Pieri (2019), a professor at the Unity of Manchester in the United Kingdom, explained that the then-British news study had framed the Ebola epidemic as a localised African crisis, which meant that the disease's source was the Africans (Monson, 2017). As the disease originated in Africa, Africans (who have for decades faced racial discrimination) became the most racialised ethnic group. The study used semantic text mining of the information gathered and data collected to prove that during the Ebola crisis, there were ideological constructions of racial stereotypes in the media's use of certain words and their prevalence in the media reports. The World Health Organisation and Centres for Disease Control Prevention (CDC) analysed the mainstream media and social media sources such as Facebook posts and found that Ebola was often portrayed as being "African" (Monson, 2017).

The United States media conceptualised the disease using words such as "other", "African", and "scary", which evoked fear, prejudice, and stereotyping of Africans by the Americans. These sentiments led to dreadful consequences across different American states. There were xenophobic attacks targeting Black people because of prejudice and racial discrimination. Monson (2017)'s article asserts that these racist sentiments in both online and print media provoked a discourse of frustration and above all, led to the "otherisation of Africa and Africans". In other words, the United States newspapers, television, and social media outlets referred to Ebola as exclusively "African", providing insight into the existential binaries and homogenisation. Some print and online media went the extra mile by reporting negative sentiments such as "Ebola is all over Africa" (Monson, 2017). A study focusing on the conceptualisation of metaphors found that during the Ebola outbreak in 2014, the two most popular newspapers in the United States, the *New York Daily News* and *The New York Times*, relied principally on one conceptual metaphor, i.e., Ebola was a "war" (Monson, 2017). This meant that the role of "culprit" was assigned to the disease, whereas the victims were the voiceless and vulnerable Africans.

Just like the previous pandemics, the media has portrayed COVID-19 as a disease caused by a group of people from a particular region and its origin from animals (Klemm, Das & Hartmann, 2016). Semiotic analyses established that African Americans who lived in the United States and those who returned to America from West Africa were physically abused and verbally harassed.

Respiratory diseases have claimed millions of lives over the years, with outbreaks such as the Spanish Flu and COVID-19 having a closer link in origin and transmission trajectories. However, the only constant has been the impact of mass media which, although gradually changing due to the highly dynamic nature of media and technology, has similar sentiments regarding minorities and their response to the viruses (Pew Research Centre's Social Demographic Trends Project, 2020). Media coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic defies media ethics which dictate that media outlets should be

focused on truth, fairness, minimisation of harm, objectivity, and accuracy (Monson, 2017). Additionally, the United Nations states that media ethics are interrelated as one principle depends on another for a resource to be considered credible (Hertzberg, 2020). Transparency and facts are interdependent as a source cannot be untruthful and transparent simultaneously.

2.4. SUMMARY

Chapter 2 presents empirical evidence showing how virus outbreaks spark violence, racism, and discrimination against minorities, more specifically the Asians and Black people living in the United States of America. This was not just the case during COVID-19 but also when Ebola, H1N1, SARS, and the Spanish Flu surfaced. There were numerous conspiracy theories from the media surrounding these diseases, which consequently led to confusion and inaccuracy in reports, which in turn led to violence and the stigmatisation of minorities. The discrepancies in information caused inaccuracy in newspapers and sparked racial wars between people. The United States media conceptualised the disease using words such as "other", "African", and "scary", which evoked fear, prejudice, and the stereotyping of Africans by Americans. There were also instances of xenophobic attacks targeting Black people because of prejudice and racial discrimination.

Studies revealed how the media's negative representation of Black people evoked attacks and hatred towards Black people. Although the media played a significant role in assisting the medical department in communicating emergency health information to the public, the United States media may have caused more harm than good, particularly for people who lived in the USA (Khunti et al, 2020). The harm caused by the mass media during these outbreaks was attributed to the wide-range domination of the media industry by the Whites, which meant a lack of proper representation of minorities such as African Americans.

Social media posts, media headlines, and language are identified as key factors that fuel the fast-spreading fire of hate and bias. All these have been shown to be constant whenever a pandemic of unknown origin surfaces. In future, we expect that solutions will also be provided to handle the issue at hand. More research on the matter should be conducted, and racism awareness should be created. The media should avoid publishing pieces that highlight personal views on these ethnic groups. They should realise that they create a profound impact on the feelings, as well as the opinions, of the public. Global leaders need to be called upon to help address this issue and employ more minorities in media corporations as journalists and decision-makers.

The forthcoming theoretical framework chapter explains how the researcher will explore the complex issue of racial discrimination in the media. Chapter 3 begins by acknowledging the longstanding existence of racial discrimination across nations and the need for a theoretical explanation and understanding of racism in the media. These theoretical frameworks serve as a guide for researchers to collect appropriate information and employ rigorous analytical methods to examine the extent of racial stereotypes and discrimination in different economic and social domains. In this thesis, the focus is on the media representations of racism and minorities in the context of multi-channel and digital education practice and research, particularly since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, Chapter 3 delves into the background information on the social construction of racial discourse, the power of media representations, and the perpetuation of racial ideologies. Stereotyping and binary oppositions are identified as critical facets of media representation, while theories such as the integrated threat theory, the critical race theory, the media richness theory, and the conflict theory are presented as influential frameworks to understand and analyse racial discrimination in the media. Despite the distinct perspectives of these theories, the chapter emphasises the need for constructive collaboration among these theories to comprehensively address the different dimensions of racial discrimination.

CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. INTRODUCTION

Racial discrimination is a concept that has long existed across different nations. Theorists developed theories to help explain and understand racism in media. These theories help evaluate the existence and extent of racial stereotypes in each economic or social domain. Although racial discrimination and prejudice are often intentional, there can be a subtle negative representation of minorities, which requires analytical and theoretical frameworks to scrutinise and help with statistical profiling (Tessler, Choi & Kao, 2020). Without theoretical models, researchers run the risk of collecting data that does not meet rigorous standards, creating critical challenges during the interpretation of data.

The theoretical models in this study will be instrumental in establishing the link between the media's representation of minorities and racial discrimination. These theoretical frameworks will serve as a guide to collect the most appropriate information required for the study and the best analytical measurement methods (Cho et al, 2021). This chapter intends to evaluate the present-day contribution of several theories in the interpretation of media representations of racism and minorities in multi-channel and digital education practice and research. Multi-channel, in this case, means the combination of different modes such as mainstream newspapers that are available digitally and in print, as well as X. This chapter gives an in-depth background of the research and a detailed account of various theoretical frameworks that apply to racial discrimination and other forms of racial stereotypes in the media representations since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Today's society has turned into a place of all-pervading human engagement in modern media using an extensive array of mobile devices and other innovations. With the swift production and dissemination of digital content, people have raised numerous concerns about the social construction of racial discourse, interactions, and racialised identities (Trčková, 2015). Whereas some scholars and theorists have directed their efforts to the possibility of the newly invented internet to welcome a digital "global village" wherein visual identifiers of race are obscured, other theories hold that race is fashioned articulately online as well as in the media (Coates, 2020). However, the primary concern is the degree to which the networked media has become a basis for the transformation of social action, decolonisation, reproduction of racism, and maintenance of the status quo. Race is often fabricated based on physical appearance, ethnicity, habits, or culture (de Melo & Figueiredo, 2021). Ideologies built on race, particularly presented in the media, serve to normalise the notion of superiority and dominance of one race over others. Discriminatory practices are deeply embedded in the present-day media industry.

Representation by the media is the process of creating meaning for phenomena through symbolic content or forms. Media representation is often studied to understand the power of media content and texts as these represent generated ideologies, impart knowledge, and present facts or any form of "truth". Most researchers argue that media representations have power, particularly because media representations shape people's perception and their understanding of phenomena whilst simultaneously engaging individuals 'emotions (Meghji & Niang, 2022).

The two critical facets of media representation include stereotyping and binary opposition. Stereotyping is defined as the use of a few or limited features of a phenomenon to propound it in such a manner that diminishes or reduces other aspects. In his book "The Spectacle of the 'Other'", Stuart Hall (1997) covers various aspects of

stereotyping. For instance, Hall (1997) explains in detail the repertoires of representation as well as practices that have built racial differences in Western popular culture. This is referred to as "racialising the other" (Hall, 1997:239). Major events — like those in the 16th century when European traders and West African kingdoms supplied Black slaves, and the scramble for Africa's territory and market control — contributed to the emergence of popular representations highlighting racial differences. Similarly, the Third World War, marked by the migration of third-world countries into Europe and North America, is another significant event shaping these representations. (Hall, 1997:240).

On staging racial differences, Hall (1997) reveals their existence since the late 20th century. These stereotypes have been fought via acts such as the anti-slavery movement that helped abolish British slavery in 1834. Abolitionists adopted various slogans that helped put an emphasis on common humanity (Hall, 1997:249). Stereotyping has been known to deploy a splitting strategy that divides what is originally acceptable from the unacceptable. It does away with anything that does not fit in or is different, making it rigid as they are "fixed, clearly cut, and unalterable" (Hall, 1997:260). Numerous trans-coding strategies have been adopted to help fight the battle of stereotyping. An example would be the reversing of stereotypes, as well as the substitution of negative images with positive images (Hall, 1997:270). After the civil rights movement in the 1960s, people began to develop a positive attitude towards the Black cultural identity (Hall, 1997:273). Positive and negative images were another strategy that contested the racial representation regime. This strategy substituted positive images for negative images of Black people, an approach that continues to dominate today's popular representation. This strategy has helped attain a balance and is supported by acceptance. It inverts binary opposition by reading the negative and positive. Such strategies have helped with the representation of minority groups by the media, however, some biases persist.

Binary oppositions are used to refer to the way a concept is defined in reference to its opposite, for instance, civilised/primitive and western/eastern. These two aspects have constantly been used to help detect negative media representations of individuals or groups of people, particularly marginalised groups, or minorities. Claude Lévi-Strauss, a French anthropologist, proposed a theory of "binary opposites" that suggests that many narratives in media contain opposing main characters. Lévi-Strauss supported the idea that binary opposites form the basic structures of human culture and thought. He also found binary opposites essential when identifying structures within communication (Fourie & Karam, 2001).

Several concerns have been raised about the idea. Despite grouping the world into binary opposites that seem harmless, these definitions have been seen to shape ideologies, viewing one as superior to the other. Jacques Derrida states that "one of the two terms governs the other" (Derrida, 1972). If the media normalises these views, representation needs to be critically assessed now that it brings about an imbalance of power and other concepts of stereotypes. Derrida suggests that language is another concept of binary opposites that needs to be criticised as it also brings about division in many ways. He proposed the idea that there are very few binary oppositions that are neutral and argues that there will always be a struggle for power between these poles. He developed the idea of "deconstruction" which aims to eradicate the boundaries between binary oppositions (Derrida, 1972).

Most researchers, activists, and frameworks believe that media representations of minorities (for example, Asian and Black people) have not only changed the way people see these minorities but have also sparked hatred and violence towards them amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Negative media representation, disguised as journalistic bias, has been linked to verbal antagonism, where racial slurs and disparaging comments in the media are perceived as being responsible for hostility towards these minorities (Tessler, Choi & Kao, 2020). Other forms of racial discrimination in the mass media include journalistic bias, ethnic prejudice, stereotypic representation — where the Chinese are the major focus of the media throughout the pandemic — over-mentioning

or overemphasising the origin of the virus, and the undesired living conditions of Black people, as well as the scrutiny of behaviours attributed to the Chinese, such as their eating habits (Coates, 2020).

Meta-analytic studies have shown that the media's representation is based on differences in culture, people, and places (Meghji & Niang, 2022). A significant percentage of media outlets have been discovered to overemphasise, over-mention, and use negative words and phrases whilst also basing their views on assumptions and conspiracy theories. A content analysis of the latest media covering COVID-19 will be instrumental in assessing the impact of the media representation of Asian Americans and African Americans (Cho et al, 2021). Although the link between the drastic rise in hatred and violence against Asian and African Americans and media representation since the start of the pandemic has not been fully established, several theories try to explain the existence and persistence of racism in the media and mass media.

3.3. INTEGRATED THREAT THEORY

One of the major theories that can be applied to media representations of Chinese and Black people amid the COVID-19 pandemic is the integrated threat theory (Khunti et al, 2020). Racial discrimination entails a difference in treatment or representation based on race or ethnicity that, eventually, disadvantages a particular group of people who belong to a certain race. Discrimination, prejudice, and other negative sentiments between ethnic groups have multiple causes. However, it is known that discrimination and prejudice result from people's beliefs and attitudes of the in-group members towards members of the out-group (Hertzberg, 2020). To try and explain this phenomenon, Stephan and Stephan (1996) developed the integrated threat theory. The integrated threat theory, also referred to as the intergroup threat theory, is a psychological and sociological framework that tries to examine the factors that trigger racial prejudice in society by determining the components of a perceived threat to diverse groups. The guiding principle of the theory is that in-group members often feel that there is an inherent threat to their beliefs and values from out-group members and thus feel the

need to deploy defence mechanisms that turn out to be hostile to the out-group members (Stechemesser, Wenz & Levermann, 2020).

Racial discrimination in mass media is often intentional, though subtle. It would take awareness of these words, symbols, phrases, or perceptions to identify racial slurs. According to the integrated threat theory, acts of prejudice and discrimination are the cause of feelings of threat and fear. These feelings of judgement and discrimination result from the beliefs and attitudes of individuals from an in-group towards those of the out-group. When members of the in-group are threatened by those of the out-group, they tend to develop adverse perceptions and attitudes, which come out as defence mechanisms (Stephan & Stephan, 2000). Although threats towards the out-group arise from differences in economic and political power, as well as material and physical well-being, the COVID-19 pandemic has become a major threat between White people and minorities in the United States — due to its origin being in the Asian region (Dhanani & Franz, 2020). This kind of threat leads to prejudice and explains the increase in racial discrimination towards Asians. The integrated threat theory indicates that negative pre-meditated judgments towards a certain group can result in prejudice. This model draws from a wide range of evidence from different research that proved the belief in negative stereotypical characteristics is intricately linked to the increased prejudice rates against minorities, often considered to be the stereotyped group. Although the link between general stereotypes and prejudice has not been fully established, Stephan and Stephan (2000) assert that the negative stereotypical aspects deeply relate to prejudice.

Additionally, a study conducted by Hertzberg (2020) demonstrated how those from White and other groups, have expressed their feelings of hatred and fear towards Asian and Black people due to fear of contracting the virus. Negative sentiments exacerbate panic, verbal aggression, and fear, which further worsen the situation by causing mental health issues (de Melo & Figueiredo, 2021). This theory explains how the in-group is developing such feelings as they feel threatened by the out-group. Since the virus is believed to originate from China, adverse feelings from other groups, such as the Whites, have developed out of fear (Stephan & Stephan, 2000).

Some countries, such as South Africa working towards decolonising through Africanisation, revealed prejudices and discrimination against the Black community (Moyo & Moyo, 2020). During the COVID-19 crisis, Africanisation has been demonstrated in various contexts. Undermining Africans 'ability to manage the crisis is a form of prejudice and discrimination that has been seen in various media platforms, and this has, in turn, influenced the growing cases of racism globally (Stephan & Stephan, 2000). Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, Black people's inability to live in good environments, such as less crowded neighbourhoods, has been linked to the escalating rates of infection and deaths from the virus compared to their White counterparts. Africans have also been portrayed as being unable to afford standard medical and healthcare practices. This links them to the persistence of the disease and other conditions, such as mental health disorders connected to the SARS coronavirus (Meghji & Niang, 2022). This study, therefore, covered an important gap in research.

In Canada and the United States, a decolonial dimension is also instrumental in explaining the increasing hate towards Black people and other minorities who are residents of the two nations (Crosby, 2021). The decolonial theory has a widespread framework, invented to explain the erudite efforts expressing the extensive rejection, by racial or colonial subjects, of the supremacy claimed by Western European people. Black people in Canada have, for a long time, been victims of racial discrimination. COVID-19 intensified the racial inequities in Canadian society because the pandemic has had a serious social impact on people (Crosby, 2021). The decolonial framework is built on the notion of "coloniality", which is used to emphasise the persistence of colonial relations. "Coloniality", in this case, is defined as the way power and epistemic relations that were developed during the European Colonialism age have, and continue to, shape the world we live in. The notion that Canada is an accommodating, peacekeeping, generous and multicultural society, according to critics, has become a myth (Nugent, 2006:21). Canada's history is shaped by the ideological organisation of the world according to classist, cultural, and racialised Eurocentric colonial indicators. These have

served as contributory factors to the ancient realities of violent exploitation, prejudice, cultural genocide, and racial discrimination throughout Western nations (Crosby, 2021). Issues and struggles of people based on their skin colour, gender, and ethnicity have recently become topics of concern. Koreans and the Chinese have also received their fair share of discrimination because the media has branded them as "vulnerable" (Tessler, Choi & Kao, 2020). The decolonial approach is important as it tries to link the present experiences to past or historical approaches and establish trends in the representation of minorities. Recent meta-analytic studies carried out since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic have established that the Canadian media lacks nuance when reporting facts and perceptions (Crosby, 2021). Crowdsourcing initiatives in Canada have revealed that Black people and other visible minorities are often referred to as "other" rather than "we". Some of the themes that emerge from racial discrimination, when viewed from the decolonial lens, include otherness, hegemony, and agency.

The Integrated Threat Theory provides a compelling framework for understanding the media representations of Chinese and Black individuals amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. This theory posits that prejudice and discrimination arise from perceived threats posed by out-groups to the values, resources, and security of in-groups (Stephan & Stephan, 1996). During the pandemic, media narratives linking the virus to China fueled perceptions of threat among in-groups, particularly White populations, leading to heightened prejudice and negative attitudes towards Asians and Blacks. Media coverage often highlighted stereotypes about Chinese eating habits or conspiracy theories about the virus's origin in Chinese laboratories, invoking fear and suspicion (Dhanani & Franz, 2020). This portrayal not only reinforced existing biases but also exacerbated intergroup tensions, contributing to discriminatory behaviors and rhetoric. The theory's emphasis on threat perception helps elucidate how media-driven narratives can shape public opinion and attitudes, ultimately influencing societal responses and exacerbating racial inequalities during crises like COVID-19. Integrating this theory into the study provides a theoretical lens through which to analyze the dynamics of media racism and its impacts on minority communities, underscoring the

need for nuanced media portrayals and interventions to mitigate prejudice and promote social cohesion.

3.4. HEGEMONY

Hegemony is a term used to describe the domination of one group over others, through consent. The term was first used in history when Marxists studied ancient ruling methods and was used to refer to ruling class-crafted methods to successfully promote their selfish interests over those below them in the social hierarchy (Meghji & Niang, 2022). Researchers later found out that the dominating class ruled with no apparent persuasion or employment of force. However, the ruling class used subtle structural systems such as the media and education. Antonio Gramsci, who was influenced by Marx, rejected class reductionism, and advanced the following definition of ideology: "Particular social groups struggle in many different ways, including ideologically, to win the consent of other groups and achieve a kind of ascendancy in both thought and practice over them". This kind of power was called hegemony (Hall, Evans & Nixon, 2013).

On the other hand, Foucault's position on power, knowledge, and discourse distinguishes his position from the Marxist theory of class interests and ideological "distortion". Power does not necessarily always go in one direction, it circulates (Foucault, 1980:98). Hegemony is an important aspect as it shows the idea behind colonisation and how some groups of people have had their self-determination suppressed over the years and therefore felt the need to develop decolonisation strategies to boost social stability and put an end to racial discrimination in their societies (Coates, 2020). The negative media representation of Asian Americans and African Americans suppresses their self-determination and development. Consequently, the decolonial framework tries to restore the minorities 'self-determination, social justice, and empowerment (Meghji & Niang, 2022).

3.4.1. Hegemony in Media Narratives

The Marxist notion of hegemony can elucidate the underlying power dynamics and dominance in the media narratives surrounding the COVID-19 epidemic. Antonio Gramsci, a Marxist thinker, introduced the concept of hegemony, which underscored rule based on consent rather than overt coercion (Hall, Evans & Nixon, 2013). Gramsci's hegemonic approach to power and control is intricate. Instead of coercion, hegemonic power shapes public opinion through ideology. Media, a nuanced structural system, champions certain interests over others, rendering this theory pertinent (Hall, Evans & Nixon, 2013).

Hegemony aligns with the notion that influential organisations, often the majority, utilise media to sway public opinion during a pandemic. This sway permeates media narratives, framing, and depictions without explicit directives. Hegemonic influence shapes perspectives without coercion, rendering it a potent contributor to social reality. Considering power as fluid rather than unidirectional contributes to our comprehension of hegemony (Foucault, 1980). The media shapes discourse and societal norms. Hegemonic dominion in media narratives reinforces social systems, marginalising and subordinating specific populations.

Power dynamics necessitate observation when scrutinising media narratives through the hegemony lens. Illuminating how media sources, consciously or unconsciously, advance prevailing beliefs is imperative. Understanding media hegemony aids in uncovering how certain groups assert dominance, perpetuating social hierarchies. The pandemic media narratives exhibit hegemonic power in a myriad of ways. Initially, the selection of narratives can indicate hegemonic control. One narrative is elevated while another is suppressed or excluded, reshaping the narrative to favour prevailing interests. This selection contributes to crafting a world that mirrors the powerful.

Furthermore, media framing fortifies hegemonic perspectives. The subtle reinforcement of prevailing narratives is accomplished through language, story focus, and group

framing as victims or threats. Framing influences public perception and societal norms and values.

Hegemonic influence also hinges on the media's representation of individuals and organisations. Casting specific groups as heroes or villains shapes social identities. Governing how diverse groups are perceived and positioned in social hierarchies constitutes hegemonic control. Antonio Gramsci elucidated cultural dominance, wherein the media serves as a tool to enforce this dominance. Gramsci contended that the ruling elite shapes societal norms and employs coercion. The dominant faction influences public sentiment, upholds its ideology, and sidelines dissenting viewpoints in the media (Gramsci, 1971). Media cultural dominance illustrates how the influential subtly craft storylines and retain authority. By controlling visuals and perspectives, the ruling elite sustains its pre-eminence and fosters a shared awareness that aligns with its agenda, sustaining social structures and sidelining resistance.

Hegemony is indispensable when comprehending power relations in media narratives amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Gramsci's dominance by consent and Foucault's circulating power explain how the media shapes social perceptions and reinforces hierarchies. Acknowledging and dissecting hegemonic impacts in media narratives are crucial for promoting media literacy, dismantling biased narratives, and fostering a more egalitarian and inclusive society.

The theory of hegemony provides a robust framework for understanding the media's role in perpetuating racial discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic. By examining how dominant groups assert control over public discourse and representation through media narratives, this study can uncover the subtle yet profound ways in which Asians and Blacks are portrayed. Hegemonic forces within media, as theorized by Gramsci, influence which stories are prioritized, how events are framed, and which perspectives are marginalized (Hall, Evans & Nixon, 2013). For instance, the selective emphasis on narratives linking the virus to Asian cultural practices or Chinese origins, while downplaying structural inequalities and systemic factors, reinforces stereotypes and

prejudices against these groups (Gramsci, 1971). Foucault's notion of power circulating through discourse further elucidates how media narratives not only reflect but also actively shape societal perceptions, contributing to the maintenance of social hierarchies (Foucault, 1980). Applying the theory of hegemony in this study allows for a critical analysis of how media representations during the pandemic construct racial identities and influence public attitudes, thereby highlighting the urgent need for media literacy and ethical reporting practices to combat racial biases and promote inclusivity.

3.5. OTHERNESS

Otherness is a term used to refer to the process through which colonial discourse produces the notion of "other". This term was first coined by Gayatri Spivak, an intellectual in colonisation studies. The concept of "other" is constantly used in reference to Black people or other marginalised groups to mean that a person is different from the "self", or one who lacks literality, propriety, and identification (Romero-Rodriguez, Civila & Aguaded, 2020). When Black people are referred to as "other", it provides insight into the idea that they are perceived as foreigners, they do not belong, and they are unfamiliar, inappropriate, uncanny, improper, or unauthorised (Meghji & Niang, 2022). Media outlets in the USA and Canada have referred to Asian Americans and Black people as "other", especially since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, due to their vulnerability and inability to appropriately manage the disease and its spread. The "other" has been a constant object of interest, research, and news highlights; they have been over-mentioned, and the impact of the pandemic on them has been overemphasised.

Otherness is a concept deeply ingrained in the sociological analyses of how identities, particularly those of majority and minority groups, are constructed within societies. This concept becomes pivotal when examining the representation of diverse groups, as those wielding greater political power typically control these representations. To fully comprehend the notion of the other, sociologists critically examine the ways in which

social identities are formulated. Unlike the common assumption that identities are inherent traits, sociologists highlight the socially constructed nature of these identities. The formation of identity and a sense of social belonging is deeply intertwined with ideas of similarity and difference. Identities possess an inherent element of exclusivity. This establishes a dichotomy between "us" and "them", where one group's membership is contingent on another group's exclusion.

Van Dijk (1998:44) proposes that polarisation between "us" and "them" is a recurrent strategy in intergroup relations, employed for self-representation, self-defence, legitimation, persuasion, and exertion of power. He introduces a four-dimensional "Ideological Square" to illustrate this phenomenon, consisting of:

- Emphasising positive attributes about "us".
- Emphasising negative attributes about "them".
- De-emphasising negative attributes about "us".
- De-emphasising positive attributes about "them".

In the context of media coverage during the COVID-19 pandemic, the concept of otherness is highly relevant. Media outlets have played a role in constructing the otherness of marginalised groups, particularly Asian and Black people. The terminology and framing used in news reports, headlines, and discussions have contributed to this portrayal of otherness. By highlighting the vulnerabilities, alleged inability to manage the disease, and potential threats posed by these groups, media outlets have perpetuated the notion of otherness. This has led to the stigmatisation and marginalisation of these groups, reinforcing the deeply entrenched power dynamics and societal hierarchies.

The content analysis of media coverage provides a lens through which we can uncover how this otherness is created, reinforced, and perpetuated. By examining the language, narratives, and framing techniques employed in media coverage, researchers can unveil the semiotic dimensions of power relations. This analysis enables us to dissect

the strategies through which media constructs "us" and "them" dynamics, as well as influences public perception and attitude.

Media outlets, both traditional newspapers and social media platforms, are entrusted with the critical responsibility of disseminating information during crises. However, the way they frame information, choose headlines and prioritise stories can either challenge or reinforce racial perceptions. When media outlets uncritically report government statements that contain racialised language or fail to provide context for policies that disproportionately affect racial minorities, they contribute to the racialisation of the crisis. Racial perceptions become intertwined with public health concerns, leading to a distorted view of the situation, and reinforcing public concerns about "the other".

In addition to distorting White people's perceptions of Black and Asian people, racial perception is capable of fostering distrust of the media within Black and Asian communities. In particular, the concepts of otherness and racial perception can give rise to hostile media perception which can be linked to the hostile media effect. The hostile media effect is the tendency of individuals with partisan viewpoints to perceive the media as biased against them (Gunther & Schmitt, 2004). Hostile racial media perception emerges when individuals perceive media content as biased or hostile towards their racial or ethnic group. The presence of stereotypes in media representations can exacerbate this perception, especially when it comes to Asians during the COVID-19 pandemic. The racialisation of Asians, driven by the foreignness attributed to the virus's origin, can foster an "us vs them" mentality, fuelling hostile racial media perception. When individuals are subjected to constant representations that emphasise their racial differences or present them as responsible for the crisis, it reinforces the process of othering, which deepens the divide. This hostile media effect can have repercussions on individuals 'in-group identification, making them more likely to seek comfort and solidarity within their racial or ethnic communities in response to perceived media bias.

Othering, rooted in the postcolonial theory, elucidates how the media influences racial and ethnic attitudes, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The concept of othering is essential to comprehend how colonial discourse establishes the "other". According to Romero-Rodriguez, Civila, and Aguaded (2020), this term implies a lack of literalness, appropriateness, and identification, effectively separating an individual or group from the "self".

Media representations underscore the notion of otherness concerning visible minorities. The media frequently represents Black and Asian people as the "other", accentuating their foreignness and implying a lack of control over the pandemic. Meghji and Niang (2022) assert that news outlets disproportionately emphasise the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on these communities, resulting in stigmatisation and marginalisation. Otherness plays a pivotal role in shaping sociological social identities. When we employ Teun A van Dijk's four-dimensional "Ideological Square", we can examine the polarisation between "us" and "them". This approach accentuates positive traits about "us", negative attributes about "them", and downplays positive attributes about "them" (Van Dijk, 2013). In the context of epidemic coverage, this polarisation reinforces racial and ethnic prejudices and power dynamics.

A nuanced understanding of social identities is imperative to grasp otherness in media representation, exploring how the media constructs categorisations between "us" and "them". It illuminates how language, storytelling, and framing influence the representation of specific groups as the "other". Such representation shapes cultural attitudes and perpetuates power systems beyond public perception.

The media's propagation of otherness during the pandemic raises concerns as it assumes a potent role as an information broker. Focusing on the impact of COVID-19 on specific racial and ethnic groups fosters prejudices and reinforces power disparities.

Labelling populations as "other", distorts their pandemic experiences, needs, and contributions.

The creation of otherness by the media has tangible effects on targeted groups. Media-driven stigmatisation and marginalisation exacerbate social inequities and systemic inequality. It is crucial to recognise that media representation actively influences social perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours. The pandemic's othering of specific populations perpetuates inequality, hinders inclusivity and understanding, and creates resistance.

Therefore, the representation of otherness during the COVID-19 pandemic reflects a nuanced interplay of power relations, societal identity constructs, and the media's role in either reinforcing or challenging narratives. A critical examination of how language, narratives, and framing strategies depict certain groups as the "other", unveils the media's impact on public perception and social views. Addressing and confronting these dynamics is about fostering a more inclusive, equitable, and empathic society, extending beyond academic discourse.

The theory of otherness is highly pertinent to the current study on media racism and prejudice towards Asians and Blacks during the COVID-19 pandemic. Otherness, rooted in postcolonial discourse, elucidates how media representations construct marginalized groups as fundamentally different and separate from the dominant societal norms. Throughout the pandemic, media outlets have consistently framed Asian Americans and Black individuals as the "other", emphasizing their perceived foreignness, vulnerability, and alleged inability to manage the virus effectively. This portrayal not only reinforces existing stereotypes but also perpetuates societal divisions, shaping public perception and influencing policy responses. By examining how media narratives construct and reinforce otherness, this study aims to uncover the underlying power dynamics and societal implications of such representations, highlighting the need for critical media analysis and ethical reporting practices to mitigate racial prejudice and promote inclusive societal narratives.

3.6. AGENCY

The agency is another critical theme in the decolonial framework. The concept is defined as the ability to reject or resist colonial power by subjects of colonisation through the initiation of actions targeting resistance to colonial rule (Coates, 2020). The agency is often linked to change leading to decolonisation and is also connected to individuals 'or groups 'self-awareness of autonomy. Thus, emphasising the need to change the media's representation of minorities.

An unprecedented number of technological and media platform inventions characterise the current digital era (Crosby, 2021). Controlling the quality and quantity of messages circulating through these platforms has become a major issue owing to the increase in intercultural contact between people of different racial backgrounds (Stephan & Stephan, 2013). However, prejudice levels in different media sources are dependent on the content, exposure, and consequential polarisation, which is often characterised by a connection to the media source exposure (Croucher, Nguyen & Rahmani, 2020).

Agency, as framed within the decolonial framework, holds significant relevance to the study on media racism and prejudice towards Asians and Blacks during the COVID-19 pandemic. This concept denotes the capacity of marginalized groups to actively resist and challenge colonial or hegemonic power structures through their actions and initiatives (Coates, 2020). In the context of media representation, agency manifests as efforts by communities and advocacy groups to counter negative stereotypes and biases perpetuated by mainstream media. This includes initiatives aimed at promoting accurate portrayals, amplifying marginalized voices, and advocating for ethical reporting practices. By asserting agency in media spaces, these groups seek to reclaim their narratives, challenge dominant discourses, and foster greater inclusivity and representation within societal narratives. The study explores how these acts of agency can influence public discourse, reshape media narratives, and contribute to broader societal efforts towards equity and social justice. Understanding agency in media

representation is crucial for addressing systemic inequalities and promoting a more balanced and respectful portrayal of diverse communities in media coverage.

3.7. CRITICAL RACE THEORY

The critical race theory of 1989 is a theoretical framework that was developed by Black legal scholars who sought to research and fight the deep-rooted racist systems during the civil rights period. According to the theory, racism is still prevalent in the United States. Additionally, racial discrimination impacts the entire society and is coherently engraved in people's social lives and legal policies (Mills & Godley, 2017). The theory has four guiding principles, which present critical elements needed to understand prejudice and inequities relating to prejudice.

One of the theory's key principles includes margin centring, which entails the digressive shift from the dominant/perspective of the majority to that of marginalised/minority groups. The second principle is that of intersectionality, which involves the apprehension that it is impossible for the experience of racial oppression by a group or an individual to be sublimated into a single identity, for example, either Black or male, for Black men (Mills & Godley, 2017). Thirdly, the principle of the social construction of race forms a pillar of the critical race theory as well. This principle involves the acceptance and recognition that race is a social construction more than it is genetically or biologically constructed (Tessler, Choi & Kao, 2020). The final principle is that of interest convergence, a concept coined by Derrick Bell which states that any progress or plan crafted towards racial equity is only accepted and acknowledged when it is also within the interests of White people (Mills & Godley, 2017). The denial by former United States President Donald Trump's administration's delayed actions and misinformation from media sources concerning COVID-19 is a result of interest convergence, one of the major principles of the critical race theory (de Melo & Figueiredo, 2021). Trump's remarks and his racist rhetoric concerning the COVID-19 pandemic, published, and aired in the media, have been linked to the increase in hate crimes towards minorities living in the USA (Coates, 2020).

Moreover, the convergence of interest has never been a result of Whites 'moral awakening, as exemplified by the United States Supreme Court ruling on matters of racial integration. Instead, it stems from a convergence of clear-cut interests of Black people and White elites who, according to research, have been economically and racially dominant in the racial capitalist system (Bell, 2018). Thus, anti-racist processes are impossible without interest convergence. Historically, the elite whites pushed the anti-racism processes as they hoped to gain from it. The Whites support anti-racism, not to end it but to protect the image of the United States from other nations and not be perceived as a racist nation, specifically towards Afro-Americans who are members of the United States population (Mills & Godley, 2017). A good example of an instance where the Whites hoped to benefit was during the Second World War when anti-racism stunts were pulled only to appease Black veterans who had taken part in fighting racial genocide in other countries but faced racial discrimination in their home country (Bell, 2018).

Convergence interests are a legal issue based categorically on race. Western nations ' readiness to accommodate Black-centred policy needs is due to the two tragedies: police brutality and the COVID-19 pandemic, which suggest a similar converging of interests (Tessler, Choi & Kao, 2020). The policies that have long been considered impossible to enact are now being put into consideration by the White elites who hope to benefit from the status quo, although they do not consciously endorse it. Consequently, this theory would predict that China is likely to be more successful in managing and controlling the COVID-19 pandemic compared to the United States, where police brutality against Black people and the consequential protests of police misconduct will turn into a continued revolt demanding even more radical transformation (Khunti et al, 2020). The progress in fighting racism keeps growing but discrimination, even in mass media sources, persists. Hegemony and White supremacy hinder effective public health responses due to the existence of structural racism and prejudice in media outlets (de Melo & Figueiredo, 2021).

Empirical evidence shows that Black and Asian people have borne the death burden due to COVID-19 three times as much as Whites, with statistical decimation showing higher rates of prejudice directed towards Black/Asian-American women, the poor, elderly, disabled, incarcerated, and LGBTQ communities (Bell, 2018). This shows that the Western nations have become disinvested from these marginalised groups and overlooked their needs. The critical race theory presents the ideology that racial discrimination is interwoven in all aspects of society, including technology and the mass media, which is often pioneered by White elites. However, one of the major disadvantages of critical race theory is that it is over-reliant on the ideology of social constructionism and emphasises narration over reason and evidence (Mills & Godley, 2017). Critics argue that the theory shows opposition towards liberalism and has caused conflict between critical race theorists. As a result, American conservative policymakers have been fighting to bring down the theory and discredit it since the beginning of 2020, with claims that the theory shows a misrepresentation of principles.

Nonetheless, the critical race theory has been (and can be) helpful when interpretively scrutinising digital media texts: either racialised content or content which tries to counter racial discrimination by providing antiracist ideologies. This theory has been used to give accounts of the experiences of Black people and their perspectives using scientific and legal evidence (Bell, 2018). According to the critical race theory, without counterarguments that disparage or ignore the opinions of Black people, racial discrimination stories would become normative (Mills & Godley, 2017). There have been many controversial narratives on the COVID-19 pandemic, targeting Black and Asian people living in the USA as seen in online media such as blogs and online articles.

Although the critical race theory was initially developed to fight racism against Black people, the theory has gradually evolved to accommodate other minority groups living in America. These include Black people living beyond the American boundaries, Indian Americans, Asians, Pacific Americans, and other Indigenous groups (Bell, 2018). This makes the critical race theory applicable to this study as it highlights oppression against both Blacks and Asian Americans. However, the critical race theory differs conceptually

from the decolonial theory since the two models do not agree on the centrality of colonialism to the current inequalities (Bell, 2018). Nevertheless, the difference between the two frameworks is essential in examining different dimensions of racial discrimination.

3.7.1. Unveiling racism in media representations

The 1989 critical race theory leverages a compelling and insightful standpoint to comprehend and assess racial dynamics in societies, especially racism in the United States (Mills & Godley, 2017). Critical race theory sheds light on entrenched disparities and the media's role in racial discrimination concerning visible minorities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.7.2. Principles of the critical race theory

3.7.2.1. Margin centring

Critical race theory advocates for a transition from predominant to marginalised perspectives. This methodology undermines media narratives and amplifies the voices of the minority during the pandemic (Mills & Godley, 2017). It prompts contemplation on whose stories and perspectives the media represents. This principle transforms media consumers and artists to critically analyse whose experiences are amplified and whose are overlooked. Centring the margin necessitates the re-evaluation of narrative approaches to encompass and authentically depict diverse voices.

3.7.2.2. Intersectionality

Critical race theory recognises cross-identity oppression, incorporates race and gender, and underscores its intricacy. A comprehensive analysis of COVID-19 requires understanding the interacting components of Black and Asian identities (Mills & Godley, 2017). This approach encourages a sophisticated analysis of how oppressions

intersect. Identity is intricate, and intersectionality acknowledges this. This principle applies to media representations that acknowledge the interconnected systems of privilege and oppression shaping crisis experiences. It elucidates the specific concerns of disadvantaged identity intersections.

3.7.2.3. Social construction of race

Critical race theory posits that race is social, not biological or hereditary. During a global crisis, this principle encourages critical analysis of how media representations shape racial identities (Tessler, Choi & Kao, 2020). It stimulates contemplation of how media narratives reshape views of race and social categorisation. The social construction of race illustrates how media reinforces or challenges racial categorisation. Critical race theory aids in comprehending power dynamics and biases in media depictions of race.

3.7.2.4. Interest convergence

The concept of interest convergence, coined by Derrick Bell, suggests that progress towards racial fairness is only acceptable if it aligns with the interests of White elites. Media representations of COVID-19-related activities and policies illustrate how racial equity and White-dominated power structures coincide (Mills & Godley, 2017). It demonstrates that progress in racial fairness depends on power. Interest convergence underscores that development is crucial, as this reform is more likely to benefit the excluded communities when it is aligned with the interests of influential people. It illuminates policy decisions and public narratives that seem supportive but are driven by underlying objectives in pandemic media representations.

3.7.3. Application of critical race theory to COVID-19 media representation

Interest convergence aligned with COVID-19 denial and misinformation, particularly during the Trump administration. Former President Donald Trump's racist media coverage escalated hate crimes against minorities (de Melo and Figueiredo, 2021). This

84

critical race theory application reveals how media narratives can perpetuate biased attitudes, impacting underprivileged communities.

Historically, White elites have propelled interest convergence. Anti-racism initiatives during World War II were employed to pacify Black veterans, underscoring the significance of interest convergence in racial progress (Bell, 2018). History demonstrates how interest convergence shapes reactions and policies during racial crises.

3.7.4. Limitations and criticisms

Critical race theory is effective for interpreting media texts, but critics argue that it relies excessively on social constructionism and a narrative over evidence. Conservative policymakers have attempted to invalidate the theory due to conflicts with liberalism (Mills & Godley, 2017). To comprehend critical race theory's role in academic and public discourse, these limitations must be acknowledged.

3.7.5. Evolution and applicability

Critical race theory, originally formulated to combat racism against Black people, now encompasses the experiences of diverse minority groups in America. The theory differs theoretically from the decolonial framework but remains significant when studying racial inequality, especially in media representations of crises like the COVID-19 outbreak (Bell, 2018). This evolution highlights critical race theory's adaptability and relevance to current racial issues.

Critical race theory provides a robust theoretical framework for analysing media representations of visible minorities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Its concepts demonstrate how racism is ingrained in society and underscore the imperative to challenge dominant narratives for racial fairness. The theory's ideas are pivotal to

fostering a more inclusive and just media landscape post-global crisis. Its adaptability and evolution underscore its importance in the pursuit of racial justice.

One of CRT's foundational principles, margin centring, advocates for shifting perspectives from dominant narratives to those of marginalized groups. Applied to media representations during the pandemic, this principle challenges biased portrayals by amplifying the voices and experiences of Asian and Black communities disproportionately affected by the virus (Mills & Godley, 2017). Intersectionality, another key principle of CRT, acknowledges the interconnected nature of race, gender, and other identities, emphasizing the need for nuanced analyses that consider how multiple forms of oppression intersect in media depictions (Mills & Godley, 2017). This approach helps uncover how media representations during the pandemic may reinforce stereotypes or neglect the complex realities faced by marginalized groups.

The social construction of race, a third principle, highlights that race is a socially constructed concept rather than a biological fact, urging critical examinations of how media narratives shape public perceptions of racial identities during crises like COVID-19 (Tessler, Choi & Kao, 2020). Finally, interest convergence, as articulated by Derrick Bell, suggests that progress toward racial equity often occurs only when it aligns with the interests of those in power. This principle illuminates how media coverage of COVID-19 policies and responses may reflect underlying power dynamics and perpetuate inequalities (Mills & Godley, 2017). By applying CRT to analyze media representations, this study aims to uncover and challenge biased narratives, advocating for more equitable and inclusive portrayals that reflect the diverse experiences and perspectives of marginalized communities.

3.8. MEDIA RICHNESS THEORY

The media richness theory, also known as the information richness theory, is a theoretical framework used to explain a medium (often communication medium)'s ability to appropriately and accurately reproduce any information that has been sent over it.

The theory was developed by Robert H. Lengel and Richard L. Daft towards the end of the 20th century as an augmentation of the information processing theory (Ishii, Lyons & Carr, 2019). This theory particularly applies to research based on the mass media's representation of minorities amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, as it not only gives insight into the role of the media but also highlights the way different media disseminate crucial information to the public. Ishii, Lyons, and Carr (2019) assert that the central tenet of the media richness theory is that the communication effectiveness of a medium is influenced by both the richness of the medium itself and the implicit nature of the task at hand for the media targets.

This theory suggests that media richness is built on language cues, variety, public information, and prompt feedback availability. According to the theory, the mode of communication in media will be selected based on equivocality and how effective the medium is in communicating messages to the public (Ishii, Lyons & Carr, 2019). For instance, the news media prefer visual forms of communication to appeal more to the public. The theory presents the idea that mass media can transmit crucial information whenever needed although there are factors, such as prejudice, which inhibit the transmission or dissemination of information. The news media's ability to effectively transmit is dependent on the utilisation of the information and its frequency during equivocality or uncertainty.

The media richness theory can be used to explain the link between the language used by media sources to pass specific messages to the public whilst seeking to develop images of different issues, which is significant in impacting the attitude of people (Tai et al, 2021). The media has the power to reinforce public perception. In other words, since diverse media sources convey different messages using different language cues and focus, there have been numerous instances where the media has been noted to have a negative representation of minorities amidst the COVID-19 pandemic (Tai et al, 2021). Unfortunately, due to the media's influence on people's thinking and attitudes, the media richness theory has been used to spread prejudice and hate speech towards Asians, who are presumed to have created the virus and spread it to other nations due

to political differences. The media further presented the Black community as unable to appropriately manage the disease due to their economic and social status (Ishii, Lyons & Carr, 2019).

According to critics, one of the major disadvantages of the media richness theory is that it was developed way before new media and significant technology changes, particularly with more widespread internet access. As a result, scholars and researchers have, on several occasions, questioned the framework's effectiveness when applied to modern media studies (Tai et al, 2021). Additionally, according to critics, another major disadvantage of this theory is that the richness levels/degree for all media remains constant regardless of the differences in people who use the media. The tasks incorporated in the theory often have varying levels of equivocality and uncertainty, making it challenging to decide whether to use lean or rich media during an analysis. Despite the theory's shortcomings, the strengths outweigh the weaknesses, enhancing the credibility and reliability of the theory in forming a good basis for research concerning racial discrimination (Ishii, Lyons & Carr, 2019).

Recent empirical evidence asserts that the media richness theory also applies to social media since there is a substantial variation in social media's ability to pass messages through writing (Ishii, Lyons & Carr, 2019). Research confirmed that social media is currently the major platform that people use to express their thoughts, concerns, reactions, and opinions on COVID-19 (Cho et al, 2021). Healthcare professionals have recently used social media to retrieve an enormous amount of real-time data for advanced surveillance and monitoring purposes. The data retrieved from social media platforms can be used to evaluate feelings, attitudes, and thoughts relating to the pandemic.

The analysis of COVID-19 media depictions necessitates the application of the media richness theory. Originating in 1984 through Daft and Lengel's innovation, the theory elucidates the richness of communication channels and information delivery. The

pandemic underscores the relevance of this theory in assessing the depth and vividness of information disseminated across diverse media channels and platforms.

The theory posits that effective communication hinges on a medium's capacity to convey information swiftly, profoundly, and vividly. The richness is contingent on the medium's ability to provide immediate feedback, multiple cues, diverse linguistic forms, and personalisation (Daft & Lengel, 1984). Scrutinising the representation of visible minorities, especially Asian and Black people, during the COVID-19 outbreak demands an understanding of media richness.

The proliferation of information through traditional news sources, social media, and online forums experienced a significant upswing during the pandemic. The richness of these channels influenced both information dissemination and public perceptions. Newspapers and television typically considered affluent media, shaped initial viral narratives as they grappled to elucidate pandemic racial dynamics.

Owing to language barriers, delayed input, and a lack of personalisation in traditional media, visible minorities faced misrepresentation. Social media and online forums, with their engaging nature and swift information dissemination, exhibited richer communication. However, this enhanced richness brought its own set of challenges.
On these platforms, unfiltered and rapid information dissemination propagated preconceived notions and falsehoods, impacting the representation of Asian and Black people. To apply the media richness theory to racial representations, an examination of communication channels and their role in disseminating preconceptions is imperative.

Digital platforms showcased the richness of real-time interactions but also posed the risk of misinformation and biased narratives. Including the media richness theory in the research of the pandemic and racial representation in the media, offers a comprehensive perspective on how diverse information channels influence public perceptions of visible minorities. According to this hypothesis, traditional media

struggles to capture the nuances of racial relations, while the online platforms' richness perpetuates stereotypes.

To explore the intricate dynamics of media representations during the COVID-19 pandemic, the media richness theory serves as a guiding framework. Developed by Daft and Lengel in 1986, the theory examines how different communication routes convey rich information. It can shed light on how communication pathways impact information richness in pandemic internet news journalism.

Traditional news outlets and social media platforms play a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions. The media richness of these platforms illuminates the dissemination of information. Organisational theory pioneers, James G. March and Herbert A. Simon expands on the theory by introducing the concept of "bounded rationality", suggesting that media decision-makers have limited cognitive resources (March & Simon, 1958). Cognitive constraints may render individuals susceptible to the framing and presentation of news outlets, as posited by Marshall McLuhan's media studies research. McLuhan's concept of "the medium is the message" underscores how a communication medium shapes its message (McLuhan, 1964).

In the digital age, the format and functionality of online news platforms influence what is communicated. Pamela J. Shoemaker and Stephen D. Reese's hierarchical model of news content, emphasises media habits, individual characteristics, and organisational structures, and contributes to understanding media richness and COVID-19 depiction (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996).

This approach helps elucidate how media richness conveyed information about visible minorities throughout the pandemic. Maxwell McCombs and Donald L. Shaw's "agenda-setting" concept, drawing inspiration from communication studies, posits that media outlets focus on specific issues to set the public agenda (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). This term is employed to explore how media richness sets the agenda for the pandemic and visible minority narratives in internet news. To enrich the discourse, Elihu Katz and

Paul Lazarsfeld's (2017) two-step flow theory from 2017 is cited. According to this notion, the media influences opinion leaders, who subsequently influence the public. Examining the two-step flow within the context of media richness illuminates the distribution of COVID-19 information and the formation of opinions. By incorporating these scholars and theoretical perspectives, this section seeks to clarify how the media richness theory and other communication theories shape the coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic drew attention to information diffusion and media influence on public perceptions, particularly regarding visible minorities. Daft and Lengel's media richness theory assists in comprehending how the richness of communication channels affects racial dynamics (Daft & Lengel, 1984).

Media outlets, such as newspapers and television, acted as influential platforms, shaping initial narratives about the virus. However, conveying the subtleties of racial dynamics proved challenging for these outlets. Language barriers, delayed responsiveness, and a lack of personalisation contributed to oversimplified and distorted representations of visible minorities.

In contrast, social media and online forums transformed the landscape of knowledge dissemination. The interactive nature and rapid information distribution on these platforms enhanced communication. However, this increased richness also introduced challenges, such as the swift transmission of unfiltered information, amplifying preconceptions and fostering misinformation, thus complicating the representation of Asian and Black individuals.

Understanding communication routes and their role in perpetuating stereotypes is crucial for elucidating the media richness theory in the context of pandemic racial representations. Traditional media, constrained by its historical norms, struggled to provide nuanced representations despite the urgency of pandemic information transmission and its inherent limitations.

The media richness theory, developed by Robert H. Lengel and Richard L. Daft, offers valuable insights into how communication channels convey information during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly regarding media representations of minorities. According to the theory, the effectiveness of a communication medium depends on its ability to transmit information promptly, comprehensively, and with adequate feedback mechanisms (Daft & Lengel, 1984). Applied to the study of media depictions during the pandemic, this theory underscores the varying capacities of different media—such as traditional news outlets versus social media platforms—to convey the complexities of racial dynamics. Traditional media, often considered richer due to their ability to provide detailed narratives and expert analysis, initially shaped public perceptions of the pandemic but struggled with nuances in racial representation, often resorting to simplified or biased portrayals (Daft & Lengel, 1984). In contrast, social media's interactive nature allowed for swift dissemination of information but also facilitated the rapid spread of misinformation and stereotypes about Asian and Black communities (Ishii, Lyons & Carr, 2019). Thus, integrating the media richness theory into the analysis of COVID-19 media representations illuminates how different communication channels influence public perceptions of minorities, highlighting both the strengths and limitations of each medium in conveying accurate and nuanced information during a crisis.

3.9. CONFLICT THEORY AND THE CULTURE OF PREJUDICE

From a sociological perspective, the conflict theory is one of the theories that try to explain the existence of racial slurs in society. Conflict theories are commonly applied to situations that entail inequality of either social class, ethnicity, gender, or race (Meghji & Niang, 2022). The conflict theory from the United States history perspective is instrumental in examining the past and current issues between Whites and other minorities, such as Black people, with conflicts rising when the Whites, who are often the dominant group, identify or perceive a threat from a specific minority group. The theory focuses on the origin and reproduction of racial inequality and other social processes that have destroyed society instead of contributing to its growth. From a conflict lens, the primary focus is the distinctive access to technology and media,

encompassed within the digital ramifications (Romero-Rodriguez, Civila & Aguaded, 2020).

Studies show that the rising power of Afro-Americans in White territories has often threatened the Whites and consequently evoked constant attempts to disenfranchise the Black people and their growing influence, including negative representations in mass media outlets (Trčková, 2016). Conflict theories also highlight who owns and controls the media outlets. Minorities comprise a significantly lower percentage of the total population in the USA and Canada. They are underrepresented in the media industry, which is dominated by the White, who, in this case, pioneer the negative representations of minorities (Meghji & Niang, 2022). The theory asserts that the powerful people in society and those highly ranked in the social institutions, have a strong influence on what circulates through the media, as well as the kind of media available for consumption by the public, serving as a subtle form of "gatekeeping".

Gatekeeping can be described as the systemising process through which several potential media texts are shaped into an appropriate form for mass media; the texts are often reduced to a manageable amount. This, in simple terms, means that media content is often controlled by a group of people who decide what messages the public will be exposed to, which many researchers explain to be the source of Western media's power. Take, for instance, the extent to which the evolution of new media has drastically replaced traditional media, which was hegemonic (Romero-Rodriguez, Civila & Aguaded, 2020). As mentioned earlier, hegemonic societies were often dominated and led by one racial group despite the society being culturally diverse. The dominant group manipulates the media to portray a phenomenon in a certain way and forcefully impose a particular worldview whilst presenting it as a norm (Baldwin, 2017).

Contrastingly, evidence from recent analytical studies has shown that new media has discredited the gatekeeping concept as individuals are free to share messages of their choice to any audience using platforms such as blogs, Facebook, and YouTube (de Melo & Figueiredo, 2021). However, prejudice (and racial prejudice) still lurks in the

mainstream media, and people have begun to use new media to promote racial discrimination. This can effectively be applied to the current issues of negative representations of minorities amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The conflict between the minorities and the dominant groups has caused journalistic prejudice and racial profiling of Blacks and Asian Americans.

Additionally, some supporters of the conflict theory assert that the way the United States media are generated and developed leads to unbalanced social and political arenas. Extremely wealthy individuals or groups are afforded the chance to appear in media as they please (positive and frequent visual experience as well as media exposure) (Meghji & Niang, 2022). On the other hand, minorities have been victims of prejudice and negative representation by the media, especially since the remarks were given by former President Donald Trump as he referred to the COVID-19 disease as the "Chinese virus". The conflict theory perspective gives important insights into racial discrimination against Black and Asian people, which is potentially a result of the existential social classes and ethnic differences in the United States.

The culture of prejudice closely relates to the conflict theory but also encompasses ideas from other theories (Baldwin, 2017). The culture of racism in the United States and Canada is based on the idea that issues in communication arise from ideological and material forces that prevent or distort periphrastic reflection. This theoretical framework is built on the communities 'absence of introspection and disinclination to self-criticism. In other words, the model divides the world into two: the good and the evil (Meghji & Niang, 2022). When we consider ourselves as "us", we become good, but when we refer to other groups of people as "them" or "other", we become evil. This theory also brings forth the idea of otherness, which has been highlighted within the context of other theories and binarism, trying to explain racial discrimination as well. Binarism is a concept used to refer to duality (two things combined in each system). The term was first coined by Ferdinand de Saussure, a semiotician and Swiss linguist.

Ferdinand de Saussure suggested that rather than a derivation of meaning from references to actual objects, signs are often assigned meanings through their defiance of other signs (Shelburne, 1996). To him, difference matters because it is essential to meaning — without it, meaning could not exist. We know what Black means, however, Saussure argued that there is no essence to Blackness, but we can contrast it with its opposite: White. He argued that meaning is relational. Therefore, it is the difference between White and Black which carries meaning. Britishness is not French because we can mark its difference from its others (Shelburne, 1996).

Some good examples of binaries are woman/man, death/birth, Black/White, developed/developing, inferior/superior, and colonised/coloniser. Binarism is a perfunctory outlook to comprehend how meaning is developed, shaped, and enhanced in media texts which are often built on the contrast principle between exclusive terms that are mutual. In this study, binary oppositions exemplify the inequality between the White elites and the Asians/African Americans. Unfortunately, in societies where binary systems are embraced, ambiguous margins existing between the minorities are suppressed whilst also reinforcing dominant ideologies, and eventually, the minority groups suffer prejudice and discrimination (Meghji & Niang, 2022).

Prejudice and discrimination breed journalistic bias and racial discrimination, which is the main reason behind increased hate and stigmatisation towards Asian Americans and African Americans, as compared to other ethnic groups. Asian and Black people are most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic (Coates, 2020). Black and Asian people have been affected three times as much and borne death due to the pandemic twice as much as their counterparts, the Whites. Additionally, Cho et al (2021) claim that racial prejudice against minorities during COVID-19 has resulted in an increase in mental health disorders such as anxiety and depressive symptoms amongst Black and Asian people due to increased hate, racial prejudice, and stigmatisation relating to the pandemic. As of January 2021, the rate of mental health disorders among Black people was twice as high as their White counterparts, according to the World Health Organisation (Dhanani & Franz, 2020). Furthermore, the United Nations reported that

minorities are dying disproportionately compared to their counterparts, Whites (Razai et al, 2021).

The culture of prejudice theory suggests that racial prejudice is embedded, or deeply rooted, in our culture. People, mostly those living in Western countries, grow up surrounded by casual expressions of racial discrimination and stereotypical images, which eventually impact their thinking, beliefs, and attitudes towards racialised groups of people (Baldwin, 2017). For instance, the underrepresentation of Black people in popular American advertisements and films creates an image of racism, yet despite the numerous attempts to eradicate racial discrimination in every aspect of life, it has become part of people's culture (Baldwin, 2017). Consequently, since people are exposed to such thoughts, images, and beliefs, it is quite challenging to determine to what extent people's thoughts, attitudes, and social processes have been influenced by their constant exposure to the culture of prejudice.

3.9.1. Globalisation and media ownership

Globalisation employs the conflict theory in the context of media ownership. As per academician Herbert Schiller, media conglomerates from the Global North wield control over worldwide information dissemination. This narrative centred on the Western perspective, sidelines voices from the Global South (Schiller & Schiller, 1969). The media, controlled by economically influential regions, accentuates Western viewpoints that shape a global information environment and perpetuates disparities in power, sidelining perspectives from less economically privileged regions.

3.9.2. Symbolic interactionism in media representations

The representation of media is elucidated by Erving Goffman's dramaturgical approach grounded in symbolic interactionism and conflict theory. His concept of "framing" explains how the media selectively present information, shaping public perception, and

individual perspectives on race (Goffman, 1974). This interactive method employs media as a platform to craft stories that evoke audience reactions. Goffman's symbolic interactionism sheds light on the intentional creation of meaning by the media and its influence on society's understanding and reactions to challenging subjects.

3.9.3. Culture of prejudice
3.9.3.1. Cultural studies and representation

A renowned figure in cultural studies, Stuart Hall, assists in the comprehension of the media's influence on cultural identities. According to his encoding/decoding hypothesis, audiences construe media signals in varied ways post-encoding. Analysing media depictions through this theoretical framework enables a deeper comprehension of how culture shapes narratives, particularly those pertaining to racial themes. Hall's research delves into the complex interconnection among media, culture, and societal perception (Hall, 1980).

3.9.3.2. Postcolonial perspectives on media

Media clichés can be comprehended via Edward Said's postcolonial philosophy: "Orientalism". Said argues that Western media sustains colonialist narratives by depicting non-Western cultures as exotic or lesser. Postcolonial media scrutiny, particularly amid the pandemic, exposes colonial prejudice. This underscores the enduring influence of Said's 1978 analysis on media representations and their socio-cultural ramifications.

3.9.3.3. Critical whiteness studies

In the realm of critical whiteness studies, academics such as Richard Dyer delve into how the media builds and sustains whiteness. Dyer scrutinises the "white gaze" and its influence on shaping perspectives and power dynamics (Dyer, 1997). This subject

necessitates a more profound understanding of how media constructs racial identities and upholds hierarchies, emphasising the intricate connections between race, representation, and authority.

The Conflict Theory and the Culture of Prejudice provide a critical lens through which to analyze media representations of racial minorities during the COVID-19 pandemic. This theoretical framework illuminates how dominant groups, such as Whites, wield control over media narratives, perpetuating negative stereotypes and biases against minorities like Asians and Black Americans. The theory underscores how media ownership and control by economically powerful entities influence global information dissemination, sidelining perspectives from less privileged regions. In the context of the pandemic, media portrayal of minorities has often reinforced pre-existing prejudices, exacerbating social inequalities and contributing to heightened racial tensions. By applying Conflict Theory and exploring the Culture of Prejudice, this study aims to unravel how media biases shape public perceptions and exacerbate disparities during global crises.

3.10. SUMMARY

Although the theories have different principles and varying perspectives concerning the existence and persistence of racial discrimination, they all try to show that racism is a fundamental problem in society and quite challenging to educate. Both intentional and subtle forms of prejudice and discrimination are a result of a variety of factors, making it almost impossible to link racism in the media to one source. These theories assist in providing a background to racial discrimination in the media and will help collect data that meets rigorous scrutiny and avoid critical challenges during the interpretation of data. The theoretical models: integrated threat theory, hegemony, otherness, agency, critical race theory, and media richness theory are instrumental in establishing a link between media representations of minorities and racial discrimination as the frameworks serve as a guide to collect the most appropriate information required for this study. The integrated threat theory will help examine factors that trigger racial prejudice

in society by determining the components of a perceived threat of diverse groups in this study, which include Asian and Black people residing in the United States. The critical race theory is helpful in interpretively scrutinising digital media texts, either racialised content such as news articles and negatively stereotyped social media posts, or that which tries to counter racial discrimination by providing anti-racist ideologies (Bell, 2018).

The media richness theory explains the media and mass media's ability to appropriately and accurately reproduce any information that has been sent over it (Ishii, Lyons & Carr, 2019). Another identified aspect in this chapter is stereotyping and representation regarding neutrality and binary oppositions and the roles they play in power/hegemony. Some strategies to help intervene in representation have also been identified.

The media richness theory, otherness, dominance, critical race theory, conflict theory, and cultural bias concept offer a robust theoretical groundwork to critically evaluate how online news depicted the actual pandemic, especially ethnic minorities during COVID-19. The media richness theory perspective enables us to scrutinise the comprehensive content of internet news networks. It prompts questions about how conventional and online media addressed the pandemic, specifically ethnic minorities. Comprehending how online news conveyed or neglected racial dynamics hinges on the theory's focus on immediacy, depth, and vividness.

Otherness emphasises how internet news crafted the concept of "other" throughout the pandemic. This is crucial to understand how Asian and Black people were perceived as foreign. Alterity underscores the semiotic aspects of power dynamics, which can guide online news' choice of words, storylines, and framing approaches to stereotype and stigmatise specific populations.

Marxist examination of dominance illustrates power dynamics and control in internet news narratives. Through dominance, we can explore how prevailing ideas influenced

depictions of ethnic minorities in online journalism. Did online news platforms fortify social hierarchies or challenge prevailing narratives to be more inclusive?

Employing critical race theory unveils deep-seated injustices in online news representations of ethnic minorities during COVID-19. The principles of focalisation on the margins, intersectionality, the societal construction of race, and interest convergence shed light on whether online news platforms exacerbated or alleviated racial bias. Does online news now highlight voices on the fringes? Did they acknowledge pandemic-related issues affecting Black and Asian communities?

Conflict theory, particularly when addressing cultural dominance and globalisation, highlights whether online news bolstered dominance. Did internet news platforms uphold cultural dominance or contest the globalised narrative that sidelines voices from the Global South? What role did the struggle theory play in epidemic online news coverage of ethnic minorities? The conflict theory, which is often linked to the culture of prejudice in Western nations, has helped to identify racial differences in society and how those in control of the media often use mainstream media outlets to their advantage. This explained the root of mass media prejudice against Afro-Americans and Asian Americans amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, despite the distinctions between the theories 'tenets, a constructive collaboration of the most relevant principles from each theory will be created to ensure all dimensions of these frameworks are covered.

Cultural studies and postcolonial viewpoints on the cultural bias concept raise inquiries about how online news shapes cultural identities. Has online news perpetuated cultural preconceptions, and how did Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding methodology impact racialised narratives? How did internet news platforms perpetuate or contest stereotypes of ethnic minorities?

By applying these theoretical frameworks to scrutinise how internet news reported on the authentic pandemic and ethnic minorities during COVID-19, we can critically assess the intricacies, predispositions, and power dynamics of media representations. This

thorough examination aids in evaluating the accuracy and impartiality of online news coverage of the pandemic, especially its impact on ethnic minority populations.

In Chapter 4 the researcher delves into the research methodology, providing a comprehensive explanation of the methods employed in this study. The critical research paradigm is outlined as the chosen research approach. The researcher further explains why this approach is suitable to explore the role of the media in racial discrimination against minorities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The chapter details the research design, focusing on content analysis to analyse the language and context of the media's representation of minorities. Data collection will be discussed, highlighting the purposive sampling method used to select relevant content from online and print media sources such as X and newspapers. The timeframe for data collection is specified, encompassing the period from the emergence of COVID-19 until 12 months after the first reported case. The chapter provides a thorough exploration of the advantages and disadvantages of the chosen methods and addresses potential limitations, such as sample selection bias and the researcher's own potential biases. The interpretive nature of the research paradigm allows for a nuanced exploration of the intricate connections between media representation, societal beliefs, and the manifestation of racism.

CHAPTER 4
METHODOLOGY CHAPTER

4.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter intends to explain in detail the research methods as well as the methodology implemented for this research. This will begin with an explanation of the research approach, followed by the research design to highlight the advantages and disadvantages of the tools chosen. The chapter includes a discussion of the research design's ability to produce valid results to meet the objectives set by this thesis. Additionally, the sample size, as well as the approaches applied by the researcher and the data analysis methods, will be tackled. Finally, the section will conclude with a brief discussion of the limitations and ethical considerations of the research methodology and any issues that could arise during the research.

4.2. OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The study focused on investigating the role of the media in the existence of racial discrimination towards minorities, specifically Black and Asian people, in the United States. The study began by stating the research problem, the background of the problem, the formulation of research questions and objectives, as well as the literature review. This chapter focuses on the research methodology, followed by the content analysis. The study focused on examining and evaluating media representations of minorities amid the COVID-19 pandemic, following the recent upsurge in concerns about the significant contribution of the media in the prevalence and persistence of racism in the United States. This study explored how the media has actively been engaged in acts of racism and other forms of prejudice against individuals of Asian and Black origin since the commencement of the COVID-19 pandemic using content analysis. The research questions are as follows:

- How did the media cover race during the global COVID-19 pandemic?

- In what ways did the media contribute to the discrimination of racial minorities since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic?
- How did the media represent minorities during the COVID-19 pandemic?

For this research, the objectives are descriptive and exploratory. The research study will first describe how minorities have been represented by the media since the commencement of the pandemic, then synthesise how the media contributes to racial discrimination towards marginalised groups. The objectives of the study are (1) to analyze the media's coverage of race during the global COVID-19 pandemic, (2) to examine the media's role in perpetuating discrimination against racial minorities since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and (3) to investigate the media's representation of minorities, particularly Asians and Black people, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, the study synthesis of the media's contribution to racism will be presented through content analysis. This study will avoid the use of semiotics or images and instead, focus on the language used to represent minority groups by the mainstream media, herein represented by newspapers available digitally or in print, and social media, herein represented by X. X was chosen to reflect social media sentiments as it is commonly utilised for activism as well as political and news discussions. X is used by an array of prominent politicians and is the most used social media platform by print and online journalists (Hutchinson, 2022).

4.3 PHILOSOPHICAL VIEW
4.3.1 Critical Theory Approach

This research opted for the critical theory research paradigm to furnish an all-encompassing and cohesive framework, covering both qualitative and quantitative components. This paradigm facilitated a distinctive examination of media representation and racial discrimination amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Its foundation lies in social critique, structural analysis, and transformative objectives, serving as a means to unveil concealed power structures, ingrained ideologies, and systemic complexities contributing to racial disparities.

Kekeya (2019) laid the groundwork for understanding the similarities and distinctions among research paradigms, contributing to the critical theory research paradigm. Fuchs (2020) delves into the intricate nexus between communication and capitalism, offering a pivotal theoretical framework supporting this paradigm. Omodan (2022), through the epistemology of research paradigms, furnishes a strategy for selecting theoretical frameworks, emphasising the meticulous approach to adopt critical theory for its transformative capacity. The critical theory research paradigm, as delineated by Varpio et al (2020), extends beyond theoretical abstractions with intricate layers, differentiating theories, theoretical frameworks, and conceptual frameworks. Numerous studies have proved the fundamental role of the critical theory research paradigm in studies that include both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies.

4.3.2. Philosophical foundations of critical theory research paradigm
4.3.2.1. Societal analysis

Critical theory investigation, grounded in the intellectual traditions of the Frankfurt School, scrutinises power structures, ideologies, and societal norms through a critique of society. This paradigm actively challenges societal elements that give rise to oppression, inequality, and injustice (Paradis et al, 2020). Moreover, critical theory exploration elucidates structural aspects in public spheres, such as health professions education. As described by Paradis et al (2020), critical theory broadens people's thinking and aids in comprehending the intricate dynamics of these areas. This critical perspective extends beyond the media to societal factors like racism and health inequities during the pandemic. According to Bogna, Raineri and Dell (2020), critical theory research is enriched by critical realism and constructivism. Combining these paradigms enables researchers to conduct a more profound qualitative examination that includes both objective structures and subjective experiences impacting media narratives.

4.3.2.2. Structural analysis

The focal point of critical theory research is a structural examination of social institutions and their significant impact on individuals. Aligned with the Frankfurt School, this paradigm scrutinises the structural forces shaping and sustaining social phenomena (Fuchs, 2020). Structured analysis in critical theory research can assist in understanding media representation and racism. This field of study delves into how media institutions either reinforce or challenge racial hierarchies. Structural analysis in critical theory aims to comprehend how media influences, and is influenced by, societal power dynamics (Mura & Wijesinghe, 2023).

Fuchs's (2020) findings underscore the imperative need to understand communication within capitalism. Critical theory emphasises the connection between the media and economic and political structures, revealing their interdependence. Mura and Wijesinghe (2023) highlight the importance of critical theories, particularly structural analysis, in diverse domains beyond tourism. Therefore, critical theory research's structural scrutiny illuminates social institutions, particularly media depiction and racism. Researchers gain insights into systemic implications on racial hierarchies by examining how media systems perpetuate or alter them.

4.3.2.3. Transformational Objectives

The critical theory research paradigm seeks transformative objectives, in contrast to interpretivism. While interpretivism aims to understand and interpret social processes, critical theory aims to bring about societal change. Scholars in critical theory actively pursue transformative approaches to address the root causes of racial inequities (Fuchs, 2020; Mura & Wijesinghe, 2023).

The critical theory framework can assist in evaluating the media's representation and racism by identifying power systems and advocating for change. Critical theory scholars examine both the content and the production, dissemination, and consumption

mechanisms of media narratives to achieve transformative ends. The paradigm's commitment to social critique underpins this transformative approach. The transformative nature of critical theory research is supported by Fuchs (2020) as well as Mura and Wijesinghe (2023), emphasising the necessity for transformative aims beyond analysis. Mura and Wijesinghe's literature assessment shows that critical theories, particularly structural analysis, can be applied to various sectors, highlighting the paradigm's potential to reform society.

4.3.2.4. Liberating Knowledge

Critical theory study emphasises emancipatory knowledge to empower individuals and communities. The pursuit of emancipatory knowledge seeks to uncover hidden narratives and promote transformative action that fosters justice and inclusivity. Critical theory's pursuit of emancipatory knowledge is particularly relevant to media representation and racism during the COVID-19 pandemic. Escaping narratives from repressive frameworks, highlighting disadvantaged perspectives, and opposing media norms suggest emancipation. Beyond criticising power structures, it generates information that can bring about societal change (Fuchs, 2020).

Critical theory scholars studying media representation and racism during the pandemic, empower people and communities with emancipatory knowledge. Identifying and eliminating media narrative discrimination is required. Critical theory aims to create a media narrative that erases racial hierarchies and promotes social awareness by illuminating hidden perspectives and including various voices (Fuchs, 2020; Mura & Wijesinghe, 2023).

4.3.3. Key aspects of critical theory research paradigm

4.3.3.1. Structural change

Critical theory research underscores the imperative for structural change to confront deeply ingrained social issues, particularly evident in the realms of media representation and racism (Spash, 2020). The critical theory research paradigm is dedicated to identifying and transforming media system structures to foster more equitable and inclusive narratives, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. This research paradigm contends that organisational frameworks and systems, which shape information dissemination, perpetuate societal issues including racial disparities in media representation (Spash, 2020). Therefore, structural change becomes essential to disrupt and modify these systems, addressing issues at their core.

Critical theory academics advocate for active engagement with media institutional structures, scrutinising the development, distribution, and reception of content (Singh, Appaling, & Trepal, 2020). Beyond issue identification, scholars within this paradigm seek opportunities for structural change, examining how media institutions contribute to racial hierarchies, and identify leverage points for transformative responses**.**

In the context of media representation and racism during the COVID-19 pandemic, critical theory research urges scholars to advocate for structural reforms that create more inclusive narratives (Spash, 2020). This involves questioning discriminatory editorial rules, promoting marginalised voices, and reinventing storytelling to challenge stereotypes. The paradigm requires researchers to actively contribute to, and advocate for, structural changes with media institutions, lawmakers, and the public. Critical theory research emphasises systemic transformation, distinguishing itself from approaches focusing solely on individual attitudes or behaviours (Spash, 2020). While acknowledging human agency, critical theory recognises that lasting change often requires altering the structures that shape and reflect cultural values.

4.3.3.2. Social Justice and Fairness

Critical theory study places a high priority on social justice, particularly in the examination of media representation and racism (Allen & Henderson, 2022). Social justice, within this paradigm, extends beyond critique to actively oppose discriminatory practices, advocating for fair representation, amplifying minority voices, and dismantling unjust structures during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research paradigm relentlessly questions and challenges biased practices in media representation, requiring a critical examination of how media narratives reinforce preconceptions, prejudices, and discrimination (Allen & Henderson, 2022). Critical theorists expose discrimination to promote social change, emphasising marginalised voices and seeking a more inclusive representation of diverse backgrounds.

Social justice in critical theory study emphasises fairness in media narratives. Beyond critiquing bias, it calls for varied and inclusive representations, promoting a media landscape that accurately reflects people from various backgrounds (Paradis et al, 2020). Fair representation is deemed essential to achieve social justice within the critical theory framework. Social justice in critical theory research seeks to address core causes of injustice, necessitating the removal of mechanisms sustaining media inequality (Paradis et al, 2020). Researchers advocate for structural changes to media institutions to disrupt power dynamics and create a more just and equitable media environment, viewing social justice as the need for a holistic and transformative redesign of media representation systems**.

4.3.3.3. Challenging Hegemonic Narratives

Critical theory research centres on the critique and challenge of hegemonic ideologies, particularly examining how dominant narratives affect racial hierarchies in media representation and racism (Paraskeva, 2021). The goal is to analyse media discourses and understand how they reinforce or challenge power relations, aiming to destabilise hegemonic discourses, especially during the extraordinary COVID-19 pandemic.

This thesis aims to identify hegemonic ideas within media narratives, challenging and dismantling arguments that maintain racial hierarchies (Paraskeva, 2021). Critical theorists analyse both explicit and implicit messages in media representations to reveal power structures supporting prevailing ideologies, offering a nuanced understanding of how these narratives shape perceptions and social norms.

In addition to criticism, critical theory research actively challenges hegemonic beliefs by presenting alternative narratives and views (Paraskeva, 2021). This involves providing a platform for marginalised voices to dispute, undermine, or offer alternatives to conventional media beliefs (Mura & Wijesinghe, 2023). Supporting narratives that depict varied perspectives more fairly and justly in media representations of racism is deemed essential, particularly during the global health crisis.

In addressing hegemonic issues, critical theory research disrupts intellectual and social life, investigating how dominant ideologies and power structures form and maintain racial hierarchies (Mura & Wijesinghe, 2023). The goal is to reshape society during the COVID-19 pandemic by opposing media hegemonic narratives and promoting alternative perspectives that challenge prevailing norms.

4.3.4. Advantages and Disadvantages of Critical Theory Research Paradigm

In-depth exploration of social structures, ideologies, and power dynamics characterises critical theory research. This approach enables scholars to delve more deeply into social issues, compared to alternative frameworks. The thorough scrutiny inherent in critical theory highlights how media systems either reinforce or challenge racial hierarchies amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Fuchs (2020) as well as Mura and Wijesinghe (2023) exemplify how critical theory unveils the interconnectedness of media structures and power dynamics.

The revolutionary potential of critical theory renders it attractive for study. This perspective not only identifies but also questions structural inequities, particularly in

media representations, rather than limiting examination to social issues. Critical theory transcends academic objectives by advocating for social change. The research goals geared towards transformation align with the paradigm's aim of comprehending and expediting societal change. Fuchs (2020) as well as Mura and Wijesinghe (2023) illustrate how critical theory research can revolutionise society beyond theoretical insights.

The foundation of social justice underlies critical theory study. In research on media representation and racism during the COVID-19 pandemic, social justice aligns with unbiased and comprehensive representations. Critical theory scrutinises social challenges and actively strives to ameliorate them. The paradigm's commitment to emancipatory knowledge reinforces its mission to empower communities through more egalitarian and inclusive media narratives. Fuchs (2020) as well as Mura and Wijesinghe (2023) demonstrate how critical theory's emphasis on social justice resonates with the urgent need for fair representations during the pandemic.

Critical theory research yields various benefits, encompassing its meticulous examination of social systems, revolutionary potential, and emphasis on social justice. It assists scholars in navigating media representation and racism throughout the pandemic, establishing itself as a valuable paradigm for comprehending and enhancing society. Fuchs (2020) as well as Mura and Wijesinghe (2023) underscore the pivotal role of critical theory in addressing contemporary social issues.

While critical theory's meticulous analysis of social structures proves beneficial, it simultaneously introduces complexities to the study. Researchers engaging in critical theory must navigate numerous social variables and power dynamics, adding a layer of intricacy to their investigations. The paradigm, as evidenced by its structural analysis component, underscores the challenge of comprehending the intricate interplay between structural elements.

Like any research paradigm, critical theory is not exempt from biases. Researchers' perspectives within the critical theory framework may impact the analysis and interpretation of findings. The emphasis on uncovering hidden narratives and systemic concerns can predispose researchers to be swayed by their own biases. Critical theory academics need to practice self-awareness and reflexivity, particularly when exploring sensitive themes such as media representation and racism during the pandemic. Maintaining research integrity and impartiality necessitates acknowledging and addressing these biases (Fuchs, 2020; Mura & Wijesinghe, 2023).

Critical theory's key strengths, including thorough analysis, transformative potential, and social justice focus, contribute to the complexity of the research process. Researchers must exercise caution to remain neutral and unbiased due to the paradigm's commitment to comprehensive understanding and revolutionary goals. The intricacies of critical theory demand careful consideration, especially as researchers delve into the study of media representation and racism during the COVID-19 pandemic (Fuchs, 2020; Mura & Wijesinghe, 2023).

Therefore, the critical theory research paradigm, characterised by its exhaustive analysis, transformative potential, and emphasis on social justice, comes with inherent drawbacks. The complexity of the paradigm and its susceptibility to biases necessitate thoughtful consideration and researcher self-awareness. Fuchs (2020) as well as Mura and Wijesinghe (2023) provide a nuanced perspective on the pros and cons of critical theory research, emphasising the importance of a balanced and discerning approach.

4.3.5. Justification for critical theory research paradigm in this study

This investigation has opted for critical theory as its theoretical framework is based on its capacity to encompass both qualitative and quantitative dimensions. The paradigm's dedication to in-depth examination aligns with the research objective, which aims to unveil and question societal influences affecting media representation and racial prejudices amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

The selected paradigm offers critical analysis as opposed to mere interpretation, supporting the notion that research should surpass mere observation. In line with the perspectives of Fuchs (2020) as well as Mura and Wijesinghe (2023), the critical theory paradigm aims to bring to light and address systemic social issues. By adopting this approach, the investigation aspires to enhance scholarly comprehension and transform societal institutions, shaping media narratives during the pandemic.

Critical theory accentuates social justice and transformation, constituting its forte. This study seeks to promote fair and inclusive media representations throughout the pandemic. The study's objective of not merely uncovering challenges, but actively advocating for change resonates with the transformative potential inherent in critical theory research (Fuchs, 2020; Mura & Wijesinghe, 2023).

The critical theory research paradigm was further selected for this study due to its capacity to integrate both qualitative and quantitative facets, conduct comprehensive analyses, and align with the research objective of unveiling and questioning societal structures. Its emphasis on transformation and social justice renders the paradigm pertinent to the study's aim of developing equitable and inclusive media representation during the COVID-19 pandemic. After considering the insights of Fuchs (2020) and Mura and Wijesinghe (2023), the critical theory research paradigm emerges as apt for addressing media depiction and racism in the chosen context.

4.3.6. Comparison with other paradigms

The comprehensive approach of the critical theory research paradigm sets it apart from interpretivism. Interpretivism typically underscores qualitative methodologies and subjective interpretations of social processes. In contrast, critical theory accommodates both qualitative and quantitative methods, establishing an all-encompassing methodological framework (Fuchs, 2020; Mura & Wijesinghe, 2023). This method's versatility can empower the researcher to delve deeper into societal issues, transcending the constraints of a singular method and fostering a more profound understanding of the intricacies of media representation and racism during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The critical theory research paradigm's capacity to integrate qualitative and quantitative methodologies facilitates profound analysis. Conventional paradigms often dichotomise these approaches, limiting investigative depth. Critical theory's inclusive perspective acknowledges the intricate interplay of methodological tools. This acknowledgment can aid in elucidating media representation and racism by delving into the intricate social processes giving rise to them (Fuchs, 2020; Mura & Wijesinghe, 2023).

Critical theory enables scholars to scrutinise social structures more profoundly by combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Beyond mere pattern recognition, this multidimensional approach can scrutinise the underlying dynamics of media narratives and racial disparities. The holistic nature of a critical theory can aid the research in uncovering concealed narratives, discerning systemic effects, and comprehending pandemic media representation and racism.

Critical theory's transformative ambitions make it a catalyst for social change as much as an observational tool. Its dynamic nature sets it apart from interpretivism, which may contribute to a theoretical understanding without advocating for tangible reforms. The

critical theory's focus on transformation and social justice positions creates a paradigm to confront media representation and racism.

4.3.7. Focused Transformational Approach

Critical theory prioritises structural transformation over interpretivism and alternative research paradigms. Owing to its focus, critical theory is well-suited to scrutinise and challenge social mechanisms contributing to media representation and racism. This emphasis aligns with the paradigm's transformative objectives, making it apt for addressing the multifaceted challenges of media representation during the COVID-19 pandemic (Fuchs, 2020; Mura & Wijesinghe, 2023).

Critical theory acknowledges that social issues often stem from structural roots: it underscores structural reform. In contrast to interpretivism, which concentrates on social incidents, critical theory investigates the structural causes of inequality. This approach assists researchers in unveiling concealed narratives and systemic issues that may perpetuate social inequities, especially in media representation and racism (Fuchs, 2020; Mura & Wijesinghe, 2023).

Critical theory underscores structural analysis, enriching the comprehension of social processes and unveiling subtle mechanisms that might be overlooked. By examining these structural components, critical theory aids academics in questioning and transforming societal processes that contribute to challenges in pandemic media representations. Given the paradigm's dedication to understanding societal structures and addressing the fundamental causes of disparities, this proactive approach bolsters its transformative goals (Fuchs, 2020; Mura & Wijesinghe, 2023).

Critical theory's emphasis on structural transformation bears relevance to media representation and racism during the COVID-19 outbreak. Racial inequities require urgent attention, and the paradigm's commitment to unravelling media myths and

challenging systemic issues aligns with this need. The focus on structural transformation enhances critical theory's potential to elucidate and confront sociocultural structures influencing pandemic media representation.

To conclude, critical theory research, with its comprehensive approach, transformative objectives, and focus on social justice, is better suited than interpretivism and other paradigms to comprehend media representation and racism during the COVID-19 pandemic. Critical theory's commitment to transformative ideals and structural change positions it as a proactive force in addressing social inequality. Utilising Fuchs (2020) and Mura and Wijesinghe (2023) to comprehend media representation and racism strengthens the critical theory research paradigm.

4.4. Research Design

The research utilized a descriptive research design to conduct a thorough and detailed analysis of how media representations portrayed racial minorities during the COVID-19 pandemic. This methodological approach was selected to accurately observe and analyze these portrayals without intervening in variables, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding media racism during this pivotal period. By employing this design, the study aimed to delve deeply into the ways different media platforms framed and depicted racial minorities, exploring the nuanced narratives and implications embedded within these representations (Siedlecki, 2020). This approach facilitated an in-depth examination of the strategies and biases at play within media coverage, illuminating their impact on shaping public perception, fostering societal discourse, and potentially perpetuating or challenging racial stereotypes.

4.5 Methods

The study employed mixed methods research, integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches to thoroughly investigate the portrayal of racial minorities in media during the COVID-19 pandemic. This methodological choice was based on its efficacy in offering a nuanced and comprehensive analysis of the multifaceted research questions posed (Punziano De Falco and Trezza, 2023). Qualitative methods, such as content analysis and thematic analysis, were utilized to explore the richness and depth of media narratives and to uncover underlying themes and patterns in the representation of racial minorities. These qualitative approaches allowed for an in-depth examination of how different media platforms framed and depicted racial issues, providing insights into the subtleties and nuances of media racism (Punziano, De Falco and Trezza, 2023).

Complementing the qualitative methods, quantitative techniques were employed to quantify and measure the prevalence and impact of these representations across various media outlets. This quantitative component enabled the study to establish trends, identify patterns of bias, and assess the magnitude of different types of racial representations in media coverage (Rahman, 2020). By integrating both qualitative and quantitative data, the research aimed to triangulate findings, enhancing the validity and reliability of the study's conclusions.

The mixed methods approach was specifically chosen over other methodologies because of its ability to capture the complexity of media racism comprehensively (Punziano, De Falco and Trezza, 2023). Unlike purely qualitative or quantitative methods, which might provide limited perspectives on their own, the combination of approaches allowed for a more holistic exploration of how media representations influence public perceptions and contribute to societal discourse on race. This methodological diversity also facilitated a more robust analysis by mitigating the weaknesses inherent in any single methodological approach, thereby strengthening the study's overall credibility and depth of insight into media portrayals of racial minorities during the pandemic.

4.5.1. Qualitative research

Qualitative research, in contrast to its quantitative counterpart, involves a holistic exploration of phenomena, relying on non-numerical data to capture the richness and complexity of human experiences (Aspers & Corte (2019). This method emphasises understanding the underlying meanings, perspectives, and social contexts that shape a phenomenon. In the examination of media representations of visible minorities during the COVID-19 pandemic, qualitative research methods offer unique advantages.

4.5.1.1. Advantages of qualitative research
4.5.1.1.1. Thorough Comprehension

In social research, qualitative methods play a pivotal role in comprehending human experiences, perceptions, and attitudes. This holds when delving into how online news media represents visible minorities. While quantitative approaches offer insight through numerical data, they often fall short in capturing the myriad of intricacies and contextual nuances influencing the experiences of marginalised groups. Qualitative research provides an in-depth and immersive exploration of these intricate realities. Researchers can gain insights into visible minorities' perspectives on online news through in-depth interviews, focus groups, and anthropological observations.

Suwankhong and Liamputtong's (2020) examination of Thai women in Internet news exemplifies how qualitative research can shed light on media representation. By conducting interviews, Liamputtong uncovered experiences ranging from misrepresentation and marginalisation to empowerment. Qualitative approaches empower researchers to move beyond surface-level generalisations, identifying fundamental dynamics that shape visible minority perceptions and experiences. A

comprehensive understanding is crucial for devising effective solutions to reduce media bias and foster equitable online news representation. This is achievable through qualitative means. Therefore, qualitative research proves indispensable for social scientists investigating visible minorities in the digital age. Exploring their experiences and perceptions enables the challenging of prejudices, the promotion of inclusive representation, and the creation of a more just and equitable media narrative.

4.5.1.1.2. Data Contextualisation

Qualitative research utilises contextualisation to scrutinise the intricate relationship between media representation and society. Unlike quantitative methods that isolate variables, qualitative approaches delve into context, unveiling the underlying meanings, biases, and societal impacts of media representations. According to Billingsley, Abedin, and Nassaji (2020), contextualising data is crucial, as it enables an evaluation of the production and consumption contexts of media representations. This contextualisation aids in comprehending subtle messages and power relations.

By placing data in context, researchers can uncover biases and blind spots that may arise from a focus on isolated media content. Cultural standards, political objectives, and historical narratives also influence media coverage. Without understanding historical marginalisation and societal preconceptions, evaluating the representation of visible minorities in Internet news may be incomplete and misleading. Contextualising the data facilitates the identification of positive representations and prejudices. Contextualisation is therefore vital in qualitative research to grasp the complex interaction between the media and society. Understanding the context of these representations allows for a more profound understanding of the intricate dynamics at play.

4.5.1.1.3. Flexibility in data acquisition

The adaptability of qualitative research enables academics to explore complex and dynamic phenomena, such as media depictions. Unlike quantitative methods with rigid frameworks, qualitative research permits researchers to adjust their data collection strategies during the investigation. This flexibility proves beneficial when studying media depictions, where fixed categories may not capture all nuances and perspectives. Qualitative approaches allow studies to evolve spontaneously, unveiling new insights and refining research topics.

In an online news study on gender stereotypes, the researcher might initially identify and analyse stereotyped narratives. However, as more data is collected, new trends or nuances may emerge, necessitating a reassessment of study topics, or the use of alternative data collection methods. The iterative nature of qualitative research, where data collection and analysis inform and shape the research, explains this flexibility. Qualitative research provides a deeper understanding of media representations by remaining open to new ideas. This adaptability is crucial when studying dynamic media content. Researchers must adjust their techniques as media representations change with social, cultural, and technological shifts. Qualitative research enables researchers to adapt to these changes, ensuring that their findings remain relevant and informative.

4.5.1.1.4. Creating hypotheses

Qualitative research yields findings and hypotheses for future research. Due to its ability to identify patterns, themes, and nuances inaccessible to quantitative methods, qualitative research can inspire hypotheses. According to Aspers and Corte (2019), qualitative research generates hypotheses that can inform subsequent quantitative studies or inspire more focused qualitative inquiries. Through qualitative data analysis, researchers can uncover patterns, linkages, and unexplored lines of inquiry.

For instance, a qualitative study on gender identities in Internet news may reveal connections between gender preconceptions and profession-specific news coverage. These connections could be further explored through a quantitative study examining the statistical association between gender stereotypes and media representation across occupations. The ability of qualitative research to generate hypotheses underscores its value. It not only provides insights into the present but also opens avenues for further research and understanding. Qualitative research uncovers new questions and expands knowledge.

When studying complex and evolving phenomena like media depictions, theories are essential. Changes in social, cultural, and technological landscapes impact media depiction. The ability to construct hypotheses in qualitative research allows researchers to continually refine their expertise and contribute to a more intricate and up-to-date understanding of the role of the media in shaping views and experiences.

4.5.1.1.5. Participant Perspectives

Qualitative research methodologies excel in valuing the viewpoints of participants and providing a platform for narratives from disadvantaged groups. Given the intricate media representations of visible minorities, the focus on participant perspectives becomes crucial. The participant-centric nature of qualitative research enables marginalised groups to articulate their intricate opinions on media representations. At the core of qualitative research lies empowerment, particularly for voices facing disadvantages. Qualitative approaches empower participants, especially visible minorities, by allowing them to reclaim their narratives and contribute to discussions in the media.

Qualitative studies can spotlight untold stories within media representations of visible minority communities. Through open-ended interviews, focus groups, or participatory observations, researchers can delve into the distinctive experiences, perceptions, and challenges faced by marginalised voices. Qualitative approaches unveil the intricacy of participant viewpoints. Understanding the lived experiences and diverse opinions of visible minority communities is valuable, extending beyond mere data collection. This methodology acknowledges that unique storylines weave a tapestry of narratives.

Participants in qualitative research may articulate their concerns about media representations. Qualitative methods enable these individuals to voice their perspectives on the public representation of visible minorities, challenging stereotypes, addressing misrepresentations, and showcasing the strengths of their communities. The participant-centric nature of qualitative research fosters trust and rapport. Trust facilitates sincere communication, which is especially crucial when discussing sensitive topics like media representations. Listening to and respecting participants contributes to the authentication of data.

"Qualitative Research Approaches" by Liamputtong and Rice (2022) serves as an exhaustive manual for qualitative research methodologies. Liamputtong imparts practical guidance on formulating and executing qualitative inquiries, underscoring

social and cultural influences. The work proves valuable for researchers in media representation, establishing the foundation for the analysis of qualitative data. In "Effective Qualitative Research", Nassaji underscores the significance of precision and credibility in media studies. This emphasis centres on openness and ethical considerations to ensure the calibre of qualitative research. Nassaji's discoveries can aid qualitative researchers examining media representations of visible minorities in upholding their authenticity.

Additionally, Aspers and Corte (2019) delve into the distinctive facets and contributions of qualitative research. Their exploration assists scholars in grasping the essence of the qualitative method. Their perspectives on media representations can guide qualitative investigations that capture the intricacy and depth of representations. Qualitative research embraces reflexivity and acknowledges the researcher's role in shaping narratives. Researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the media's representation of visible minorities by prioritising participant perspectives and recognising their own biases and prejudices.

4.5.1.2. Relevance to the research topic

Qualitative research methods can unveil the profound layers and intricacies of media representations of visible minorities during the pandemic. Qualitative researchers utilise interviews, content analysis, and thematic analysis to discern viewpoints and experiences related to the media. A multifaceted approach allows for a more profound comprehension of the factors influencing representations and their substantial impact on visible minority groups. Qualitative research can assist in revealing the intricate fabric of pandemic media depictions. Participants from visible minority groups share their unique perspectives in in-depth interviews, enabling researchers to move beyond statistical assumptions and explore individual experiences with media narratives.

Analysing the media landscape necessitates qualitative content analysis. This method enables researchers to assess content within its contextual framework, surpassing mere

quantitative counts. The quantity and quality of representations of visible minorities can be better understood through this technique. Thematic analysis, another mainstay of qualitative research, assists in uncovering themes and patterns in participant narratives. This approach helps researchers identify recurring motifs, societal discourses, and individual narratives, which enhances their comprehension of the complex network of pandemic media depictions.

A vital method for mapping media depictions is qualitative research. Researchers can unearth the intricate influences, systemic biases, cultural nuances, and socio-political climate, that shape the media representations of visible minorities through in-depth interviews and studying information within its socio-cultural context. Beyond understanding representations, qualitative methods are ideal for studying the impact on visible minority groups. Participant narratives aid researchers in understanding the emotional, psychological, and social effects of pandemic media depictions.

The participant-centric approach of qualitative research to sensitive topics, such as media depictions of visible minorities during a global crisis, amplifies the voices of those directly affected. A sense of agency from participant involvement ensures that the research revolves around them. To investigate media representations of visible minorities during the pandemic, qualitative research must delve beyond the surface and explore the complexity. A qualitative study provides a more comprehensive, nuanced, and participant-centric understanding of crisis media narratives and their effects on visible minority groups.

This design has proven to be applicable in this research due to the connections between several variables, which must be established via interpretation. Rather than a surface description, the primary aim of qualitative research is to gain a deeper understanding of a specific event or organisation (Boréus & Bergström, 2017). This study was guided by the interpretive research paradigm. The media presents complex and multi-layered phenomena that are subject to multiple interpretations and best fit the research design. The research approach for this study uses qualitative methods as the

research questions focus on depth and seek to unveil the thoughts, opinions, and motives of various sources and, more specifically, opinions towards minorities or marginalised groups since the onset of the pandemic. Additionally, the research will make use of triangulation which will enable the researcher to approach the research objectives from different points of view, attaining a more nuanced viewpoint on the connection of the various variables in this research. An intersection between the variables in this research is essential, hence the use of this approach (Thurmond, 2001).

In conclusion, qualitative research methodologies enrich the examination of media depictions of visible minorities during the pandemic by encompassing experiences, perspectives, and circumstances. Aspers and Corte, Liamputtong, Nassaji, and others propel qualitative research theory and application, enhancing its utility to probe intricate social phenomena. The integration of qualitative and quantitative approaches yields profound insights into media depictions and their impact on communities of visible minorities.

4.5.2. Quantitative research

Quantitative research, a systematic and empirical investigation, relies on numerical data and statistical methods to analyse and interpret findings. It offers a structured approach to understanding patterns, relationships, and trends within a population or sample. In the context of investigating the representation of visible minorities in online news during the COVID-19 pandemic, the incorporation of quantitative research methods holds several advantages.

4.5.2.1. Advantages of Quantitative Research

4.5.2.1.1. Emphasis on Numerical Precision

Quantitative research is characterised by its emphasis on numerical precision, enabling researchers to measure variables with a high degree of accuracy (Rahman, 2020). This precision is crucial for quantifying and representing phenomena in a way that allows for clear comparisons and analyses. By assigning numerical values to variables, researchers can conduct statistical analyses that yield precise and quantifiable results. This numerical precision enhances the rigor and clarity of research findings, making them more objective and reliable (Rahman, 2020).

4.5.2.1.2. Measurement of Variables and Establishment of Statistical Relationships

In quantitative research, variables are carefully defined and measured using standardised instruments. This meticulous measurement process allows researchers to establish statistical relationships between variables (Black, 1999). Through techniques such as correlation and regression analysis, researchers can examine the strength and direction of relationships, providing insight into the interplay between different factors (Black, 1999). This aspect of quantitative research contributes to a more systematic understanding of the phenomena under investigation.

4.5.2.1.3. Objectivity and replicability

Quantitative research places a strong emphasis on objectivity, aiming to minimise the influence of researcher bias. Standardised data collection procedures, including the use of structured surveys or experiments, help ensure consistency and reliability in gathering information (Jaljuli et al., 2023). This commitment to objectivity enhances the replicability of findings, as other researchers can follow the same procedures and expect similar results. The reliance on numerical data further supports the transparency and replicability of quantitative studies.

4.5.2.1.4. Large sample sizes and generalizability

One of the advantages of quantitative research is the ability to work with large sample sizes (Rahman, 2020). Large samples enhance the generalisability of research findings to broader populations. The principle is that a larger and more diverse sample better represents the characteristics of the population being studied, allowing researchers to make more confident inferences about the broader context (Rahman, 2020). This generalisability is particularly valuable when attempting to draw conclusions that extend beyond the specific sample studied.

4.5.2.1.5. Sophisticated statistical analyses

Quantitative research employs sophisticated statistical analyses that go beyond simple descriptive statistics (Rosenthal & DiMatteo, 2001). Techniques such as inferential statistics, analysis of variance (ANOVA), and multivariate analysis enable researchers to uncover complex patterns and relationships within the data. These analyses not only identify trends but also assess the significance of these trends, providing a deeper understanding of the research questions. The use of advanced statistical methods contributes to the robustness of quantitative research (Rahman, 2020).

4.5.2.1.6. Identification of significant patterns or correlations

Quantitative research excels in the identification of significant patterns or correlations within datasets (Rahman, 2020). By applying statistical tests, researchers can determine whether observed patterns are likely to be due to chance or if they represent meaningful relationships. This capability is crucial for drawing valid conclusions and making evidence-based decisions. It allows researchers to move beyond mere observation and discern the underlying structure of the data, revealing insights that may not be immediately apparent through qualitative analysis alone.

In summary, the advantages of quantitative research lie in its commitment to numerical precision, rigorous measurement of variables, objectivity, large sample sizes for generalisability, and the application of sophisticated statistical analyses for the identification of significant patterns or correlations (Rahman, 2020). These characteristics collectively contribute to the robustness and reliability of quantitative research findings.

Neuman's (2013) seminal work provides an expansive exploration of both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. Regarding quantitative research, Neuman offers detailed insights into the principles of designing quantitative studies, including discussions on sampling techniques, survey design, and statistical analysis. Neuman emphasises the importance of rigorous methodology, explaining how quantitative approaches can contribute to the establishment of causal relationships and the generalisability of findings.

Additionally, Neuman delves into the nuances of quantitative data collection methods, such as experiments and observational studies, shedding light on their applications and potential pitfalls. His comprehensive overview equips researchers with a solid foundation in quantitative research, emphasising its role in generating reliable and valid data to answer research questions effectively.

Creswell's (2017) work is recognised for its comprehensive approach to research design, encompassing both qualitative and quantitative methods. Regarding quantitative research, Creswell provides detailed discussions on the various types of quantitative research designs, such as experimental, quasi-experimental, and non-experimental designs. He emphasises the importance of selecting the most appropriate design, based on the research questions and objectives.

Creswell also delves into the intricacies of quantitative data analysis, introducing researchers to statistical techniques commonly used in quantitative studies. His work serves as a practical guide for researchers looking to design and execute robust

quantitative research studies, offering a step-by-step approach to conducting quantitative research within a broader research design framework.

Cozby and Bates (2018) offer a practical guide that introduces readers to the fundamentals of behavioural research methods, encompassing both qualitative and quantitative approaches. For quantitative research, they provide a detailed exploration of experimental designs, surveys, and statistical analysis. They emphasise the importance of understanding the principles of measurement and data analysis in behavioural research.

Cozby and Bates's (2018) work is particularly valuable for researchers in the social sciences, offering practical advice on how to apply quantitative methods to behavioural research questions. It serves as a bridge between theoretical understanding and practical application, making it a valuable resource for those seeking a hands-on approach to quantitative research in behavioural sciences.

While Yin (2017) is often associated with case study research, his work also discusses the integration of quantitative and qualitative research methods, showcasing the benefits of a mixed-method approach. In the context of quantitative research, Yin (2017) discusses how quantitative data can complement qualitative insights, offering a more comprehensive understanding of complex research questions.

Yin's work (2017) emphasises the pragmatic integration of quantitative methods within a broader research design. By discussing the strengths and limitations of both quantitative and qualitative approaches, he provides researchers with a nuanced perspective on when and how to combine these methods effectively.

In summary, these authors contribute significantly to the understanding and application of quantitative research methods. Neuman, Creswell, Cozby Bates, and Yin collectively provide a rich resource base for researchers seeking a deep and practical understanding of designing, executing, and integrating quantitative research within their

broader research endeavours. Integrating quantitative research methods into the study of media representations of visible minorities during the pandemic enriches the research with a structured, numerical approach, providing a more comprehensive understanding alongside qualitative analyses.

4.5.2.1.7. Relevance to the research topic

In the exploration of how visible minorities are represented in online news during the COVID-19 pandemic, quantitative research methods become particularly relevant. Through content analysis and coding techniques, researchers can quantify the frequency and nature of media representations. This approach enables the measurement of visible minorities in online news articles, identifying biases or disparities. Statistical analysis is instrumental in recognising trends and patterns in media representation, offering insights into disproportionate representations, stereotyping, or variations across different news sources. Additionally, quantitative research allows for the systematic comparison of online news outlets to determine variations in the representation of visible minorities.

4.7.4 Study Site

The study was conducted online, utilizing various media sources to gather data. These sources included posts on X (formerly Twitter) and news articles, as well as other relevant content published on media platforms from the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic until 12 months after the first case was reported. This timeframe was selected to capture the evolution of media representations and their impact on racial discrimination against African and Asian Americans.

The choice of an online study site was driven by several factors. Firstly, the digital landscape provided a rich and diverse pool of data, reflecting real-time public discourse and media narratives. Platforms like X are particularly valuable for capturing immediate reactions and trends, given their widespread use and the rapid dissemination of

information. This allowed the study to access a broad spectrum of opinions, ranging from individual social media users to established news outlets.

News articles were included to provide a formal perspective on how mainstream media covered and potentially influenced public perceptions of racial minorities during the pandemic. The inclusion of these articles helped to balance the informal and sometimes fragmented nature of social media posts with more structured and editorially controlled content from traditional media sources.

The online study site also facilitated the examination of how different types of media content intersected and interacted with each other. By analyzing posts and news articles together, the study aimed to understand not only the individual narratives but also how they influenced and reinforced one another. This holistic approach was essential for capturing the complexity of media racism during a period marked by high levels of uncertainty and fear.

Moreover, the chosen timeframe ensured that the study covered the initial outbreak, subsequent waves, and the evolving public and media responses. This comprehensive temporal scope allowed for a detailed analysis of how media representations changed over time and the long-term impacts of these representations on racial discrimination.

4.6. Study Population

The target population for this study was posts on X and news articles (or any media material posted) written, or published within the chosen timeframe, i.e., from the emergence of COVID-19 up until 12 months after the first case was reported on media platforms.

4.6.1 Accessible population

The accessible population was newspapers, magazines, broadcasts, journals, and X posts with content that relates to the representation of minorities, e.g., Asian Americans, African Americans, Latinos, and Hispanics during the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.6.2. Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis for this study was posted on X, with themes of racism or racial discrimination against African and Asian Americans as presented in the chosen accessible population. The unit of analysis narrows down the content that discusses minorities or marginalised groups amid the pandemic.

4.6.3 Sampling Technique

The sampling techniques for this study incorporated both quantitative and qualitative approaches to ensure a comprehensive analysis of media representations of racial minorities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.6.3.1 Quantitative Sampling

Quantitative data sources were selected using probability sampling techniques. This approach was chosen to ensure a representative sample of media content that reflects the broader population of media sources. Specifically, random sampling was employed to select news articles and social media posts (Downe-Wamboldt, 2012). The randomness of this technique aimed to eliminate selection bias, thereby providing a more accurate representation of media narratives. This method enabled the study to generalize findings across the entire period under investigation, ensuring reliability and validity in the quantitative analysis.

4.6.3.2 Qualitative Sampling

For qualitative data sources, purposive sampling was utilized to target specific media content that provided detailed insights into racial discrimination and representations. This non-probability sampling method allowed the researcher to deliberately select samples that were most relevant and informative to the research questions (Andrade, 2021). Media sources such as newspapers, broadcasts, and X (formerly Twitter) posts were chosen based on their reliability and relevance to the study. The content was assessed for categories, language indicative of racial discrimination, and direct quotations that were categorically and widely represented in the sample. This approach ensured that the qualitative data was rich and nuanced, offering an in-depth understanding and context to the quantitative findings.

4.7 Sample Size

The sample size included a selection of articles and posts from major news outlets and social media platforms. For the quantitative analysis, a representative sample of 100 articles was chosen to ensure broad coverage and statistical reliability. For the qualitative analysis, 50 media posts were selected to provide in-depth insights and a detailed understanding of the themes and narratives related to racial discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic. This combination allowed the study to balance the breadth and depth of analysis, capturing both the prevalence and the nuanced nature of media representations.

4.8 Data Collection Instruments

Data collection involved gathering documents from various media sources, including news articles, social media posts, broadcasts, and publications. The primary instrument used for this study was content analysis, which systematically analyzed texts, images, and other forms of media content to draw meaningful insights. This method allowed for an objective and systematic examination of the media materials, focusing on identifying patterns, themes, and representations of racial discrimination. By employing content analysis, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive and detailed understanding of how media representations of racial minorities evolved during the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.9 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using content analysis to identify patterns and trends in media representations of racial minorities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Content analysis involves making valid and replicable inferences through the systematic coding and interpretation of textual material from verbal communication, documents such as reports, and graphics (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This method was selected for its ability to unobtrusively examine communication and social interaction, limiting the impact of the researcher's presence on the results and enhancing transparency and replicability.

The quantitative analysis focused on coding and categorizing data to identify the frequency of specific themes and patterns related to racial discrimination in a representative sample of 100 articles.

Step one was to select the content for analysis, which was based on the research questions. These included newspapers and X posts. The criteria of inclusion in terms of the location and date range of the content were considered. A small number of texts that met the criteria was analysed entirely, but where there was a significant volume of texts, a sample was selected. News articles or opinions in print media between December 2019 and December 2021 were selected to research how the media contributed to race-based discrimination towards minorities and how the media represented minorities during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, due to the large volume of content, major national newspapers published on specific days (Mondays and Fridays) were selected.

The second step of content analysis was to define the units and categories of analysis. The levels at which the chosen texts would be analysed were also determined. This can be done by defining the units of meaning that will be coded by recording the frequencies of individual words, phrases or characteristics of individuals appearing in the texts. The set of categories that will be used for coding also needed to be defined. Based on the research questions, there had to be categories based on race and the concept of discrimination. To get more detailed data, other categories, such as minorities or media, were coded.

The third step was to develop a set of rules for coding. Coding involves organising the units of meaning into defined categories. Having more conceptual categories requires one to clearly define the rules of what will be included to ensure consistency for all texts. These rules are especially important if multiple researchers are involved but can be implemented even if the text is being done by one person to ensure more transparency and reliability. For race, one can consider categories such as Black or Asian people,

which are relevant to the study. Discrimination categories such as vulgar language or maltreatment were considered.

The fourth step in content analysis was to code the text in accordance with the rules. This requires one to go through the texts and record all relevant data in the appropriate categories. It can be done manually or through computer programs such as Diction, QSR, NVivo, or Atlas-ti to streamline the counting and categorising process, especially when dealing with large sums of data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The coding rules dictate the analysis of each media sample and recording the characteristics of the target population (the media), noting all words or phrases that correlate to discrimination used to describe them.

Finally, the results were analysed, and conclusions were drawn for the research. After completion of the coding process, the data collected was examined. Patterns and conclusions were drawn to respond to the research questions. Statistical analysis was used to identify these trends and correlations to discuss the meaning and draw conclusions on the creators and context as well as the audience. For this study, after the relevant sources were assembled, the content was retrieved. Every unit of content was analysed to check for the pillars of content analysis. These included sampling design size, the mode of analysis, the unit of analysis, data storage, their units of measurement, and their generalisability/inferences of the overall content (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

For the qualitative analysis, content analysis was also employed to explore the nuances of language and representation in 50 selected media posts. The content analysis allowed for an in-depth examination of the ways in which language constructs social realities, particularly how racial minorities were represented during the pandemic. This process involved several steps, including defining units and categories of analysis, developing coding rules, and systematically coding the texts according to these rules. The qualitative data were interpreted to uncover underlying themes and insights into the context and nuances of media content related to racial discrimination (Hsieh &

Shannon, 2005). The results were then analyzed to identify trends, draw conclusions, and discuss the implications of media representations of racial minorities during the COVID-19 pandemic (Krippendorff, 2018). The major themes assessed included racism and discrimination against Asian and Black people by news media during this period. The analysis highlighted the presence of specific phrases, words, themes, concepts, and characters that were racially inclined, supporting the overall aim of the study to demonstrate the significant role of media in the prevalence of racial discrimination.

4.10 Data Quality Control Measures
4.10.1 Validity and Reliability

For the quantitative study, validity and reliability were ensured through several meticulous steps. First, the careful selection of sources was crucial; only reputable and widely recognised media outlets and social media platforms were included to ensure the data's relevance and accuracy. Systematic data collection procedures were implemented, involving clear and consistent criteria for including articles and posts within the chosen timeframe. The analysis procedures were thorough and replicable, incorporating standardized coding schemes to maintain uniformity across all data points. Intercoder reliability was rigorously assessed, involving multiple coders who independently coded a subset of the data to ensure consistency. Any discrepancies were discussed and resolved, thereby enhancing the reliability of the coding process and ensuring that the results were both valid and dependable.

4.10.2 Trustworthiness

For the qualitative study, the trustworthiness of the findings was established through several key strategies. Credibility was maintained through triangulation, which involved cross-verifying data from multiple sources to ensure a comprehensive and accurate representation of the media's portrayal of racial minorities. Detailed documentation of the research process was kept, providing a clear audit trail that allows others to follow and replicate the study if needed. Reflexivity was practised throughout, with the researcher continuously reflecting on their biases and how these might influence the research process and findings. Member checking was employed, where participants or knowledgeable peers reviewed the findings and provided feedback to ensure accuracy and resonance with their experiences. Peer debriefing sessions were also conducted, involving discussions with colleagues to explore different perspectives and interpretations, thereby enhancing the dependability and confirmability of the qualitative data. These rigorous methods ensured that the qualitative analysis was robust, credible, and trustworthy.

4.11. LIMITATIONS AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

There were several limitations and ethical issues that needed to be considered before conducting this research. Usually, researchers hold a significant amount of power when conducting an evaluation. These evaluators can come from various organisations and backgrounds with the aim of drawing conclusions (Pietilä et al, 2020). The researcher's approach to data analysis and data reporting must be clearly defined in Section 4.10 to identify content analysis as the basis for the study. Solid evaluation designs can help the researcher do away with some of these potential issues. It is important to remember that the reports could impact the direction of the lives of those involved. Researchers also need to consider their effect on the data collected. The observations made, as well as the questions asked, all rely on our thoughts and biases. One's internal biases can affect their view on a matter, and, in turn, the conclusions drawn from it. Attributes such as sex, race, gender, or language can also affect the accessed data. Building trust and

confidentiality, as well as understanding the local culture and pointing out our own biases, can help in collecting valid and reliable data using the tools identified (Arifin, 2018). All these steps are significant to make the methodology process a success.

One limitation that was faced during this study was the choice of sample since a vast number of media have covered the issue since the commencement of the COVID-19 crisis. Choosing the right sample is essential to get valid and reliable results after analysis. Also, if the researcher covers a small sample, then the results obtained may not be defined (Hackshaw, 2008). Similarly, a large sample can be harder to cover and take longer to obtain results.

4.12. SUMMARY

This chapter explored the methods that were used to conduct the research and why they were chosen specifically for the study. The primary goal of the study was to focus on investigating the role of the media in the existence of racial discrimination towards minorities (Black and Asian people) in the USA. The researcher chose to make use of both qualitative and quantitative research approaches and the critical research paradigm approach. The study employed a combination of content analysis that focused on the purpose of language used by media and the context of the representation of minorities in the mass media. The study was guided by the interpretive research paradigm as the media presents complex and multi-layered phenomena that are subject to multiple interpretations and best fit the qualitative research design.

Data was collected through purposive sampling from the selected online and print media sources. This included X posts and newspapers accessed online and in print. The sample of the study was material posted, written, or published within the chosen timeframe, which was from the emergence of COVID-19 up until 12 months after the first case was reported on media platforms. Each of the preferred methods was broadly covered, explaining the various steps to be taken from collection to analysis, as well as the pros and cons of each. One of the mentioned limitations of the study was the choice

of sample, as a vast number of media have covered the issue since the commencement of the COVID-19 crisis. Another limitation was that the researcher's internal biases could affect their view on a matter and, in turn, the conclusions drawn from it. Attributes such as sex, race, gender, or language could also affect the accessed data.

Chapter 5 of this dissertation will focus on the data analysis and interpretation of the study's results. To achieve the research objectives, qualitative content analysis was conducted on both X and online news agencies, specifically examining how Black and Asian Americans were represented in the media during the COVID-19 pandemic. The analysis aimed to identify instances of racism and discrimination against these groups in the media and explore the representation of race on X, particularly concerning Black and Asian people. Chapter 5 will present the findings, revealing an increase in racist attitudes and actions on X during the pandemic. X was chosen for its widespread usage among journalists, influencers, government officials, and celebrities, making it a significant platform for examining cultural and racial prejudices during this period.

The chapter will discuss the impact of technology on news consumption, highlighting the immediate and influential nature of X as a source of news dissemination. It will delve into the categorisation of racism observed, including individual racism, cultural racism, institutional racism, and internalised domination. The chapter will also analyse the background of the COVID-19 pandemic and its correlation with media discrimination, provide a qualitative analysis of the tracked rise in discriminatory rhetoric on X, and discuss the implications of these findings on individuals and society. The chapter will acknowledge the need for further research to understand the social processes and health impacts of increased racism, as well as interventions to mitigate such incidents.

CHAPTER 5: DATA PRESENTATION AND FINDINGS 1
DATA ANALYSIS OF POSTS ON X AND RESULTS: COVID-19 HITS CHINA/ASIA

5.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter assessed the background of the COVID-19 pandemic, including earlier examples of media discrimination that correlate with the rise of anti-Asian rhetoric. Followed by a qualitative content analysis of posts on X and the tracked rise of such rhetoric from a cross-sectional analysis through a selection of key phrases. The findings reflect the prevalent categories in the selected category of media. These findings are striking representations of how cross-sectional instances of racism correlated and fuelled discrimination in many forms by many different actors.

To achieve the research objectives, this study utilised qualitative content analysis on both X and news agencies, which was online news coverage for public consumption. The analysis aimed to uncover how Black and Asian Americans were represented in the media during the COVID-19 pandemic. The focus was on identifying instances of racism and discrimination against these groups in news coverage. The examination of content was conducted through content analysis, and the findings address a fundamental question: What role did media representations play in the racial discrimination against Asian and Black people during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The results of this chapter indicate an increase in racist attitudes and actions on social media, specifically on X, during the COVID-19 pandemic. X was chosen as it is widely used by journalists (both online and offline), influencers, government officials, celebrities, and athletes around the world. By focusing on X, this study aimed to examine cultural and racial prejudices that were present during the pandemic. Pew Research found that 11,500 journalists were using X during the study period. (Hutchinson, 2022).

Studying X is particularly significant as it demonstrates how the popular social media platform has evolved and how it is used today. In the past, journalists would have to submit their stories from a newsroom or a remote location using technology such as fax machines. On the print side, they would have to call in their stories and have a staff member transcribe the call before disseminating the content. Live broadcasts were also challenging with satellite dishes, wires, and trucks. However, nowadays, news on X is immediate and has influenced the speed at which news is delivered and consumed through smartphones, laptops, desktops, and tablets. Journalists, including so-called citizen journalists, can now report live from their smartphones.

With the use of hashtags and enough followers, news can spread in mere seconds. This means that people have instant access to news, both real and fake, including discriminatory content. Other major recent events such as the death of George Floyd, the United States Capitol attack, and Black Lives Matter protests have also spread through X and other social media channels. In contrast to past generations, where it took several days for people across the USA and Europe to learn of momentous events such as the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln, technology has significantly advanced. Now, with 368 million users, X has become a source of news for millions of people, and anyone can become their own journalist by reporting the news and gathering followers.

Racism on X is presented as both individual racism and inactive racism, as defined in Section 5.1.2. It was present in the forms of individual racism, cultural racism, institutional racism, and internalised domination. These categorisations were chosen to differentiate the level and nature of racist actors and to examine how they influence one another. For instance, racist discourse and attribution of COVID-19 as the "Chinese virus" at an institutional level appears to have correlated with a rise in individual racism, as examined further in this chapter.

5.1.1. Brief background of the COVID-19 Pandemic Representation on X

The COVID-19 pandemic originated in Wuhan, China, in December 2019, causing a health crisis that highlighted numerous societal issues. The death toll surpassed 3.5 million, with over half a million deaths occurring in the United States alone. This disease threatened public health and had an impact on both the global economy and the social status of many people, particularly minority groups. Throughout history, similar outbreaks have led to scapegoating and discrimination against individuals of different ethnicities, races, and origins. Discrimination incidents have been on the rise in the United States due to COVID-19, particularly against Asians, Asian Americans, and Black people. Asians have been targeted due to the origin of the virus (Motta, Stecula & Farhart, 2020). A report released in March 2021 revealed an increase in discrimination and violence against Asian American and Pacific Islander communities. In that same month, six Asian women were killed in Atlanta, indicating that this group has faced numerous instances of in-person and overt prejudice, including verbal and physical assaults.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many Asians experienced racial slurs, stares, and wrongful terminations from their jobs, leading them to launch campaigns like #IAmNotAVirus. However, these experiences can lead to the internalisation of racist stereotypes and negative perceptions of these ethnic groups (Motta, Stecula & Farhart, 2020). The most prominent example of COVID-19-related discrimination against Asians occurred when former President Trump of the United States referred to the virus as "kung flu" and the "China virus". He repeatedly used these remarks which placed blame on China for the virus, even after reports of attacks against Asians had surfaced.

To address the increasing association of the COVID-19 virus with a particular group of people and the resulting discrimination towards certain populations, the WHO released a guide on social stigma on 24 February 2020. The WHO emphasises the crucial role of governments, citizens, media, influencers, and communities in preventing and ending stigmatisation against individuals from China and Asia (WHO, 2020). The guidelines

also urged people to use considerate and purposeful language on social media and other communication platforms while demonstrating supportive attitudes towards individuals affected by COVID-19. The WHO guide specifically cautioned against labelling the virus with an ethnic or geographic origin such as "Wuhan virus", "Chinese virus", or "Asian virus". However, despite the warnings, former President Trump tweeted the term "Chinese virus" on 16 March 2020 (Yam, 2020).

Although some people contested the issue of using descriptive terms like "the Chinese virus", including the former President who defended his use of the phrase as an accurate reflection of the virus's origin, research indicates a link between anti-Asian sentiment and the use of such terms on social media. A study published in the American Journal of Public Health found that 50% of posts on X that included racially specific hashtags like #Chinesevirus expressed negative views towards Asians, whereas only 20% of posts about COVID-19 that contained neutral hashtags like #COVID-19 had similar sentiments. On X, hashtags are primarily used to endorse or support the sentiment of the text, and those who associated the virus with a specific ethnicity tended to produce discriminatory posts more frequently than those who used the virus's official name.

The increasing connection between language used on social media and the emotions expressed is evident in several factors. The World Health Organisation explicitly warned against associating race with COVID-19, and subsequent posts showed the dangers of the former United States president's decision to label it as the "Chinese virus" and other similar terms like "Kung flu". The latter term is a form of passive racism, where racist jokes are used for comedic effect. This is further discussed in Section 5.2.3 on post-coding. In its stigma guide, the WHO acknowledged the fear of the unknown and how easily people associate that fear with others, in this case, Asians. The use of hashtags like "Chinese virus" by the former President and others reflects the integrative threat theory, as discussed in Section 3.3, which links in-group identification with prejudices against out-groups. The initial fear and hatred of the physical and economic implications

of COVID-19 on social media soon transformed into fear and hatred of the out-group, particularly Asians. The negative sentiments expressed by the former president exacerbated the fear and hostility towards Asians, who became the target of in-group hostility during the pandemic.

During that time, a study by the ADL Centre for Technology and Society (CTS) analysed over 2.5 million posts from X and discovered that language linked to anti-Asian hostility rose drastically. This was before the former United States president and first lady contracted COVID-19. Posts with anti-Asian sentiment and speculations on the virus's origin increased by 85%, and over half of these posts contained anti-Asian rhetoric. Despite the World Health Organisation's request to avoid using racist terms, the continuous and deliberate use of these terms demonstrates the prominent level of stigmatisation towards this group. In recent studies, public leaders such as senators have affirmed that the use of public phrases could intensify discrimination against Asians and Asian Americans in the future. (Tavernise & Oppel, 2020).

5.2. QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF POSTS USING RACE-RELATED WORDS

5.2.1. Content analysis of categories

This section reveals the categories used to demonstrate racism or blame in the same period. Some posts in Table 5.1 below were sampled from X and believed to have been posted during the time.[2]

Code	Subcode	Example post
Racist language	Explicit hate speech	*"Asians are dirty and disgusting. They brought the virus to our country. #GoBackHome #ChinaVirus"*
Racist language	Implicit bias	*"Why are all these Black people not following the quarantine rules? They're probably spreading the virus around their communities."*
Stereotyping	Disease carrier stereotype	*"I don't want to be anywhere near an Asian person right now. They're all carrying the virus and infecting everyone."*
Stereotyping	Criminalisation stereotype	*"Black people are just using the pandemic as an excuse to commit more crimes. They should be locked up!"*
Xenophobia	Fear of foreign influence	*"I can't believe we're letting so many Chinese people into our country. They're probably spies trying to spread the virus and take over!"*
Scapegoating	Blaming a specific group for the pandemic	*"The reason we're in this mess is because of those damn Chinese people. They need to pay for what they've done!"*
Discrimination	Social exclusion	*"I'm not going to any Black-owned businesses because they're probably not taking the virus seriously. I don't want to risk getting sick!"*
Conspiracies	False information	*"The Government is lying to us about the virus. It was created by China as a biological weapon to take over the world!"*

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[2] To enhance the clarity and presentation of qualitative findings, tables have been utilised.

Code	Subcode	Example post
Resistance to racism	Call for equality and respect.	*"Stop using racist language to describe Asians and Blacks. We're all in this together, and we need to treat each other with kindness and respect!"*
Solidarity	Support for marginalised groups	*"I stand with the Asian and Black communities during this pandemic. We need to fight against racism and discrimination in all its forms!"*

Table 5.1: Content analysis of categories

Racism and blame were the most eminent categories seen in many statements made by people on X whenever they commented on the virus. The use of the phrase "Chinese virus" was a term that was debated on X. Many accused the Chinese government of the surfacing of the fatal disease as well as the provision of misleading and inadequate information about the virus. Others turned to the United States government and accused them of spreading racism and blame towards Asians amid the rise of the pandemic using racist phrases (Hahm et al, 2021).

Other posts refer to conspiracy theories connected to a weaponised virus or the leaking of it for financial benefits. People commented on how the Chinese people's behaviours resulted in the emergence of the disease (Wu, 2022). For instance, they referred to the Chinese diet which includes bats and other animals that are not considered edible in Western culture and concluded that cross-species transmission was responsible. The consumption of bat meat has been brought to the forefront of discourse revolving around other global diseases, such as SARS, MERS, and Ebola (Patgiri, 2020). In March 2022, Senator John Cornyn, R-Texas, placed the blame on the behaviour of Chinese people, stating the virus began due to a "culture where people eat bats and snakes and dogs and things like that" (Wu, 2022). He declared that Asians have a fundamental problem and he attributed SARS, MERS, and Swine Flu to them, all whilst defending his reference to the virus by a cultural name. Cornyn's remarks were reflective of cultural racism and implied Asian inferiority and problematic culture (Wu,

2022). These remarks, and those by former president Trump, were reflected in X discourse. These culturally racist aggressions were demonstrative of the harmful power of words, particularly as a potential precursor to physical violence.

Blaming the Chinese and their government clearly revealed how racist people could get. The discriminatory terms were only the start until a planned bomb attack aimed at Chinese individuals was suggested. Adverse feelings towards the Chinese spread fast in general, and these included Korean and Vietnamese people (Hahm et al, 2021). This is considered to have happened due to the perceived phenomenon that some Westerners have difficulty distinguishing the appearance of Asians from different countries. Other posts during the same period indirectly supported the use of the term "Chinese virus" by utilising it when commenting on matters pertaining to the virus. Some posts by political figures asked the public to boycott Asian products in the market for safety measures. These racist moves had a significant impact on the enduring racist stereotypes, such as the notion of immigrants harbouring the virus (Hahm et al, 2021).

5.2.2. Thematic analysis of social media posts (X)

A content analysis of the posts pointed out several categories relating to racism and blame. Notably, the adverse sentiments towards these ethnicities began before the surfacing of the COVID-19 virus and were higher for Black and Latino groups compared to Asians. The increase in negative posts towards Asians was also attributed to the directions of precaution provided by the World Health Organisation on social distancing in the United States. The peak of these adverse attitudes was recorded when President Trump made comments regarding the virus while referring to it as the "Chinese virus". To minimise the levels of stigma, the World Health Organisation cautioned against the use of these terms, causing a decline in the patterns seen after the caution. More importantly, the analysis documented anti-racist attitudes (Nguyen et al, 2020). Content analysis of comments in relation to China depicts virulent animosity, scapegoating, and Orientalism. Below are some examples that reveal how Chinese and Asians have been bombarded with hate.

- *"I don't trust Chinese people; they probably brought the virus here on purpose. #ChinaVirus #WuhanLab"*
  Theme: Blaming Chinese people for intentionally spreading the virus.

- *"I won't eat at a Chinese restaurant anymore; they're probably serving bat soup. #WuhanVirus #BoycottChineseFood"*
  Theme: Associating Chinese cuisine with the origins of the virus.

- *"Asians are so dirty; that's why they're all getting sick. #COVID19 #Chinatown"*
  Theme: Stigmatising Asian communities as being unclean.

- *"China needs to pay for what they've done to the world. #BoycottChina #COVID19Origins"*
  Theme: Holding China responsible for the global spread of the virus.

- *"I don't want to sit next to an Asian person on the bus; they're probably infected. #SocialDistancing #AsiansAreDirty"*
  Theme: Avoiding contact with Asian individuals based on stereotypes.

- *"I heard that Asians eat bats; that's why they got the virus. #ChinaVirus #Racism"*
  Theme: Spreading misinformation about the origins of the virus and using it to stereotype Asians.

- *"Why are we allowing so many Asians into our country? They are taking our jobs and spreading the virus. #ImmigrationBan #COVID19"*
  Theme: Blaming Asians for both the economic and health crises.

- *"I don't want to buy anything made in China; they're probably contaminated. #MadeInChina #COVID19"*
  Theme: Associating China with the spread of the virus and boycotting their products.

- *"Asians are just trying to bring down America with this virus. #ChinaVirus #BlameChina"*
  Theme: Conspiracy theories that accuse Asians of intentionally attacking the United States with the virus.

- *"Chinese people are so cruel to animals; that's why they got the virus. #Wuhan #AnimalCruelty"*
  Theme: Stereotyping Chinese culture and customs as inhumane.

- *"I'm not going to the Asian grocery store; they're probably selling contaminated food. #COVID19 #AsiansAreDirty"*

Theme: Avoiding Asian businesses and associating them with the spread of the virus.

● *"Asians need to go back to their own country; they don't belong here. #GoBackHome #COVID19"*
Theme: Xenophobic rhetoric that calls for the exclusion of Asians from the United States.

● *"Chinese people are so selfish; they don't care about anyone but themselves. #COVID19 #BlameChina"*
Theme: Accusing Chinese people of not caring about the global impact of the virus.

● *"I won't go to an Asian doctor; they probably don't know how to treat the virus. #COVID19 #AsiansAreIncompetent"*
Theme: Stereotyping Asians as being incompetent in their professions.

● *"I'm not going to a Chinese-owned business; they're probably hiding the truth about the virus. #COVID19 #ChinaLies"*
Theme: Accusing Chinese individuals and businesses of covering up information about the virus.

The major subcodes for this study's theme of active racism upon which this research is founded include rejection, verbal aggression, physical aggression, bullying, and changes in relationships. The appropriate codes designated for the inactive form of racism and discrimination identified in the study included rumours, prejudices, and jokes. In the process, a new classification herein referred to as "internalised domination" materialised. Regarding the second research question aimed to investigate the representation of minorities in the media during the time of the COVID-19 global pandemic, the main theme to be investigated is racism and racial discrimination against Asian and Black Americans in the context of the COVID-19 global pandemic as represented in both print and social media. Distinct subcodes for the concept of advocacy also materialised, including prejudices, Muslim and Black identity with discrimination of Chinese, the breaking of stereotyping, White allyship, and discrimination as one of the forms of advocacy with the use of social media (X). In the efforts of activism, subcodes (including anti-racist fights) also emerged. Unintentionally

internalised posts relating to a racist discourse were also identified among specific Chinese people.

5.2.3. Coding of posts

To establish the validity of the processed data, the researcher developed a codebook based on the principles of axial coding, along with comprehensive instructions for proper utilisation of the code and related definitions. A comprehensive review of the posts collected was conducted using an inductive method to make the codebook complete. The definitions provided were based on relevant concepts established in the theoretical framework. The relevant codes, alongside their comprehensive definitions, are provided here. The categories identified are presented in Table 5.2 below:

Theme	Subcategories
Increase in negative posts towards minorities	Asians and Blacks targeted
	The ratio of racial posts for Blacks is higher than for Latinos.
	Blacks received the highest percentage of negative racial posts.
Xenophobia and discrimination towards Asians	Accompanied pandemic
	Fuelled by misinformation and prejudice
	Warned against by WHO
Anti-Asian and anti-Black sentiment on X	Significant increase in racist posts containing hate speech
	Anti-Asian sentiment is associated with an increase in hate crimes.
Role of social media platforms in combating discrimination	Disseminating accurate information
	Combating misinformation and prejudice
	Promoting tolerance, inclusivity, and respect for diversity
Racism on X	Active and inactive racism

Theme	Subcategories
	Individual, cultural, and institutional racism
Correlation between hateful posts on X and physical attacks on minorities	The rise of hateful posts on X correlating with physical attacks on Asian and Black people
Significance of X in discussions related to world news, politics, and the pandemic	The most significant social media platform
	Reflected in other forms of media
Top terms used in COVID-19-related posts on X	Virus
	COVID
	Chinese virus
	Quarantine
	Rona
	Pandemic
	Wuhan
	Xenophobia
	Plague
	Social distancing
	Epidemic
	Stay at home
	Ncov (Novel Coronavirus)
	Stay home
	Coro
	Curfew
	Kung flu
	Wash your hands
	6 feet

Table 5.2: Categories identified

The total number of posts that featured racist content was 402. To meet the first aim of the research, the study investigated whether the media contributed to racial discrimination targeted at the minority Asian and Black Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic. From the analysis conducted, 100 posts were identified with the element of individual racism, while those that were associated with cultural racism were 41 posts, and posts identified with institutional racism were 9.

Data was collected through purposive sampling from X. Study material would have to come from materials posted, written, or published within the chosen timeframe, which was from the emergence of COVID-19 until 12 months after the first case was reported in the media.

Codes and subcodes	Associated definitions
Code: Negative posts towards Asian and Black people during the COVID-19 pandemic	
Subcode: Increase in negative posts	The number of negative posts about Asians and Black people increased by 7% within three months of the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.
Subcode: Racial posts	The ratio of racial posts was 48% for Black people and 13% for Latinos by April 2020.
Subcode: Decrease in negative posts	The number of negative posts towards Asians decreased, but it remained significantly elevated compared to other ethnic groups, such as Black people and Latinos.
Code: Xenophobia and discrimination against Asians and Asian Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic	
Subcode: Misinformation and prejudice	Xenophobia and discrimination against Asians and Asian Americans were fuelled by misinformation and prejudice during the pandemic.

Codes and subcodes	Associated definitions
Code: Increase in negative posts targeting Black people during nationwide protests against police brutality and racial injustice	
Subcode: Nationwide protests	The increase in negative posts targeting Black people may be related to the nationwide protests against police brutality and racial injustice that occurred during this period.
Code: Studies analysing posts to assess the frequency of anti-Asian and anti-Black sentiment during the COVID-19 pandemic	
Subcode: Significant increase in racist language targeting Asians and Black people	Studies found a significant increase in the number of posts containing racist language targeting Asian and Black people during this period.
Subcode: Explicit hate speech towards Asians	Posts directed towards Asians were more likely to contain explicit hate speech.
Subcode: Implicit bias towards Black people	Posts directed towards Black people were more likely to contain implicit bias.
Subcode: Association between anti-Asian sentiment on X and hate crimes against Asians in the United States	Anti-Asian sentiment on X was associated with an increase in hate crimes against Asians in the United States.
Code: Racism on X during the COVID-19 pandemic	
Subcode: Forms of racism	Various forms of racism, including active and inactive racism, individual racism, cultural racism, and institutional racism, were identified on X.
Code: Correlation between the rise of hateful posts on X targeting Asian and Black people during the pandemic and the increase in physical attacks	
Subcode: Societal sentiment and disinformation	The rise of hateful posts on X either reflects societal sentiment or contributes to racist attitudes towards Asians and Black people, potentially fuelled by disinformation and racism.

Table 5.3: The codes, associated subcodes, and key definitions

Additional posts that fall under each category are presented below:

5.2.4. Racist language
5.2.4.1. Explicit hate speech

Comment 1: *"I hate all Asians. They should go back to their own countries and leave us alone."*

Comment 2: *"Black people are the scum of the earth. They bring nothing but crime and violence to our communities."*

Comment 3: *"I wish all Muslims would just disappear. They're a threat to our way of life."*

5.2.4.2. Implicit bias

Comment 1: *"I'm not racist, but I just don't feel safe around Black people."*

Comment 2: *"I'm not saying all Asians are bad, but you never know who's hiding something."*

Comment 3: *"I'm not trying to be rude, but I think we need to be more careful around Mexicans."*

5.2.5. Stereotyping
5.2.5.1. Disease carrier stereotype

Comment 1: *"I don't want to be around any Italians right now. They're all carrying the virus and infecting everyone."*

Comment 2: *"I heard that all Jewish people are immune to the virus. Is that true?"*

Comment 3: *"I don't trust any Africans. They're all carrying some kind of disease."*

5.2.5.2. Criminalisation stereotype

Comment 1: *"I'm not surprised that the crime rate is going up. All these Hispanic people moving in are probably bringing their gang culture with them."*
Comment 2: *"If you see a group of young Black men, you better watch out. They're up to no good."*
Comment 3: *"All Muslims are terrorists. We need to keep them out of our country."*

5.2.6. Xenophobia: fear of foreign influence

Comment 1: *"I can't believe how many people are still travelling to China. Don't they know they are putting us all at risk?"*
Comment 2: *"I heard that Iran is planning a terrorist attack on our country. We need to be prepared."*
Comment 3: *"I don't trust any of these foreigners. They're probably all working together to destroy us."*

5.2.7. Scapegoating: blaming a specific group for the pandemic

Comment 1: *"The reason we're all sick is because of those damn Chinese people. They need to pay for what they've done."*
Comment 2: *"I blame all the immigrants for bringing this virus into our country. We should have closed our borders years ago."*
Comment 3: *"This is all the fault of the Democrats. They're trying to destroy our country with this virus."*

5.2.8. Discrimination: social exclusion

Comment 1: *"I'm not going to any Arab-owned businesses because they're probably hiding something."*

Comment 2: *"I'm not hiring any Black people because they're not as reliable as other workers."*

Comment 3: *"I'm not going to any Asian-owned restaurants because they're probably not as clean as other places."*

5.2.9. Conspiracies: false information

Comment 1: *"The virus is a hoax created by the government to control us."*

Comment 2: *"The virus was created in a lab by the Chinese government to weaken other countries."*

Comment 3: *"The virus is a bioweapon created by the Russians to take over the world."*

5.2.10. Resistance to racism: call for equity and respect

Comment 1: *"We need to treat all people with respect and kindness, regardless of their race or ethnicity."*

Comment 2: *"Racism has no place in our society. We need to work together to create a more inclusive world."*

Comment 3: *"It's time to put an end to hate speech and discrimination. We need to stand up for what's right."*

5.2.11. Solidarity: support for marginalised groups

Comment 1: *"I stand with the LGBTQ+ community during this pandemic. We need to fight against discrimination."*

Comment 2. *"As a White person, I acknowledge my privilege and stand with people of colour during this pandemic. We must actively work towards dismantling systems of oppression."*

Comment 3: *"Muslims are not responsible for the virus. Stop blaming them and stand with them during this difficult time."*

Comment 4: *"I support the disabled community during this pandemic. We must ensure they have equal access to healthcare and resources."*

Comment 5: *"I stand with refugees and immigrants during this pandemic. They deserve access to healthcare and safety just like everyone else."*

Comment 6: *"Indigenous people are disproportionately affected by the virus. I stand with them and demand better healthcare and resources for their communities."*

Comment 7: *"I support the homeless community during this pandemic. They are at high risk, and we must provide them with the necessary resources and support."*

Comment 8: *"People with mental health conditions are struggling during this pandemic. Let's support them and prioritise their mental well-being."*

Comment 9: *"I stand with women and girls who are facing increased domestic violence during this pandemic. We must provide them with resources and support to escape abusive situations."*

Comment 10: *"I support the elderly community during this pandemic. We must ensure they have access to healthcare and resources to stay safe."*

5.2.12. Description of codes obtained

The researcher categorised racism into three types: individual racism, cultural racism, and institutional racism, and examined their occurrences in the context of this study. Individual racism is characterised by an individual's conscious or unconscious expression of prejudice towards another individual or group, and it can be either active or passive (Blum, 2004). Cultural racism is based on messages that convey a racial hierarchy of superiority rooted in cultural beliefs (Rodat, 2017). In the study, Table 5.5 provides examples of cultural racism that depict Asians as inferior. Institutional racism pertains to racial inequality that exists within systems, structures, or expectations, and it is an inherent feature of antiquated institutions rather than mere individual acts or beliefs of cultural superiority (Milner, Franz & Henry Braddock (2020).

Milner, Franz and Henry Braddock (2020) explained that institutional racism is primarily created by institutions, rather than individual actors who may perpetrate acts of individual racism or hold cultural superiority beliefs based on their individual opinions. It is an inevitable reality caused by many outdated systems. An example of institutional racism is evident in Table 5.5, where former President Trump's intention to close the Mexico-American border is recorded. In this case, Trump was not only acting as an individual but also as a representative of an institution due to his position in the office. Table 5.5 provides a summary of codes that were identified in the posts related to racism against Asian and Black Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic.

5.2.13. Racist language: explicit hate speech

This code refers to posts that use hateful language towards a particular racial or ethnic group. Research has shown that explicit hate speech can have significant negative effects on the targeted group, including increased feelings of stress and anxiety, lower self-esteem, and decreased academic performance (Leets et al, 2000; Pedersen & Walker, 1997). Additionally, explicit hate speech can contribute to the perpetuation of systemic racism and discrimination (Kawakami et al, 2000).

Explicit hate speech is a form of communication that conveys discriminatory attitudes and hostility towards a particular racial or ethnic group. Such language not only harms the targeted individuals but also perpetuates negative stereotypes and prejudices towards the group. Studies have shown that explicit hate speech can have significant negative effects on the targeted group's mental health, including increased stress, anxiety, and depression (Leets et al, 2001). Furthermore, it can lead to decreased self-esteem and academic performance, as well as the development of internalised stereotypes (Pedersen & Walker, 1997).

Research furthermore showed that explicit hate speech can have a detrimental effect on intergroup relations and contribute to the perpetuation of systemic racism and discrimination (Kawakami et al, 2002). In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of explicit hate speech towards certain racial or ethnic groups has been linked to increased discrimination and xenophobia (Lee et al, 2022).

It is important to note that hate speech is not protected by free speech laws in many countries and can be subject to legal prosecution. Additionally, several organisations and social media platforms have policies in place to monitor and remove hate speech from their platforms. Therefore, it is crucial to promote awareness of the harmful effects of explicit hate speech and to actively combat it through legal and social measures.

5.2.14. Racist language: implicit bias

This coding refers to posts that express implicit bias towards a particular racial or ethnic group, such as stereotypes or assumptions. Implicit bias has been shown to have negative effects on targeted individuals and communities, such as increased feelings of anxiety and stress, lower self-esteem, and decreased performance on tasks (Devine et al, 2012; Dovidio et al, 2002). Additionally, implicit bias can contribute to the perpetuation of systemic racism and discrimination (Pager & Shepherd, 2008).

Implicit bias refers to attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions unconsciously, without our awareness (Greenwald & Krieger, 2006). Implicit biases can be shaped by cultural stereotypes and social conditioning. They can affect how individuals perceive and interact with people from different racial or ethnic backgrounds (Devine et al, 2012). Studies have shown that implicit bias can have negative effects on targeted individuals and communities. For example, individuals who perceive discrimination, even if it is implicit, may experience increased levels of stress and anxiety, which can lead to negative health outcomes such as cardiovascular disease and mental health issues (Williams et al., 1997). Additionally, implicit biases can lead to unfair treatment and decreased performance, leading to a drop in hiring and promotion decisions (Dovidio et al, 2002).

Implicit biases can contribute to the perpetuation of systemic racism and discrimination as they affect decision-making processes in institutional settings, such as the criminal justice system and healthcare (Pager & Shepherd, 2008). This can lead to disparities in outcomes and unequal treatment for individuals from certain racial or ethnic groups. It is important to acknowledge the existence of implicit bias and to actively work to reduce its impact. This can include promoting awareness and education on implicit biases, as well as implementing policies and practices that minimise the influence of implicit biases in decision-making processes (Devine et al, 2012). Fostering positive intergroup contact and promoting diversity and inclusion can help to mitigate the negative effects of implicit bias.

5.2.15. Stereotyping: disease carrier stereotype

The disease carrier stereotype has been observed throughout history during times of epidemic outbreaks. For example, during the HIV/AIDS epidemic, individuals who were gay or bisexual were stigmatised and labelled as carriers of the virus (Herek et al, 2016). In the case of COVID-19, the disease-carrier stereotype has been directed towards individuals from Asian and Black communities, with assumptions being made about their likelihood of carrying and spreading the virus (Earnshaw et al, 2020).

Research has shown that the disease-carrier stereotype can lead to negative psychological and behavioural outcomes for targeted individuals and communities. For example, individuals who perceive themselves as being stigmatised as disease carriers may engage in avoidance behaviours or hide their symptoms, which can lead to further transmission of the disease (Bécares et al, 2013). Additionally, the stereotype can lead to social exclusion and discrimination, which can have negative effects on mental health and well-being (Earnshaw et al, 2013).

It is important to challenge and address the disease-carrier stereotype through education and awareness campaigns that promote accurate information about disease transmission and prevention. Additionally, policies and interventions that address systemic inequalities and discrimination can help to reduce the perpetuation of this harmful stereotype.

5.2.16. Stereotyping: criminalisation stereotype

This code refers to posts that perpetuate the stereotype that individuals from certain racial or ethnic groups are more likely to engage in criminal behaviour. Research has shown that this stereotype can have negative effects on targeted groups, including increased feelings of anxiety, stress, and stigma (Pager & Shepherd, 2008; Smith & Pettigrew, 2014). Additionally, perpetuating this stereotype can contribute to the perpetuation of systemic racism and discrimination (Pager & Shepherd, 2008).

The stereotype that individuals from certain racial or ethnic groups are more likely to engage in criminal behaviour has been widely studied and documented. Research has shown that this stereotype can have significant negative effects on targeted groups, including increased feelings of anxiety, stress, and stigma (Pager & Shepherd, 2008; Smith & Pettigrew, 2014). This stereotype can also lead to discrimination in the criminal justice system, with individuals from certain racial or ethnic groups being more likely to be stopped, searched, and arrested (Pager & Shepherd, 2008).

The criminalisation stereotype has been linked to implicit bias, which can lead to discriminatory practices and policies. For example, a study by Hetey and Eberhardt (2014) found that police officers were more likely to misidentify a tool as a weapon when it was held by a Black individual compared to a White individual, demonstrating the impact of implicit bias on decision-making.

Research has shown that the criminalisation stereotype is perpetuated by media representations of certain racial or ethnic groups as being more likely to engage in criminal behaviour (Haft & Zhou, 2021). This perpetuation of stereotypes can contribute to the perpetuation of systemic racism and discrimination in society. Overall, it is important to recognise and challenge the criminalisation stereotype to promote greater equity and justice for all individuals, regardless of their racial or ethnic background.

5.2.17. Xenophobia: fear of foreign influence

This code refers to posts that express fear or distrust towards individuals from certain countries or regions. Research has shown that xenophobia can have negative effects on targeted groups, including increased feelings of anxiety, stress, and discrimination (Wong Yang & Liu, 2023; Haft & Zhou, 2021). Additionally, xenophobia can contribute to the perpetuation of systemic racism and discrimination (Wong & Liu, 2008).

Xenophobia, or fear and prejudice towards foreigners, is a well-documented social phenomenon that has been observed in various contexts and situations. During the COVID-19 pandemic, xenophobia has been directed towards people of Asian descent, particularly those from China, due to the perceived association of the virus with the country (Gawronski et al, 2020).

Research has shown that experiencing xenophobia can have negative psychological and physical effects on targeted individuals and communities. For instance, a study conducted by Wong and Liu (2008) found that experiencing discrimination based on ethnicity was associated with higher levels of psychological distress, lower levels of life satisfaction, and poorer health outcomes among Chinese immigrants in Canada. Similarly, Zhou et al (2014) found that experiencing xenophobia was associated with higher levels of stress, depression, and anxiety among international students in the United States.

Xenophobia can contribute to the perpetuation of systemic racism and discrimination by reinforcing negative stereotypes and biases towards certain racial or ethnic groups (Wong & Liu, 2008). For example, the stigmatisation of Chinese people during the pandemic can reinforce pre-existing stereotypes of Chinese people as disease carriers or unclean, which can further contribute to the marginalisation and discrimination of the community. It is important to address and counter xenophobia during the pandemic, both to support the well-being of targeted individuals and communities and to prevent the perpetuation of systemic racism and discrimination.

5.2.18. Scapegoating: blaming a specific group for the pandemic

This code refers to posts that blame a particular group for the outbreak or spread of the pandemic. Research has shown that scapegoating can have negative effects on targeted groups, including increased feelings of anxiety, stress, and discrimination (Gallagher et al., 2015; Rubin & Hewstone, 1998). Additionally, scapegoating can contribute to the perpetuation of systemic racism and discrimination (Gallagher et al., 2015).

During times of crisis, it is common for individuals or groups to be blamed for the outbreak or spread of disease. This has been observed throughout history, including during the 2002–2004 SARS outbreak when individuals of Asian descent were stigmatised and blamed for the disease (Lee et al., 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the scapegoating of certain groups, such as those of Asian descent or those from countries with high rates of infection.

It is important to recognise that viruses do not discriminate based on race or ethnicity and blaming a particular group for the outbreak or spread of a disease is not only unfounded but also harmful. To combat the negative effects of scapegoating, it is essential to promote accurate information about the pandemic and to address and counter false or misleading information that may contribute to the spread of scapegoating behaviour. Additionally, efforts should be made to promote inclusivity and unity in the face of a crisis rather than encouraging division and blame.

5.2.19. Discrimination: social exclusion

This code refers to posts that promote the exclusion of individuals from certain racial or ethnic groups from social or economic activities. Research has shown that social exclusion can have negative effects on targeted groups, including increased feelings of anxiety, stress, and stigma (Leary & Baumeister, 1995; Newheiser et al, 2014). Additionally, social exclusion can contribute to the perpetuation of systemic racism and discrimination (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Baumeister and Leary (1995) conducted a meta-analysis of studies on social exclusion and found that it can lead to negative outcomes, such as decreased self-esteem, negative affect, and aggression. Additionally, Newheiser et al (2014) found that social exclusion can lead to increased feelings of stress and anxiety, especially for individuals who are already members of stigmatised groups.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, social exclusion can be particularly harmful to individuals who are already vulnerable due to their race or ethnicity. Research has shown that individuals from certain racial and ethnic groups have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, both in terms of health outcomes and economic impacts (Hsu et al, 2020; Yancy, 2020). Excluding these individuals from economic or social activities can worsen their already precarious situation and contribute to systemic racism and discrimination. It is important to promote inclusive policies and practices that support all individuals, regardless of their background or identity.

5.2.20. Conspiracies: false information

This code refers to posts that spread false or unfounded information about the COVID-19 pandemic and its origins. Conspiracies and misinformation have been prevalent during the pandemic, leading to confusion and mistrust in scientific and public health institutions (Bridgman et al, 2020). Research has shown that the spread of false information can have negative consequences on public health outcomes, including decreased adherence to public health guidelines and increased vaccine hesitancy (Giuan et al, 2020; Pennycook et al, 2020).

The spread of conspiracies and false information during the COVID-19 pandemic has been a significant challenge for public health communication and interventions. A study by Bridgman and colleagues (2020) found that misinformation about COVID-19 spread rapidly on social media, with false claims about the origins of the virus and potential cures being widely shared. This study also found that some political leaders and media outlets contributed to the spread of misinformation.

The consequences of spreading false information during a pandemic can be severe. A study by Liu and colleagues (2020) found that exposure to misinformation about COVID-19 was associated with lower adherence to public health guidelines, including social distancing and wearing masks. Similarly, a study by Pennycook and colleagues (2020) found that exposure to false information about vaccines was associated with increased vaccine hesitancy.

It is important to address and counter false information to promote understanding and effective public health interventions during a pandemic. To address the spread of false information, it is important to engage in effective communication strategies that promote accurate information and combat misinformation. Research has suggested that correcting misinformation can be challenging, but some strategies can be effective, such as using fact-checking and debunking messages, presenting accurate information

clearly and concisely, and engaging in dialogue with individuals who spread false information (Bode & Vraga, 2018; Roozenbeek & Van der Linden, 2019).

The researcher examined the occurrences of three categories of racism: individual racism, cultural racism, and institutional racism. Individual racism can occur on an active or inactive level and is purported by an individual, either consciously or subconsciously, to express their prejudices independently towards another individual or group. Cultural racism refers to culture-based messages of a racial hierarchy of superiority (Lloret-Pineda et al, 2022). Examples of cultural racism presented in Table 5.5 portray Asians as inferior. Institutional racism is racial inequality present in systems, structures, or expectations. As the name suggests, institutional racism tends to be in the form of institutions, rather than simply human actors who may create attacks of individual racism and hold beliefs of cultural superiority based on their individual beliefs (Milner, Franz & Henry Braddock, 2020). Instead, institutional racism is an unavoidable reality caused by many antiquated systems. Institutional racism is captured in Table 5.5 with former president Trump's intent to close the Mexico-American border. In this instance, former president Trump was acting not only as an individual but as a representative of an institution due to his position.

5.2.21. Findings in connection to theories

The intricate network of media narratives and racial bias imposes Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony on X. Gramsci posited that hegemony might govern through consensus rather than coercion (Gramsci, 1971). X's curation of narratives, framing of occurrences, and depiction of individuals shape public perception and fortify prevailing ideas. Hegemonic power regulates information on X, a platform for narratives (Hall, Evans & Nixon, 2013). By meticulously selecting stories, structuring events, and strategically portraying people, hegemonic forces subtly reinforce predominant beliefs (Gramsci, 1971). This pervasive impact influences public perception without conscious awareness, even though it is frequently disregarded. The nuances of hegemony are demonstrated through media narratives and X's racial bias (Halls, Evans & Nixon,

2013). Biased coverage of situations related to minorities can propagate stereotypes and unfavourable opinions about these communities.

Similarly, amplifying certain narratives while marginalising others can perpetuate racial prejudices and inequality. Hall, Evans, and Nixon (2013) observed that "media are not neutral instruments; they are always embedded in particular social relations and power structures". Media narratives entrench power, underscoring the role of hegemony in public discourse and racial bias. The digital era rekindles Gramsci's concept of hegemony, emphasising consent over coercion. As a virtual medium, X facilitates the inconspicuous exercise of hegemonic authority through story selection, event framing, and depictions of individuals (Hall, Evan & Nixon, 2013). Ultimately, the interplay between media narratives, racial bias, and X's hegemony reveals the subtle yet omnipresent hegemonic force of the digital age. Grasping the mechanics of hegemonic control is crucial to understanding how narratives perpetuate dominant ideologies and take informed action to resist and dismantle these forms of power.

In the dynamic realm of X, where stories are magnified and voices converge, critical race theory sheds light on pandemic media analysis. The theory's principles of recognising systemic racism and questioning the social construction of race align with the diverse conversations on X (Mills & Godley, 2017). X provides a virtual platform for storytelling, aligning with critical race theory's emphasis on disadvantaged perspectives. Platform users debate whose stories are promoted and whose are marginalised, highlighting minority communities' authentic experiences often overlooked in mainstream media (Mills & Godley, 2017). X's conversation weaves intersectionality, a fundamental concept of critical race theory. Critical discussions unveil how race, gender, class, and sexual orientation intersect, contributing to multifaceted oppression. Intersectional analysis complicates race narratives and reveals the complexity of marginalisation (Tessler, Choi & Kao, 2020). The immediacy and reach of posts facilitate critical media analysis, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Users challenge the media's framing and disproportionate coverage of minority-related issues.

Critical analysis encourages users to scrutinise media narratives, identify biases, and uncover power relations (Tessler, Choi & Kao, 2020).

Mills and Godley (2017) argue, "X has become a potent tool for critical race scholars to analyse media representations and challenge dominant narratives". The theory's principles come to life on the platform, aiding individuals in comprehending the structural impact of racism on society. X amplifies underrepresented perspectives and challenges dominant narratives, according to de Melo & Figueiredo (2021). They assert that X's decentralisation and ability to bypass gatekeepers enable minority communities to express their stories and contest media representations. Therefore, critical race theory's prevalence in X narratives transforms race and media discourse. The theory prompts viewers to critically assess media, amplify underrepresented perspectives, and question the social construction of race in the digital era (Bell, 2018). The theory is likely to evolve as X becomes a more prominent social discourse platform, promoting a more inclusive and equitable media ecosystem.

In the vibrant posts of the pandemic, a harmonious convergence of theoretical perspectives illuminates the intricate relationship between race dynamics and media representations in the digital age. Symbolic interactionism, cultural studies, postcolonial perspectives, and critical whiteness studies create a symphony of comprehension that aligns with the intricacies of the virtual world. Symbolic interactionism, a sociological theory emphasising intentional meaning creation through social interaction, underlies this theoretical harmony (Goffman, 1974). Users' subtle responses, meticulously crafted posts, and astute hashtag usage demonstrate this purposeful meaning generation on X. Goffman's dramaturgical approach, a fundamental aspect of symbolic interactionism, elucidates X's virtual performances, where users manage their self-presentations and navigate social interactions.

5.3. QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF POSTS USING RACE-RELATED WORDS

Within three months of the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of negative posts about Asians and Black people increased by 7%. By the end of April, negative posts directed towards these groups had reached 13%, which was still higher than the initial levels. Even though the number of negative posts towards Asians decreased, it remained significantly elevated compared to other ethnic groups, such as Black people and Latinos. A study by Hahm et al (2021) showed that by April 2020, the ratio of racial posts was 48% for Black people and 13% for Latinos. Upon closer examination of the data, posts aimed at Black people received the highest percentage of negative racial and ethnic posts compared to Latinos in the United States, but this trend decreased over time.

The increase in negative posts targeting Asians and Black people during the initial months of the COVID-19 pandemic is concerning and has been reported in several studies. The pandemic has been accompanied by xenophobia and discrimination against Asians and Asian Americans, which has been fuelled by misinformation and prejudice. The World Health Organisation has specifically warned against stigmatising people based on their ethnicity or nationality during a pandemic, as it can lead to discrimination and social unrest. The increase in negative posts targeting Black people may be related to the nationwide protests against police brutality and racial injustice that occurred during this period.

Another study published in the American Journal of Public Health analysed posts between 1 January 2020 and 31 May 2020, to assess the frequency of anti-Asian and anti-Black sentiment. The study found that there was a significant increase in the number of posts containing racist language targeting Asians and Blacks during this period. The study also found that posts directed towards Asians were more likely to contain explicit hate speech, while posts directed towards Blacks were more likely to contain implicit bias.

Overall, these studies highlight the need to address xenophobia, racism, and discrimination during public health crises. Social media platforms can play a crucial role in disseminating accurate information and combating misinformation and prejudice. It is important to promote tolerance, inclusivity, and respect for diversity during a pandemic to avoid exacerbating social tensions and inequalities.

The results discovered in Fitzgerald's study presented subsequently, were attained through primary research and found an increase in the use of racially charged language towards certain groups in posts, which was associated with the unjust association of these groups with the COVID-19 virus. This phenomenon can be explained by the critical threat theory, which describes how fear of a perceived threat can lead to discrimination and prejudice against certain groups. It identified various forms of racism, including active and inactive racism, individual racism, cultural racism, and institutional racism, taking place on X. These findings are detailed in Section 5.2.21.

The study, which utilises first-hand research efforts, also found a correlation between the rise of hateful posts on X targeting Asian and Black people during the pandemic and the increase in physical attacks on these groups. The researcher believes that this hate of X either reflects societal sentiment or contributes to racist attitudes towards Asians and Black people, potentially fuelled by disinformation and racism. This study used X to gauge social media attitudes, even though it may not be the largest social media platform in terms of unique users. However, X's influence is reflected in other forms of media, as over 94% of United States journalists use X (Jurkowitz & Mitchell, 2020), and news outlets frequently use the platform to disseminate their content. Additionally, former President Trump, who had over 80 million X followers in June 2020, used X to disseminate his message and political agenda. This study concludes that X is the most significant social media platform, particularly in discussions related to world news, politics, and the pandemic. This research demonstrates that the most used terms accounting for up to 95% of the posts, were as follows:

Term	Percentage
Virus	22
Covid	20
Chinese virus	13
Quarantine	11
Rona	11
Pandemic	7
Wuhan	4
Xenophobia	3
Plague	2
Social distancing	1
Epidemic	1
Stay at home	1
Ncov	1
Stay home	1
Coro	0.6
Curfew	0.4
Social distancing	0.4
Kung flu	0.3
Wash your hands	0.3

Table 5.4: Accounting of terms mostly used

Asian and Black Americans during COVID-19:

Codes and subcodes obtained		
Individual racism (n=100)		
Active racism (n=68)	Physical aggression (n=39)	*"When the original COVID-19 virus started in China, all of the Western countries were pussies unable to raise a claw."*
	Verbal aggression (n=28)	*"All of a sudden, we have been renamed 'Coronavirus' and other similar names. But wait a minute, the Spanish Flu was a natural disease, but COVID-19 is not because it did not originate from Asia. Interesting!"*
	Change in relationships (n=3)	*"Racism has compelled my 12-year-old kid to endure the pain of racism by doing homework alone because of COVID-19."*
	Rejection (n=23)	*"We were crowded in class, but guess what happened when a Chinese sneezed? #AuspolSoCorrupt."*
	Bullying (n=5)	*"This is Belle, a Chinese student at Oz. Just a few days ago, he was beaten for speaking Chinese. Racial discrimination because of the #CoronaVirus is consistently making this country very unsafe."*
Inactive racism (n=32)	Prejudice (n=15)	*"Be clear about this for once now. #COVID2019 is not the equivalent of a common cold. It's not an Asian-borne disease. It's more than that…spare Asian Americans."*
	Rumours (n=14)	*"COVID-19 was intentionally manufactured in Chinese research labs. But why does the US seem to target Black residencies in their enforcement of curfew protocols? Why? #Racism?"*
	Jokes (n=5)	*"I love the concept of immunity to COVID-19; I will just ensure I catch the virus and then attain immunity, after which I could walk in the streets of Wuhan loving the Chinese."*

Codes and subcodes obtained		
Cultural racism (n=41)	Journalist reports (n=12)	*"The @nypost is at it again, demonstrating their poor professionalism in journalism by use of racist reporting as the first confirmed case of COVID-19. #nypost #racism #coronavirus #Coronavirusnyc #WorldHealthOrganisation"*
	Yellow peril (n=2)	*"No one is safe going forward! I still remain the target for being e member of the minority group in the US. #ImNotAVirus #COVID19 #Coronavirus"*
Institutional racism (n=9)		*"What scares me is that Trump intends to close the Mexico-US border because there are four confirmed cases of COVID-19. Meanwhile, there are hundreds already confirmed in the US. #racism #TrumpVirus #COVID19US…"*
Internalised domination (n=6)		*"If the virus originated from America or in Europe, you would not hear anybody say anything or verbally or physically attack them. #racism #coronavirus #COVID2019…"*

Table 5.5: Summary of codes identified in the posts associated with racism targeted at Asians and Blacks

5.4. DESCRIPTION OF CODES OBTAINED

5.4.1. Individual racism

5.4.1.1. Active racism

The analysis of the posts presented two categories of active racism as manifested in social media: inactive and active forms of racism. Inactive and active racism speaks to the level of consciousness with which racist speech is expressed and received. Inactive racism uses implicit and covert racism compared to active racism, which does the opposite, by expressing racist messages overtly. Active racism occurs through intentional actions with a stated or explicit goal to maintain a system of racism and the oppression of those in targeted racial groups (Tatum, 2017). Table 5.5 illustrates overt examples of racism, such as verbal aggression, bullying, and changes in relationships that reflect the principles of active racism. Inactive racism comprises beliefs, attitudes, and actions that, when presented, contribute to ongoing racism in the absence of overt oppression (Tatum, 2017). Examples of individual inactive racism, as set out in Table 5.5, may include rumours, jokes, and prejudice. All of these may explicitly state racist intent but are infused with covert sentiments that further a racist agenda, whether consciously or not.

The total number of posts clearly exhibiting the active racism theme was 68. The content of these sources was retrieved utilising a qualitative approach to gather and analyse non-numerical data to analyse and draw conclusions towards the nature of individual racism as it pertains to opinions, behaviour, experiences, and concepts on X. The random sampling was conducted cross-sectionally during the COVID-19 pandemic, concluding 12 months after the first case was reported in the media. The researcher chose these methods to identify types of racism in order to determine the prevalence of active and inactive racism and determine how they interrelate.

The posts with elements of active racism were characterised by a variety of major subcodes, which included verbal aggression, rejection, physical aggression, bullying, as

well as changing relationships. For instance, an incident in which physical aggression manifested, with intended targeted assaults, attacks, and brutal beatings identified, includes:

> *"He is an Italian Chinese man who was violently assaulted for racial reasons."*

Other posts showed a combined element of verbal aggression and targeted physical aggression in their respective media communication message content, demonstrating the way media exacerbate racial bias through verbal and physical forms of aggression and how they are synonymous (n=14):

> *"I love the concept of immunity from COVID-19; I will just ensure I catch the virus and then attain immunity, after which I could walk in the streets of Wuhan loving the Chinese."*

There were frequent cases of verbal aggression, particularly name-calling. The most prevalent insults include "coronavirus" and "corona", even though claims like "Yellow face" and "Yellow peril" were also exhibited in some of the posts:

> *"All of a sudden, we have been renamed "coronavirus" and other similar names. But wait a minute, the Spanish Flu was a natural disease, but COVID-19 is not because it did not originate from Asia. Interesting!"*

Changes in the aspect of relationships were also evident as elements of the larger theme of active racism. This is illustrated in the following post observed during the analysis:

> *"We were crowded in class, but guess what happened when a Chinese sneezed? #AuspolSoCorrupt"*

Other elements of the active racism theme include rejection, bullying (as shown in the bullying at school), and intimidation targeted at Asian Americans and Black Americans during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic.

5.4.1.2. Inactive Racism

The inactive racism theme connoted the usage of prejudice in the text; racist intentions manifested in the form of jokes and excitement over rumours. The notion of "I am not a virus" emanated from the mandatory wearing of the face and surgical masks, which was equated to having caught the virus. The hashtag emerged as an approach to fighting prejudices, which is expressed in this context as advocacy:

> *"COVID-19 was intentionally manufactured in Chinese research labs. But why does the US seem to target Black residencies in their enforcement of curfew protocols? Why? #Racism?"*

There were also rumours about the type of Chinese food, the source of the virus as the research laboratories, and other conspiracies around it, characterising it as a threat and potentially harmful. The rumours that Asian Americans were victimised in their workplaces as having contracted the disease were not founded on facts. The claims that they had privileges to travel were false as the restrictions affected all other workers in those workplaces.

These categories and subcategories manifested in different dimensions, exhibiting the diverse ways in which the minority Black and Asian Americans were represented on social media during the pandemic.

5.4.2. Cultural racism

The theme of cultural racism manifested in the messaging of posts as well as within the emergent subcodes involving racist reporting of journalism and apparent support for a racist course under the "Yellow peril" form of racial stereotyping:

> *"No one is safe going forward! I remain the target for being a member of the minority Asian ethnic community. #ImNotAVirus #COVID19 #Coronavirus"*

During the COVID-19 pandemic, minority groups, especially racial and ethnic minorities, were exposed to online racial discrimination. This was particularly prevalent among Asian Americans and people of Asian ethnic origin. The concept of Orientalism describes a long-standing form of cultural discrimination as it pertains to viewing Asians through a Western lens that characterises those in Eastern countries as inferior. The presence of culturally racist Orientalism with reference to decolonisation viewpoints was further exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Such rhetoric was prevalent in the characterisations of Asian cuisine as uncivilised and barbaric — as demonstrated through X discourse, media representations, and political actors.

The journalism reports were embraced to detect posts featured on social media containing prejudiced or discriminative content targeted at Asian Americans. For example, some of the users observed during the analysis showed discontent:

> *"The @nypost is at it again, demonstrating their poor professionalism in journalism use of racist language on its renowned platform as the first confirmed case of* COVID-19*. #nypost #racism #coronavirus #Coronavirusnyc #WorldHealthOrganisation"*

The subcodes — particularly those that focused on showing how professional journalistic reports affirmed racist intentions through the imagery of Chinese in masks as infected with the virus. Yellow peril is another notable subcode emphasising that the notion persisted until as recently as the end of 2021, manifesting the same elements of culturally racist content communicated through posts.

178

"I am very grateful to these users on X for giving me an opportunity to come and address the controversies around the podcast on the outbreak of COVID-19. The virus-related racism is one of the uncountable manifestations of the persistent Anti-Chinese and yellow peril claims."

Black Americans were subjected to intersectional race and economic inequalities and were more likely to suffer financial hardship during the COVID-19 pandemic. Half of the Black adults, compared to 42% of White adults, reported that they, or a family member, lost work or experienced a reduction in income during the pandemic. Among Black parents, two-thirds reported a loss or reduction in income. Two-thirds of Black Americans also reported the belief that the government would be taking stronger action on COVID-19 if White Americans were dying from the virus at a higher rate than Black Americans. Sentiments of institutional disillusionment as the product of cultural racism were reflected in a nationwide questionnaire by The Centre for Black Health & Equity (The Centre). The Centre reviewed responses by 791 African American adults between the ages of 18 and 54. These revealed that a high percentage of Black Americans received their COVID-19 information from social media (39% of respondents) (2022).

During the pandemic, Black Americans were found to be discovering and sharing disinformation and misinformation through various social media platforms, including X. Disinformation and misinformation correlated with a reduction in vaccine uptake, which was particularly dangerous among Black communities where medical emergencies resulting from the virus happened at a disproportionate rate. This belief among respondents of the Black community is reflective of Derrick Bell's principle of the critical race theory as it concerns interest convergence that the plan will only move forward if it is in the interest of White individuals, as examined in Section 3.4. Interest convergence was also rooted in vaccine scepticism among the Black community when Dr Faucci assured Black Americans that a Black doctor, Dr Kizzmekia Corbett, played a prominent role in the development of the vaccine. Some associated the use of a Black individual's prominence to pander to Black people while furthering White interests. Furthermore, disinformation and misinformation led to institutional distrust, as examined henceforth.

5.4.3. Institutional racism

The major theme of institutional racism was quite frequent, with at least nine mentions of the issue in posts. The problem of institutional racism was indirectly constructed:

> *"Since the start of the pandemic, universities have experienced losses of Chinese students exceeding 100,000;* if guardians and parents of Indian students get to know it*, they will swiftly evacuate the 100,000 learners left behind."*

Through bigoted rhetoric and exclusionary policies, the anti-Asian sentiment was perpetuated through institutional racism by actors at the state level. In the United States, not only did former president Trump incite attribution of the virus to Asians and Asian Americans, but his administration subsequently failed to take meaningful action towards addressing anti-Asian hate crimes. In March 2020, Congresswoman Grace Menge (D-New York) called for the formation of a task force to address COVID-19-related racial bias and its many consequences, but this did not materialise or receive meaningful support at a federal level. As social media hostilities towards Asian Americans grew, so did physical assaults and hate crimes (Gover, Harper & Langton, 2020). Social media advocacy shone a light on some of these incidents using hashtags such as #WashTheHate and #HateIsAVirus. The significance of social media in its correlation with both real-world hate and the use of advocacy to shine a light upon it is demonstrative of the foundation of the media richness theory in the media's ability to transmit meaningful information.

Black people were impacted by institutional racism reflected in the online discourse during the COVID-19 pandemic as well. Vaccine misinformation reached many Black people on social media, and a history of medical racism as well as ongoing discrimination in healthcare, such as issues of access, left them particularly susceptible. Institutional distrust among Black communities and a lack of access to reliable information on COVID-19 through social media platforms resulted in official information reaching far fewer Black individuals. When mistrust with institutions runs high, such as it does among many Black communities, dangerous misinformation has more opportunity

to spread. Additionally, many Black communities saw limited access to vaccines due to structural inequalities, particularly during the initial stages of vaccine administration. An inequitable distribution of vaccines reinforced the vaccine distrust stemming from institutional racism. Race-based medical inequality pre-dated the COVID-19 pandemic. Statistically, Black Americans experienced lower rates of health insurance coverage, increased barriers to healthcare, and worse health outcomes when compared to White Americans. In addition to the overt medical inequities prevalent among Black communities, institutional racism and Black mistrust of institutions can also be connected to the police killing of George Floyd during the first few months of the COVID-19 pandemic. The fallout from the killing of George Floyd, the subsequent Black Lives Matter protests and related grievances, similarly reflects an institutional distrust founded on practices of institutional racism.

The existence of healthcare disparity, both pre-dating COVID-19 in insurance coverage, care access, and poorer health outcomes as it related to vaccine availability, reflects institutional racism as well as the foundational principles of critical race theory as discussed in Section 3.4. The principle of race, as a social construct, perpetuated by American institutions and functioning to create and maintain inequalities between Whites and minority groups, is reflected in health discrepancies (as well as the socio-economic well-being of Black Americans compared to their White counterparts), due to the generational impact of racism in the United States.

5.4.4. Internalised domination

This theme was visible in six posts and showed the presence of internalised domination in the representations of ethnic minorities during the pandemic. The excerpt from the posts presents a clear illustration of the existence of internalised dominion in social media, particularly on X, during the COVID-19 pandemic, targeting Iranian and Chinese people as comparatively inferior relative to White Americans on X:

"It excites me how COVID-19 *mortalities are highest in the intensely inhabited geographical regions, including China and Iran. More exciting still, the White infested regions of the world, like Italy and the US, experience lower* COVID-19 *mortality rates."*

5.5. CONNECTION TO THEORY

The integrated threat theory supposes that discrimination and prejudice do not originate from only one source — it is caused by targeted negative beliefs, or attitudes developed towards a specified member of a group or individual (Williams et al, 1997). Accordingly, the findings established in research about racial discrimination in the United States and elsewhere globally, even during the COVID-19 pandemic, are attributed to a fear for the minority group, mainly because of the labelling against them in both print and social media. The discrimination and racial bias towards Asians and African Americans emanate from the fear of catching the virus during social interaction. The representation of racial biases in the media to the perceptions of people towards infection is scary and does not matter their ethnic identity or race (Borja et al, 2020). Racial discrimination evident in the media, targeted at Asian and Black Americans, seemed to be synonymous with reference to the COVID-19-causing virus in media contexts as a "Chinese virus" and intersection with the radicalisation of the virus and blame on Asian Americans.

Accordingly, the media have a proactive role in defining the actions of the masses, significantly influencing public understanding of issues that affect society (Phelah & Link, 2015). The shortages of comprehensive reporting on key information and data for the masses concerning COVID-19 data make it imperative for all industries and societies in different countries globally to rely on the media. The COVID-19 pandemic reveals widening health disparities, particularly ethnic and racial disparities, with recent research studies showing that Black and Asian Americans are more susceptible to racial crimes meted out against them during the pandemic. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, numerous media have continued to demonstrate the significance and the role of print, digital, social, and other forms of media in the aggravation of racial

prejudice against minorities in the United States (and other parts of the world) against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the COVID-19 virus disseminated, X evolved into a virtual marketplace for unrestricted expression. Unfortunately, racial bias, particularly against Asians, surged amidst the deluge of information and ideas. The integrated threat theory is pivotal for comprehending the rationales behind discriminatory conduct. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, various entities perceived Asians as a menace due to the global origin of the virus (Khunti et al, 2020; Hertzberg, 2020). Apprehension and ambiguity resulted in prejudiced language and undesirable posts. X's unfiltered, instantaneous essence cultivated prejudiced content. The platform's anonymity and immediacy empowered individuals to articulate their perspectives without trepidation (Moyo & Moyo, 2020; Crosby, 2021). This virtual domain nurtured adverse stereotypes and preconceived judgments, fostering discrimination and marginalisation. The integrated threat theory's emphasis on perceived threats encapsulates this occurrence. Asians, extensively faulted for the outbreak, emerged as a heightened threat. Some factions reacted defensively by assailing Asians to safeguard their in-group's well-being. According to Hertzberg (2020) as well as de Melo and Figueiredo (2021), this predicament revolves around fear, bias, and virtual communication. The virtual platform, X, magnified these factors. The platform's anonymity and ease of disseminating information and thoughts fuelled fear and bias. The COVID-19 pandemic brought to light the ubiquity of racial bias in X data analysis.

Daft and Lengel's (1984) media richness theory can elucidate how X's distinctive medium influences public perception and bias. According to this theory, a medium's richness as well as its capacity to convey multiple cues simultaneously, affects communication. X, being a rich medium with text, graphics, videos, and emojis, shapes public perception in numerous ways. Language signals like emoticons and hashtags aid marginalised groups in expressing emotions and cultivating subcultures, fostering community (Oschatz, Stier & Maier, 2022). The diverse content formats on X enable the

dissemination of varied opinions, challenging the uniformity of traditional media. Likes, reposts, and comments on X provide individuals and groups with a sense of agency and acknowledgement (Oschatz, Stier & Maier, 2022). A real-time feedback loop encourages engagement, amplifies voices, and reshapes narratives, particularly those opposing colonial power structures. Crosby (2021) contends, "X has become a potent tool for marginalised groups to resist colonial power and reclaim their narratives." The agency is imperative to challenge the status quo, manage messages, and reshape the media landscape on X. As per Croucher, Nguyen and Rahmani (2020), X amplifies underrepresented perspectives and contests conventional media narratives, underscoring its significance in reshaping narratives. X empowers individuals and communities to challenge prevailing narratives, advocate alternative perspectives, and foster social change, as indicated by their study (Ishii, Lyons & Carr, 2019). X's role as a stage for resistance, narratives, and media richness underscores how agency transforms the digital space. X has evolved into a crucial instrument for social change by empowering individuals to reclaim their stories, confront colonial authority, and reform the media.

The media richness theory affirms the role of social media in propagating racism and its potential to cause significant influence. The key component giving social media the power to shape racism is because of the self-presentation of young generations on social media.

Otherness was reinforced on X where users shared news articles, government statements, and individual opinions. While some individuals used the platform to combat racism and challenge stereotypes, others perpetuated harmful narratives that influenced racial perceptions. Racialised language and imagery were sometimes used to scapegoat specific racial groups, blaming them for the spread of the virus. These narratives reinforced pre-existing biases and contributed to the racialisation of certain communities. Scholars have determined that blame can be placed on specific targets in reaction to information obtained during a crisis. The result of this blame attribution can lead to hostility towards the targets (Lee et al, 2022).

Researchers, news and media outlets, experts, and opinion shapers in different fields and industries globally have recently started to aggressively confront the rise of racism against Asians and Asian Americans during the pandemic. Prominent opinion shapers, including the former president of the United States, Donald J Trump, various groups, individuals, and media (print, digital, and social) who support his political course, used many controversial terminologies such as the "Chinese virus", which experts warn could exacerbate racism and xenophobia. In a study conducted by Kostarella and Kotsakis (2022), it was found that African Americans and Asian Americans stood higher chances of being exposed to incidences of racial-based crimes compared to their White counterparts in the United States.

The chairperson of the Department of Asian American Studies at San Francisco State University, Professor Russell Jeung, in collaboration with advocacy and civil rights organisations, founded an online-based COVID-19-related data and valuable information reporting centre, focusing on incidences of prejudices targeted at Asian Americans. According to the professor, over 100 different incidences of racial bias are reported daily, and more than 1,200 reports have been collected in total since it began operating on 19 March 2020 (Devakumar et al, 2020): The research centre brought the development and language use in the context of racial bias into the light. Jeung said:

> "You read the reports people write, and they're harrowing. People aren't just being yelled at; they're being yelled at with vehemence and a virulence that is scary."

Jeung added that people deliberately coughing at Asians in threatening and aggressive ways has become a distressing trend. An article published on 12 April 2022, titled "COVID-19 has driven racism and violence against Asian Americans: perspectives from 12 national polls", by Findling et al (2022) provide a comprehensive review of a large body of data which shows that the COVID-19 pandemic has indeed exponentially fuelled violence and racist attacks against the minority Asian American population in the United States. The article cites the report findings of the FBI showing a sharp rise of

77% in the rate of hate crimes targeted at Asian American populations in the United States between 2019 and 2020.

Al Jazeera news published an article on 5 April 2020, highlighting the continued online anti-Asian American hate crimes experienced by individuals amid the COVID-19 global crisis:

> *"Racist abuse of Asians continues on social media despite pledges by Facebook, X, and TikTok to tackle the issue."*

The explanatory component for the hostilities and negative emotions towards Black and Asian Americans points to the threat perception. Elias et al (2021) explain that when members of a given group tend to hold on to their beliefs and values and are vulnerable to threats by another foreign or out-group, they start to develop negative emotions towards the perceived threat as a form of self-defence. The integrated threat theory illustrates the forms of negative perceptions and feelings towards a minority ethnic group: symbolic threats, negative stereotypes, intergroup anxiety, and realistic threats. Therefore, X's play delves into the concept of "otherness", mirroring a striking resemblance to the media's function in colonial discourse. The polarisation between "we" and "them" on X is illustrated in van Dijk's "Ideological Square" (van Dijk, 1998). This digital discourse consistently categorises Black and Asian populations as "other" to underscore their vulnerability and apparent inability to navigate the situation (Meghji & Niang, 2022). X's fragmented discussions echo this ideological division heightened by "otherness" narratives. The dichotomy of "us" versus "them" is employed to instil fear, suspicion, and disdain towards oppressed populations (van Dijk, 1998). This digital division impacts power dynamics and stigmatises these communities. This digital saga reinforces online social frameworks. The endorsement of "otherness" cements power structures, sidelining minority groups and hindering their full participation in society (Meghji & Niang, 2022).

The digital creation of "otherness" is more comprehensible through van Dijk's "Ideological Square". The four techniques in the square — highlighting "our" positive

properties/actions, emphasising "their" negative properties/actions, downplaying "our" negative properties/actions, and downplaying "their" positive properties/actions — are alarmingly utilised in X debates (van Dijk, 1998). Using these techniques, prevailing narratives portray minority populations as inferior, incapable, and even threatening. Marginalised communities encounter discrimination, bias, and violence from this digital portrayal.

As Romero-Rodriguez, Civila and Aguaded (2020) state, "social media platforms like X have become arenas for the construction of 'otherness', where marginalised groups are often subjected to harmful stereotypes and discriminatory rhetoric". Similar to colonial "otherness", minority groups are sidelined and excluded from the dominant narrative in this digital conflict. The X exploration of "otherness" underscores the pernicious influence of digital narratives and colonial discourse online (Meghji & Niang, 2022). Dissecting "otherness" and its negative stereotypes can aid in dismantling digital hierarchies that perpetuate social inequality.

Agency emerges as a potent force in X's vibrant fabric, challenging media representations of colonial authority (Meghji & Niang, 2022). Technology and the evolving digital media landscape facilitate resistance, enabling individuals and communities to reclaim their narratives. X's platform for diverse content from a myriad of voices showcases the democratisation of information and citizen journalism (Gunther & Schmitt, 2004). Unfiltered platforms empower individuals to share their thoughts and experiences publicly without constraints (Meghji & Niang, 2022). This empowerment to share stories and question dominant narratives transforms media influence.

Cultural studies contribute additional depth to the X discourse by scrutinising the intricate connection between media, culture, and society. Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding hypothesis, a tenet of cultural studies, accentuates the dynamic interpretation of post-interactions (Hall, 1980). Each post becomes a negotiation between sender and receiver, influenced by cultural backgrounds and social contexts. The significance of X discourse is paramount, given postcolonial perspectives' emphasis on revealing and challenging colonial narratives. Edward Said's (1978)

seminal work, Orientalism, illustrates the power dynamics within colonial narratives that depict minorities as inferior. X's global platform for debate challenges these myths and reveals the impact of colonialism in media representations (Dyer, 1977). Critical whiteness studies shed illumination on the intricate connections between race, representation, and authority, enriching the theoretical symphony. Critical whiteness studies flourish within X's diverse user base (Arthur, 2023). Users critically discuss the white gaze, power dynamics of racial representation, and digital whiteness.

These theories function as notes, melodies, and harmonies in X's grand symphony amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The intricate relationship between race, media, and the digital realm is elucidated by each theory. The theoretical symphony facilitates our comprehension of X's potential as a platform for social discourse, where diverse voices contest narratives, expose inequities and advocate for a more just and equitable society.

5.6. SUMMARY

Overall, this analysis suggests that anti-Asian discrimination since the commencement of the pandemic has been striking and affected both Asian and non-Asian individuals, as well as Black people. The findings reveal how anti-Asian discrimination during the face of the pandemic affected not only their normal way of life but also that of other people. Racist acts and ethnocentrism, portrayed by political leaders and members of the society at large, contribute to the already existing anti-Asian hate and bring about other mental repercussions on Asians, Asian Americans, and Black people (2022). Researchers, however, needed to enable us to understand the social processes that took place causing an increase in racism, as well as the impact it had on the health of those affected and the interventions that were taken to lessen the occurrence of such incidences together with their mental impact. This study gains vigour from employing a mixed-method strategy that uses content analysis, all of which includes a collaboration of data from experts and qualitative researchers. It also implies that the pandemic brought about spill-over impacts on racial matters and further reveals that racial

prejudices are connected to health issues. Creating awareness of racial attitudes could have policy effects that are vital for one's wellness. Chapter 6 of this research will look at the spread of COVID-19 to Europe, America, and South Africa. In this section, this work will explore and analyse coverage of how Black and Asian people were represented in the media between the years 2021 and 2022.

In Chapter 6 the researcher will also address a fundamental question, which was mirrored in Chapter 5, but will instead involve the news media arena: how did the press cover race during the global crisis? Through primary research, this next chapter will look at online coverage; the newspapers utilised are also in print, but for the purpose of this study, online content, such as headlines and words, will be examined. Like X and its content, news media coverage will shed light on the prejudices and media biases that existed towards Black and Asian people during the global pandemic.

CHAPTER 6: DATA PRESENTATIONS AND FINDINGS
READING THE ONLINE PRESS: WHO IS TO BLAME?

6.1. INTRODUCTION

Chapter 6 analyses how newspapers, in the form of print media and digital content, covered race during COVID-19. Several news sources are examined from the onset of COVID-19 to the discovery of the Omicron variant in South Africa. The findings set out subsequently will bring to light discrimination and bias against African and Asian communities by the media. Through analysis, as defined in Chapter 4, the researcher will examine how terms were constructed and chosen to refer to the virus, reflecting the prejudices and xenophobia towards Black and Asian people. The following categories emerged from the study: (1) racialisation of the COVID-19 virus as a multidimensional threat, (2) the COVID-19 virus as an imminent threat, (3) global calls for collectivism, and (4) proposals of speculative solutions aimed to curtail racial discrimination. Findings will be tied back to the theoretical framework as detailed in Chapter 3.

6.2. BACKGROUND

In 2020, the coronavirus pandemic affected all nations (over 50 million individuals) globally. Governments started functioning in a radical, uncertain context and were faced with challenging trade-offs with the social, economic, and health issues that the virus presented. The virus brought about catastrophic effects on the world's population, which resulted in over six million deaths by March 2022. It has emerged as the most severe and consequential worldwide health crisis since the influenza pandemic that occurred in 2018. The COVID-19 crisis resulted in an abrupt impact on Europe's economy and also triggered unparalleled policy responses globally and across Europe as of 2021. In America, cases relating to COVID-19 deaths as of May 2022 totalled 994,530. The cases of COVID-19 deaths in May 2022 surpassed 100,000 in South Africa. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to present unprecedented economic and health

consequences for many individuals in Europe, South Africa, and America. However, for some, especially Asian and Black Americans, the impact of this pandemic goes far beyond monetary and medical worries. Four out of ten Asian and African American adults in the United States reported being bullied because of media representations of these groups during the pandemic.

Moreover, as of 2021, three out of ten Asians reported becoming the target of racial insults or slurs owing to the pandemic. Most people recognised that the pandemic caused the worst economic and social crises since World War II, in addition to the human and health tragedy it caused. All facets of the economy felt the negative effects of a drop in international tourist and business travel, a decrease in demand for goods, especially imported services and goods, and a disruption in global supply chains. Small and medium-sized businesses took a major hit from the virus containment measures. The number of people requiring aid and the unemployment rate rose significantly. To lessen the effects of the economic crisis, some countries ceased adopting the pandemic containment measures. However, this led to a surge in the number of COVID-19 cases, which threatened the progress made towards a cure.

Despite efforts to end the scapegoating of certain groups on various social media sites for the pandemic's start, people of colour, especially Asians, continue to be stereotyped as being responsible for the spread of the disease. Many people thought that as they learned more about the virus, their prejudice and bigotry towards Black and Asian people would decrease. Reports from the 2021 media suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated prejudice and discrimination towards people of colour, especially Black and Asian people. Numerous acts of racism, violence, and harassment against Asian Americans have been documented by March 2021. There was a significant increase in the rate of hate crimes in 2021 compared to 2020.

Many Asians have described being the target of jokes such as the term "Kung flu", insults, verbal harassment, and even physical attacks in school, at work, and elsewhere. The continued use of the terms "Kung flu" and "Wuhan virus" increased discrimination

against Asian Americans and Black people, according to a 2022 study that analysed articles reporting about COVID-19 written in the *New York Times*, *China Daily*, and *The Guardian*, which cover especially America, China, and Europe. According to this analysis, several right-wing media outlets in the United States and Europe covered news about this calamity using racist and false terms, such as "Chinese virus pandemonium", which associated COVID-19 with geography and ethnicity. Discrimination cases against numerous Asians have been aggravated by headlines like "China kids should stay at home", which were common across 2021. These newspapers, when reporting on the pandemic, continuously focused on four major categories, including the multifaceted threat presented by racialising the virus, the discrimination threat presented by the pandemic, and urges to eliminate the racialisation of the virus, therefore, showing how the racialisation of the virus has intensified discrimination and prejudices among Black people and Asian minorities.

The above-mentioned media channels have repeated COVID-19 xenophobia. Continued repetition of the "Kung flu" and "Wuhan virus" terms has increased discrimination, violence, and harassment against individuals of Asian descent. However, although the media has repeatedly reported on the use of these terms, it has emphasised that global efforts can significantly assist in fighting the pandemic as well as eliminating the resulting harassment. Notably, since the media is significantly influential in terms of how individuals in the public think and behave about some issues, it should take care when naming threats or diseases after ethnicities, people, and regions. The "China virus" was among the keywords that these news study articles used mostly in 2021 to talk about the rising COVID-19 xenophobia and racism against Asian individuals in the West. An analysis of the effects of these words in 2021 revealed that cases of assault had increased by 150% compared to the cases of assault experienced in 2020. Most 2021 COVID-19 coverage in *The Guardian* and *The New York Times* featured categories relating to the representation of the coronavirus as a threat, as well as racialising the virus as a complex threat. *The China Daily* news study featured speculative solutions and curbing racialisation-related categories.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought to light the multidimensional threat it poses at the intersection of systemic racism, financial status, and health, with Black Americans being disproportionately affected. Throughout the crisis, frontline and essential workers, disproportionately people of colour, faced significant risks, financial hardships, and medical challenges. Unfortunately, the media often failed to acknowledge the nuance of the racial realities and systemic inequalities leading to the differing health outcomes between Black Americans and White Americans. Without examining the systemic factors leading to the disparity in health outcomes for Black Americans, their poorer health outcomes could be blamed on individual failings to be healthy or genetic factors. However, when viewed comprehensively in the context of critical race theory and the intersectionality of race and class in America, the failings are demonstrably institutional. Narrow framing hindered efforts to address the underlying systemic racism and social determinants of health, allowing institutions and policymakers to evade responsibility.

The disproportionate representation of people of colour in low-paying, high-traffic essential jobs, made them more susceptible to COVID-19. In 2020, the Bureau of Labour Statistics identified a significant presence of Black workers in various occupations: from janitors and nurses to construction workers and bus drivers. However, while the mainstream media coverage identified the higher risks posed to frontline workers, they rarely acknowledged this racial divide, undermining the experiences of Black Americans.

Well-intended messages of collectivism emerged during the early days of the pandemic, suggesting that COVID-19 was an equaliser affecting everyone. However, this narrative failed to recognise the stark socio-economic and racial disparities that the pandemic exposed. The media's inadequate exploration of the racial component perpetuates the notion of a colour-blind society, disregarding the systemic racism and realities faced by Black Americans.

The lack of trust that Black Americans have in the media further perpetuated a cycle of poor outcomes during the pandemic. Rebuilding this trust necessitates addressing

concerns raised by Black communities and improving media coverage. By featuring diverse perspectives and challenging prevailing narratives, the media can foster a more informed and equitable response to the challenges presented by COVID-19.

6.3. QUANTITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS OF NEWSPAPERS

This section analyses several print media released and posted from the beginning of the pandemic to when the Omicron variant struck South Africa, revealing the existence of discrimination and bias against the African and Asian communities by the media. The researcher was interested in examining words like "Kung flu", how they were presented by media and how they constructed these terms in reference to the virus, prejudices, and xenophobia against Blacks and Asians. The constant rise of abuse, both verbal and physical, against these two communities sparked interest in an effort to understand how the media played a role in igniting racism and the overall view of the pandemic.

6.3.1. Newspapers

The newspapers selected for this study were the American *New York Post*, *The New York Times*, and *The Guardian*. Other papers selected to support the findings include *NBC*, *The Washington Post*, *Fox News*, *Global Times*, *CTGN*, and *Opinion Media*. *The New York Times* is a US-based news study comprising 740,000 print subscribers and 8.6 million digital subscribers. It also runs *The Daily*, which is a well-known podcast. *The Guardian* is a British daily news study founded in 1821. It also runs the *Observer* and *The Guardian* weekly. *The New York Post* is a New York-based conservative daily read with an average circulation of about 146,649 print papers. These are the major papers the study will focus on. However, the researcher pulled several articles and studies from other print media to help establish more solid findings for the study, such as *The Washington Post*, which is a daily news study, neither a conservative nor liberal news study in the United States with a circulation of around 447,000 copies a day and more than a million digital subscribers.

6.3.2. Findings (quantitative and qualitative)

For the study, the researcher selected 30 news articles that included published stories, news, and interviews about the subject of racism in the limelight of the media during the COVID-19 pandemic within the period of study.

Emerged theme	Subcategories	NY Post	The NYT	The Guardian	Other
Racialisation of COVID-19 as a potential multi-dimensional threat.	Characterisation of a shift in blame as a threat to the relationship between the US and China.	13%	30%	20%	37%
COVID-19 virus-causing disease is an imminent threat.	Disinformation/ misinformation threat/potential threat to minorities and a threat to the economy.	5%	15%	30%	50%
Rallying calls across the globe for collectivisation to arrest the rising racialisation of the disease-causing virus.		10%	25%	15%	50%
Proposals of speculative solutions aimed at curtailing racial discrimination.		12%	20%	15%	53%

Table 6.1: Quantitative analysis — categories and respective subcategories identified in the newspapers

6.4. QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

The following tables provide a detailed breakdown of the key qualitative findings:[3]

News study source	Code	Subcode	Extracts/quotes
"Coughing while Asian: living in fear as racism feeds off coronavirus panic." (*The Guardian*, 24 March 2020).	Racism	Individual racism	*"It comes from China, that's why. It comes from China. I want to be accurate,"* Trump said (*The Guardian*, 2020).
		Cultural racism	*"China is to blame because the culture where people eat bats and snakes and dogs and things like that … that's why China has been a source of a lot of these viruses,"* John Cornyn, a Republican senator from Texas (*The Guardian*, 2020)
"Hateful incidents against Americans of colour surge amid a pandemic." (*The Guardian*, 29 July 2020)	Racism	Cultural racism	*"Four in 10 Black and Asian adults reported increased racial tension since the pandemic began, according to a Pew survey."* *"Some in Asian communities have reported facing xenophobic attacks, while some Black Americans have reported targeted harassment for wearing masks."* *"Still, Trump dug into inflammatory rhetoric last week, referring again to the outbreak as the "China virus," a term that has repeatedly been denounced as racist."* (*The Guardian*, 2020)
"China is now the centre of COVID. The world should be watching – and testing." (*The Guardian*, 3 January 2023)	Racism	Passive racism	*"The US, Italy, Japan, Taiwan, and India are among the countries that have already introduced strict checks on flights coming from China. The UK also now has a requirement for travellers from China to England to provide a pre-departure negative*

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[3] To enhance the clarity and presentation of qualitative findings, tables have been utilised.

News study source	Code	Subcode	Extracts/quotes
"China's deadly coronavirus wave." (*The Guardian*, 17 January 2023).	Racism	Active racism	*"In a country not well vaccinated and with limited numbers of ICU beds, especially away from large cities."* (*The Guardian*, 2023)
"China coronavirus: 14 test negative in the UK as military doctors sent to Wuhan – as it happened." (*The Guardian*, 24 January 2020)	Racism	Individual racism	*"UK universities issue quarantine warning to Chinese students."*
		Active racism	*"What is the Wuhan coronavirus, and how worried should we be?"*
		Active racism	*"China coronavirus"*
"Trump wades further into China Covid-19 row as focus turns to easing lockdowns." (*The Guardian*, 16 April 2020)	Racism	Institutional racism	*"Do you really believe those numbers in this vast country called China?"*
"China virus: ten cities locked down and Beijing festivities scrapped." *(The Guardian, 24 January*	Racism	Active racism	*"China virus"*
"China pneumonia outbreak may be caused by Sars-type virus: WHO."	Racism	Active racism	*"China pneumonia"*
"Spit on, yelled at, attacked: Chinese Americans fear for their safety." (*The New York Times*, 23 March 2020)	Racism	Bigotry/active racism	*"It's just, how dare you exist in my world. You are a reminder of this disease, and you don't belong in my world."*
"China COVID cover-up had huge help from Western elites." (*The New York Post,* 24 April 2023)	Racism	Institutional racism	*"Two China-pushed narratives are at stake here: that the virus did not escape from the Wuhan Institute of Virology and that China's murderous, totalitarian response to the pandemic was a model of success."*

News study source	Code	Subcode	Extracts/quotes
"The New York Post spent weeks fearmongering about vaccines. Now it's telling people to GET VAXXED." (*The New York Post,* 22 April 2021)	Racism	Institutional racism	*"Getting vaccinated then making money through sensational stories that mislead readers about vaccines, then in the Post's case turning around and trying to make more money with covers like this and through doing things like selling 'VAXXED AF' ball caps that celebrate the vaccines via*
"OPINION: The media coverage of the Omicron variant is biased against Africa." (*OPINION,* 3 December 2021)	Racism	Individual racism	*"The fact that some nations adopted a selective-banning approach is questionable. Although South Africa was indeed the first country to report a case of the Omicron variant, new reports show that it was already spreading in Western Europe before*
"How Fox News misled viewers about the coronavirus." (*CNN,* 12 March 2020)	Racism	Passive racism	*"Watch the Democrats, watch the media; you start to feel like they are rooting for coronavirus to spread,"*
"Why did the coronavirus outbreak start in China?" (*The New York Times,* 20 February 2020)	Racism	Cultural racism	*"Let's talk about the cultural causes of this epidemic."* *"Wuhan pneumonia"*
"Is China setting itself up for another epidemic?" (*The New York Times,* 23 January 2020)	Racism	Active racism	*"Wuhan virus"*
"Three US airports to check passengers for a deadly Chinese coronavirus." (*The New York Times,* 21 January 2020)	Racism	Active racism	*"Deadly Chinese Coronavirus"*
"COVID-19 origins and blame game." (*The Washington Post,* 28 Feb 2023)	Institutional racism	Passive racism	*"Calls for investigations into the origins of COVID-19 have intensified, with some politicians subtly suggesting a 'lab-leak' theory without concrete evidence."*
"Global efforts to combat the pandemic." (*BBC News, 21 May 2021*)	Individual racism	Bigotry/active racism	*"Reports of verbal abuse and physical attacks against individuals from certain ethnic backgrounds have surged, fuelled by misconceptions about the virus's spread."*

News study source	Code	Subcode	Extracts/quotes
"COVID-19 vaccine rollout disparities." (*CNN, 26 January 2021*)	Institutional racism	Passive racism	*"Disparities in vaccine distribution have raised concerns about the unequal access to protection against the virus, particularly in marginalised communities."*
"Conspiracy theories surrounding COVID-19." (*The New York Times, 31 Oct 2021*)	Individual racism	Bigotry/active racism	*"False narratives linking certain ethnic groups to the creation and intentional spread of the virus continue to circulate, contributing to increased prejudice and discrimination."*
"Impact of COVID-19 on minority-owned businesses." (*NBC, 11 August 2021*)	Institutional racism	Active racism	*"Minority-owned businesses report facing challenges accessing government relief funds during the pandemic, highlighting systemic issues in the allocation of resources."*
"Global responses to the Delta variant." (*Reuters, 16 Nov 2021*)	Cultural racism	Passive racism	*"Certain regions continue to stigmatise the Delta variant as the 'Indian variant', perpetuating stereotypes and contributing to discrimination against individuals of South Asian descent."*
"COVID-19 and economic inequality." (*Bloomberg, June 2020*)	Institutional racism	Passive racism	*"The economic fallout from the pandemic has disproportionately affected marginalised communities, highlighting systemic inequalities that existed long before the virus emerged."*
Media portrayal of COVID-19 hotspots (*Brookings*, 9 April 2021)	Individual racism	Bigotry/active racism	*"Certain media outlets continue to sensationalise and exaggerate COVID-19 hotspots in predominantly Black and Brown neighbourhoods, contributing to biased perceptions."*
"The aftermath of COVID-19: rebuilding or reinforcing inequities." (*NPR, 26 May 2020*)	Institutional racism	Passive racism	*"Post-pandemic recovery efforts are at risk of exacerbating existing social and economic disparities, as marginalised groups struggle to regain footing."*

News study source	Code	Subcode	Extracts/quotes
"Pandemic's impact on mental health." (*The Guardian, 11 August 2020*)	Institutional racism	Passive racism	*"The lack of culturally sensitive mental health resources during the pandemic has disproportionately affected minority communities, highlighting systemic issues in healthcare provision."*

Table 6.2: Categories and respective subcategories identified in the newspapers

6.5. ANALYSIS OF THEMES IDENTIFIED

The four most relevant categories that emerged in the comprehensive analysis conducted are as follows:

- Racialisation of the COVID-19 virus as a multidimensional threat (see Section 6.5.1).
- The COVID-19-causing virus is an imminent threat (see Section 6.5.2).
- Rallying calls across the globe for collectivisation to arrest the rising racialisation of the disease-causing virus (see Section 6.5.3).
- Proposals of speculative solutions aimed to curtail racial discrimination (see Section 6.5.4).

These four categories are discussed separately to facilitate a comparative analysis of the representation of racial discrimination targeted at Black and Asian Americans in the media — both online on social media and in print media (including newspapers), which can also be accessed via the internet. Chinese and Asian individual stories in the sampled publications highlighted the rise in both anti-Chinese and anti-Black American rhetoric and rapid dynamic shifts in blame over the COVID-19 global health crisis and reported incidences of physical and verbal assaults and bullying. What's more is that the Western media outlets (e.g., *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*) highlighted the first two identified categories of concern in this part of the study (i.e., the virus as an imminent threat and racialisation of the disease-causing virus) more frequently and in

greater depth compared to the rest of the categories. A summary of the categories is presented in Table 6.2. *The China Daily,* as noted from the analysis, stressed a need for concerted efforts to end the racialisation of the disease and speculation of possible solutions to stop race-based hate crimes and xenophobia against the Asian communities in the West.

6.5.1. Theme 1: Racialisation of the COVID-19 virus as a potential multi-dimensional threat

A considerable proportion of the articles obtained from the chosen newspapers clearly portrayed the theme of discriminatory racialisation of the disease-causing virus as a multidimensional threat — particularly a concerning peril to the Asian Chinese ethnicities. An article published in *The New York Times* on 24 June 2020, reported on racial bias experiences targeted at Chinese descent, "Chinese Americans have been spat on, yelled at and attacked by bigots during the coronavirus pandemic." Similarly, other excerpts include the following:

> *"Ever since the outbreak of the COVID-19 global health crisis, there have been rising trends involving the use of nicknames globally in the media spaces — including kung flu and Chinese virus. The use of such wordings is reckless and irresponsible as it could provide an opportunity for racial biases and intensified discrimination."* (*China Daily*, 25 February 2020)

> *"As the death toll caused by the virus exponentially increases with time in the United States of America, so do media and research reports of physical and verbal attacks targeted at Asian Americans. A victim who also goes ahead to report that hostile White Americans do largely blame for the outbreak, spread, and other impacts of the COVID-19 causing virus globally."* (*The New York Times*, 10 April 2020).

These specific excerpts point to a monumental construction of racialisation of the disease-causing virus that could potentially promote the intensity of the spread of hate crimes, discrimination, and harassment targeted at Chinese and Asian communities.
An *NBC* News report found that there was an increase of over 150% in hate crimes against Asians in the United States alone, only a year after the outbreak of the

pandemic (Mahabir et al, 2022). The hateful rhetoric involving the use of terms such as "Kung flu", "Chinese virus", and "Wuhan virus" by renowned and influential people, strongly implies that the dangers, damages, and harms of the virus originate from a specific geographical location and community. The negative imagery through the connotation also contributes to the social representation of the racialisation of the COVID-19-causing virus as an intricate, multi-faceted threat. These labels with which the virus has been strongly associated found COVID-19 on premises of imagery of a particular geographical location or ethnic community, an aspect that exacerbates racist discrimination against those targeted communities or ethnicities from a certain geographical area.

> *"Early in February, I read unsupported speculations that a virus ravaging a distant city called Wuhan was due to a Chinese taste for a strange-scaled mammal called the pangolin, which resembles an anteater but is cuddlier than its lumbering tube-snouted look-alike. Around that time, during a dinner party, I laughed when a friend quipped: "How do you eat a pangolin anyway? Do you dip its scales in butter like an artichoke?"* (*The New York Times*, 12 April 2020).

The above excerpt clearly demonstrates the existence of the substantial elements of a "joke" about the virus, particularly in the choice of food eaten in Chinese culture. There are also reports that the virus originated from Chinese research labs, which are solely political and lack credible facts.

These excerpts demonstrate concerted efforts on the construction of racialisation of the virus that may encourage hate crimes, harassment, and discrimination against Asian and Chinese communities. According to an *NBC* News report, there has been a 150% increase in anti-Asian hate crimes in 2020 in the United States alone (Yam, 2021).

COVID-19 can be traced as a multidimensional threat to the intersection of systemic racism, financial status, and health particularly affecting Black Americans. Throughout the pandemic, frontline or essential workers were consistently put at risk and faced both financial and medical hardships. These, typically low paying with high foot traffic, people of colour disproportionately occupied positions. However, this fact often goes unnoticed

in the images portrayed by the media. Systemic racialised class structure plays a role in placing Black workers in jobs that are more susceptible to COVID-19 than their White counterparts. Workers of colour make up a significant portion of janitors, nurses in supportive positions, construction workers, correctional officers, bus drivers, graders, and sorters in the agricultural industry, as well as police and sheriff patrol officers (Bureau of Labour Statistics 2020b).

Meanwhile, collectivist refrains were commonplace during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the early days of the pandemic then-Governor of New York, Andrew Cuomo, called the virus "the great equaliser" after his brother had tested positive for the virus. Cuomo was quoted as saying:

> *"Everyone is subject to this virus. I don't care how smart, how rich, how powerful you think you are."* (Johnson, 2020)

While everyone is subject to the virus, COVID-19 proved to be anything but an equaliser, instead bringing stark socio-economic and racial disparities to light. However, even when the reality of the collectivist refrains was questioned, they were commonly done without adequately exploring the racial component. *Bloomberg* reported on the realities of unequal susceptibility to COVID-19 in an article titled "the coronavirus class divide in cities":

> *"The coronavirus is exposing a longstanding class divide in the way Americans work — between the low-paid front-line workers and the stay-at-home professionals with more job security and benefits."*

In their report, they focused on income, the nature of the job, proximity to metropolitan centres, and healthcare insurance coverage (Florida & Seman, 2020). While these are all factors, failure to acknowledge the realities of the racial divide is a form of colour-blind racism in itself and fails American citizens of colour to the same extent the collectivist ideal does. The systemic racism and realities of the number of Black

Americans occupying these positions must be viewed through the lens of critical race theory to adequately convey the racial divide exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

6.5.1.1. Subtheme: Characterisation of blame as a potential threat to the US-China ties

The assessed media coverage of the subtheme provided a deeper understanding on a personal level and highlighted simmering political tensions that experts warn could potentially ruin the ties between the western world and China. The excerpts provided below provide further apprehension of the rhetoric blaming the Chinese (China) for the vast spread of the COVID-19-causing virus, an aspect which creates an ideal condition for a proper understanding of the notion of "othering" in the context of mass attitudes. It creates an opportunity for targeted racialisation of the pandemic as an intricate multi-fold threat. Cooperation is the only feasible option for mutual benefits, and conflicts could harm both sides.

> *"Xi expressed his hopes that the US could implement 'substantive actions 'to enhance the relationships between the US and China to ensure the creation of a mutually beneficial association that is devoid of 'conflicts and confrontation', stressing that it be founded on the grounds of 'mutual respect and valuable cooperation between the two countries'".* (*The Guardian*, 27 March 2020)

> *"The relationship, however, began to simmer when President Trump labelled the disease-causing virus as the 'Chinese virus 'or, in some cases, the 'Wuhan virus'".* (*The New York Times*, 22 March 2020)

The excerpts demonstrated both rising tension between the West and China and a rallying call aimed at concert efforts to curb hate crimes and racism against Asian Americans and Chinese.

6.5.2. Theme 2: The COVID-19 global pandemic as an imminent threat
6.5.2.1. Subtheme: Misinformation/disinformation threat

The incidences of social representations of the virus as an imminent threat attracted the attention of the media and research scholars and has been widely studied from varied perspectives as a human health threat and as affecting several other key human life social aspects like social structures (e.g., the economy, family, social class), cultural values, and interactions. As evident in the analysis of *The New York Times* published articles, the root of the pandemic has been pointed towards a certain country's research laboratory. These articles are also accused of causing severe impacts on daily commercial goods and commodities.

> *"But it's going to be a real kind of tightrope walk because if it gets so expansive, then it's not going to just disappear the way SARS did," he said. "I think the next four to five weeks are going to be critical. It's either going to start peaking and go into a downturn, or it's going to explode into a global outbreak."* (*The New York Times*, 29 January 2020)

6.5.2.2. Subtheme: A potential threat to diverse racial minority groups

The social representation of the virus was also largely blamed for the more intensely disproportional impacts on the Black and Asian American minorities compared to the White majority communities. *The Guardian* reported that:

> *"The rate at which the pandemic affected minorities, including Latino and Black Americans, in the US was twice more intense than the rate at which White Americans were affected by the virus."* (*The Guardian*, 21 August 2020)

With the COVID-19 outbreak, racial disparities in health outcomes have been brought to the forefront. A disproportionate number of Black Americans have been infected, hospitalised, or died from the virus as compared to White Americans. As one of the strongest influencers of public opinion, the media has had a significant impact on the

narratives surrounding race and COVID-19. Findings include the perpetuation of narratives that diminished racial differences by employing colour-blind racism. By presenting COVID-19 as the great equaliser, media outlets often undermined the racialised nature of the pandemic's consequence in instances of colour-blind racism. When the divide was addressed, health outcomes for Black people were often posited to be the result of individual poor health factors, disregarding the structural and systemic inequities which have led to long-standing poorer health outcomes among Black communities.

An approach utilising critical race theory coverage of this nature tends to fail to highlight the social, political, and societal prejudices that worsened outcomes for Black Americans. To properly characterise the systemic problems that led the United States here, a broader context of the racial disparities in health outcomes is essential. Failing to characterise these issues through the lens of critical race theory can result in undue blame towards Black Americans by framing their poorer health outcomes as individuals rather than systemic failings.

In media narratives concerning COVID-19 mortality rates of Black Americans, racial stereotypes are reinforced and colour-blind racism is perpetuated. Putting too much emphasis on Black mortality rates, without looking at underlying structural factors, creates a distorted picture that puts the blame on individuals or genetics. As a result of this narrow framing, institutions and policymakers are effectively absolved of their responsibility to address systemic racism and social determinants of health. Racial health disparities in the United States are primarily driven by structural racism and structural discrimination. However, early coverage of the pandemic did not consistently emphasise systemic racism despite racism's growing recognition as a public health crisis. (Williams et al, 2019)

COVID-19 has often been portrayed as a great equaliser, affecting everyone irrespective of their background. Though intended to foster unity, this narrative trivialises pre-existing racial inequities in healthcare. Colour-blind approaches undermine efforts to

address structural racism that perpetuates the disparities experienced by Black communities. Global media outlets, like *China Daily*, reported headlines that portrayed Black people in a negative light. "Black people account for over 80% of COVID-19 infections in the United States capital" was one such headline in a story by *China Daily* (Chen & Xu, 2021). The story put into question, and cast doubt on, Black Americans as a whole and suggested that White Americans had better control over the virus and were being less affected. "Us versus them" is used in such a headline and story, suggesting that the Chinese media were deflecting the blame for the onset of the virus. In America and the West, how the media covered race was clear: Blacks, like Asians, were portrayed in a negative light.

Here are more headlines and articles that place Black people into question: "People of colour account for 90% of NYPD's COVID-19 arrests" (Trougakos, Chawla, & McCarthy, 2020). The headline and story portrayed Black people as criminals without mentioning White people being arrested. "Out of the 125 'COVID-19 related 'arrests made, 83 suspects were Black and 30 were Hispanic, according to data released by the NYPD Tuesday", the online study reported. New York City had a population of 8.468 million during the time of this research, and 125 arrests is quite a low sample, also since Whites are not at all mentioned in the police's correspondence, nor the article.

Furthermore, the NYPD categorised these arrests as "COVID-19 related due to the circumstances", without providing a breakdown of the charges. This lack of transparency caused the Legal Aid Society to deem these broad descriptions as "meaningless" (McCarthy, 2020). The media framing was evident just months after the pandemic took its toll on the world. With headlines such as the *New York Post* "Minorities more likely to test positive for the coronavirus, study finds", as well as *The New York Times* running headlines such as "Black Americans face alarming rates of coronavirus infection in some states."

Even when well-intentioned media framing (including headlines such as these) had the ability to reinforce "us vs them".. According to studies from the Pew Research Centre, 39% of Asian and 38% of Black adults noticed someone acting uncomfortable around them because of their race or ethnicity since the coronavirus outbreak (Ruiz et al., 2020). Media framing of Black people's higher susceptibility to the COVID-19 virus, whether well-intentioned or not, could contribute to hostilities and forms of active and inactive racism by activating beliefs of otherness as a threat.

This led to then-President Trump speculating on what the reason for these disparities was at a conference, wondering, "Why is it that the African American community is so much, numerous times, more than everybody else?" (Eligon et al., 2020). President Trump posed this question even though there was a wide range of explanations readily available once the systemic injustices, disparities, and inequalities in both historical and contemporary American society were examined within the context of critical race theory.

6.5.2.3. Subtheme: The virus as an economic threat

The pandemic was represented as severely harmful to the stability of economies in different countries globally. Several companies shut down following the outbreak of the pandemic. In the United States, the economic decline was evident, with rising unemployment and growth of government expenditure trying to cushion its citizens against the impact of the disease. As the economy of the United States continued to warble, *The Guardian* reported President Trump saying:

> *"I would love to have it open by Easter, I would love to have the country opened, and just raring to go by Easter."* (*The Guardian*, 24 March 2020)

Other selected articles also portrayed the subject of the virus as a big threat. In early March 2020, Jing, a Chinese citizen aged 26, and a resident of Shanghai, posted a video about the COVID-19 pandemic. Her objective, according to the post, was to show how she feared as the disease peaked in China. Whereas the post attracted over

60,000 views, there were immensely virulent racial abuses hurled at her on the post. One of the notable comments in the comments section mocked the looks of Asians, insulting them based on race and appearances as "slanty-eyed b****rd". This, and several other similar posts, left the social media network user hurt and extremely threatened (Macguire, 5 April 2020).

6.5.3. Theme 3: Collectivisation aimed to end the rising racialisation of the virus

All the selected newspapers analysed as part of the sample represented the virus as a shared responsibility for all the affected parties — governments, individuals, institutions, social rights activists, and societies — with the main aim being to end the rising racialisation of the disease-causing virus.

The following incorporated the word "colour-blind" to stress the fact that the disease does not recognise status, colour, culture, or religion.

> *"A virus is colour-blind ... It does not discriminate based on skin colour, religion, or socio-economic status … It recognises no national boundaries." (China Daily,* 25 March 2020).

The excerpt changed the perspectives of the world during the pandemic for all stakeholders globally. Well-intended comments such as these can be seen as trivialising the realities of the racial divide perpetuating the stark contrast in health outcomes, particularly as it pertains to Black Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic. Eschewing consideration of the historic, generational, and contemporary systemic factors that contribute to poorer health outcomes for Black Americans than their White counterparts, is a failure for which the governments need to be held accountable when it comes to determining a way to correct these systemic inequities.

By disregarding the opportunity to assess the racial divide, highlighting the poorer health outcomes experienced by Black Americans through the lens of critical race theory, and properly attributing the systemic causes and influences, the public is left to

put the blame on poor individual health behaviours among Black Americans. Instead of focusing solely on a person's unhealthy behaviours, the disproportionate effect of COVID-19 on Black people can be attributed to social determinants of health, which encompass social, economic, and political factors. Racial health disparities cannot be adequately explained by the media unless these structural explanations are explored (Gee & Hicken, 2021).

Coverage of Black people during the pandemic has emphasised individual behavioural explanations of racial health disparities rather than structural explanations. News articles frequently focus on behavioural explanations, perpetuating colour-blind racism and overlooking systemic factors (Gollust et al, 2020). It is common for media narratives about Black people and COVID-19 to rely on colour-blind racism, which frames racial disparities as outcomes of non-racial dynamics. As a result, journalists often perpetuate racial biases and downplay the role of systemic racism in health outcomes by resorting to cultural stereotypes founded in cultural racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2019).

6.5.4. Theme 4: Potential speculative solutions aimed to curb racial discrimination

The selected article samples comprehensively feature the collective responsibility frame. It was to mitigate the representation of concerted efforts aimed at providing a solution to end racial discrimination based on attributes of the virus with symbolic reference to Asian and Chinese communities globally through language, imagery, or any other form of communication in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Specific hashtags in some of the articles showed support for an end to anti-Asian racism with reference to the pandemic. This is illustrated in the excerpt given below:

> *"The fight against pandemic-related harassment of Asian Americans has fallen to civil rights groups, marketing agencies, social media accounts, and non-profit organisations, which have encouraged frequent hashtags like #IAmNotCovid19, #RacismIsAVirus."* (*The New York Times*, 21 July 2020)

Instances of both direct and indirect bias, relating to the COVID-19 pandemic with certain groups of people have dominated major newspapers 'coverage and stories since the onset of the virus. In a story covered by Lauren Aratani (2020) and appearing in *The Guardian* on 24 March 2020, entitled "Coughing while Asian: living in fear as racism feeds off coronavirus panic"*,* there is an outright association of the virus with the persons of Chinese descent. Acts of racial prejudice against individuals with a Chinese background are further worsened by the attitude of the then-United States President, Donald Trump, who openly kept referring to the coronavirus as "the Chinese virus". The symptoms of coronavirus, especially coughing, which is presentable more physically, were openly associated with the Chinese making a majority fear coughing in public, despite not being infected by the virus. As reported, Trump's sentiments demonstrated a deeply entrenched racial prejudice against the Chinese as exhibited by actions of other Americans in separate instances, including a derogatory reference to Chinese culture by John Cornyn, the Republican senator.

The Guardian's headline on 3 January 2023, "China is now the centre of COVID. The world should be watching – and testing," by Devi Sridhar, passively demonstrates how the news study contributed to racial sentiments against China about the coronavirus. China is identified to have finally decided to live with the virus. The Chinese government is depicted as less transparent. Actions were taken by other countries (as reported), such as subjecting all travellers from China to strict checks, with China being seen as the centre of the pandemic. The information on the statistics about the virus is illustrated as spun by the Chinese government, thus stripping off transparency on the coronavirus information; China is depicted as an isolated country based on the virus, intrinsically illustrating passive racial discrimination.

The headline by *The Guardian* on Tuesday, 17 January 2023, "China's deadly coronavirus wave", explicitly demonstrates an open bias towards China about the coronavirus. Most certainly, the headline gives an interpretation that the virus has direct

links and relationships with China, thus demonstrating an openly active bias towards the country.

On 18 April 2023, *The Guardian* ran a headline by Murong Xuecun: "China's 'zero COVID 'policy was a mass imprisonment campaign". Such an alarming headline depicted China as not being concerned about the welfare of its citizens, who were ravaged by the deadly coronavirus. There is a biased representation of facts based on the approaches adopted by China towards containing the spread of the virus within its borders. From the report, China is illustrated as having leveraged the pandemic to accumulate more power, thus becoming more totalitarian, anti-scientific, and likened to an unfaithful husband who keeps denying their actions as part of limiting damages. Cumulatively, there is an explicit demonstration of institutional racism against China by a Western-based media house.

Published at the onset of the coronavirus by *The Guardian* on 24 January 2020, the news article "China coronavirus: 14 test negative in the United Kingdom as military doctors sent to Wuhan – as it happened", captured an open and explicit demonstration of individualised racism against Chinese students in the United Kingdom. All the universities in the United Kingdom are reported in the news study to have issued quarantine warnings to all Chinese students. The news study further refers to the virus as the Wuhan coronavirus, thus blatantly demonstrating acts of active racism.

China continued to unprecedentedly face unwarranted labelling and racist condemnations by being associated with the virus, especially from leading countries such as the United States led by the then-president, Donald Trump. The reports by *The Guardian* on Thursday, 16 April 2020, under the headline "Trump wades further into China COVID-19 row as focus turns to ease lockdowns", reported Trump casting doubt on the Chinese data reflecting the number of COVID-19 cases in the country. Inadvertently, President Trump, among a host of key US government leaders, led the promotion of the theory that the virus was a naturally occurring virus that had escaped

the laboratory in Wuhan. Endorsing such an unproven theory and it is reported in the news study demonstrated the United States holding racial slurs and doctrine against China.

On Friday, 24 January 2020, *The Guardian* ran an open and glaring racist headline related to the coronavirus pandemic. The headline "China virus: ten cities locked down, and Beijing festivities scrapped," referring to the coronavirus as the "China virus" openly demonstrated racial inclination against the country, and the media house directly waded in on the racial stabs that were levelled against China at the height of the pandemic. On Thursday, 9 January 2020, *The Guardian* ran an alarming headline directly discriminating against China by referring to the coronavirus as China pneumonia: "China pneumonia outbreak may be caused by Sars-type virus: WHO". On 27 January 2020, *The Guardian* glaringly referred to the coronavirus as the "China virus" while reporting on the updates about the COVID cases in the United Kingdom. "China virus death toll hits 82 as 73 test negative in UK – as it happened".

On 23 March 2020, *The New York Times* covered the extent to which Chinese American citizens were subjected to racial bigotry levelled against them by other citizens. According to the *New York Post*, published on 24 April 2023, with the headline "China COVID-19 cover-up had huge help from Western elites," China is demonstrated rightly to must have had a hand in the outbreak of the coronavirus and subsequently sought to cover up the outbreak at least with the assistance of Western allies, this casts doubt on the country's policy frameworks.

Deep-rooted institutional racism is depicted in the analysis of the comment carried out in the publication published by the editorial team at the *New York Post*. The *New York Post* spent a lot of time fearmongering against vaccines developed for the coronavirus. The fearmongering against the vaccines by a news study with Western links could be linked with the prejudice and bigotry that was held against China by associating the country to be the cause and epicentre of the virus. The *New York Post*, an outright lean-

right news study, endorsed the re-election of President Donald Trump for the 2020 elections. The endorsement of Trump came at a time when the former president was widely condemned for his actions, in reference to China, and his handling of the coronavirus. Trump endlessly referred to coronavirus as the "China virus", endorsing Trump's re-election without condemning his racial stance against China on the issue of the coronavirus depicted the news study's racial stance against China based on the outbreak and spread of the coronavirus.

The media, which newspapers are a part of, is a powerful entity on earth due to its influence and reach to people. The use of racialised information about a group of people, especially during instances of global concerns such as the coronavirus pandemic, negatively paints the media by illustrating the level of the pervasiveness and demonstration bias, especially by media houses aligning themselves with policies, institutions, or individuals who openly demonstrate hate, bigotry, and other acts of discrimination. Racially marginalised groups such as Chinese Americans are further isolated and discriminated against by carefully crafted verbiage by journalists or media houses based on different events in society. The innumerable acts or racially crafted language dominated several publications in the newspapers, thereby creating instances of isolation and hate against the targeted groups such as the Chinese Americans during the coronavirus pandemic.

The prejudice held by the Western media not only permeated against the Chinese during the coronavirus pandemic, but the aspects of prejudice and racism were witnessed elsewhere, especially in Africa, and the biased coverage ended up affecting the United States citizens. The emergence of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus received bias that clogged its coverage by the media. The biased media report saw a more racialised response from the Western countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, EU countries, and Canada, who immediately imposed travel prohibitions on travellers from South Africa and other African countries; the concern over the banning of travellers was based on a more selective approach. In the whole ordeal, the media, in its coverage of the whole issue of the Omicron variant, depicted a

prejudiced image of Africa perceived as a hostile, disease-stricken, and hungry continent.

The prominent level of bias in the Western media coverage of the coronavirus ended up distorting information on the pandemic to the peril of their own citizens. In the United States, *Fox News*, which is much aligned with Trump and his position on the coronavirus, misled the audience of the news channel on several facts about the virus and its effects. An even larger percentage of the United States citizenry believe that the coronavirus, largely associated with China, was less problematic or serious than influenza and therefore the seasonal flu was a major cause of concern, more than the novel coronavirus.

Appearing in *The New York Times* on 20 February 2020, the headline: "Why did the coronavirus outbreak start in China?" was so alarming and insensitive towards China at a time when the entire world was concerned with finding the best solutions and approaches that each country would leverage to help in containing the pandemic. The article illustratively links several Chinese cultural practices and philosophies to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. On 23 January 2020, *The New York* Times ran the headline and article "Is China setting itself up for another epidemic?" in which it reported China's high level of unpreparedness in combating the coronavirus. This pointed to a lot of prejudice to the state of China. In the article, COVID-19 is repeatedly referred to as the Wuhan virus, thus fomenting the aspect biases against China even further. On 17 January 2020, *The New York Times* carried an outrageously biased headline against China, "Three US airports to check passengers for a deadly Chinese coronavirus".

The headline openly linked and referred to the coronavirus as "Chinese coronavirus". This consistently victimised China against the virus and is openly a racist reference. From the above analysis, we can confidently conclude the existence of an elaborate bias by Western media houses on the coverage of the coronavirus. The problem is

further exacerbated by most leaders in the western world demonstrating a lot of prejudice against China and its policies and approaches towards the virus.

6.6. DISCUSSION

There are three types of media bias. To begin, there is gatekeeping bias, which occurs when only some topics are covered in the media. Second, there's coverage bias, which is when one side of an issue or an event is emphasised more than the other. The third type of prejudice is statement bias which occurs when journalists inject their own perspective into their writing. There are examples of all three types of media bias in the articles chosen from the newspapers. As these pieces show, the fight against COVID-19 graduated from the medical to the political sphere in terms of gatekeeping bias. The authors of these articles managed to politicise the pandemic even though new cases are being reported every second and individuals of all races and ethnicities are dying every minute.

Articles like "Don't blame China, blame the Chinese Communist Party" from *The Washington Post* play into this phenomenon by placing blame on the country's government. Other articles also contain examples of coverage bias, such as *The Washington Post*. COVID-19 is referred to as "the Chinese virus", "Wuhan virus", and "kung flu" in these articles leading to mainstreaming as is known in the fields of communication and media studies. In elaborate terms, this is where a public opinion would be formed because of the purposeful or unintentional repetition of a perspective. If we want to keep an idea out of the mainstream media, we need to avoid words that could lead to a preconceived notion of it. The *People's Daily* piece blames the poor American management for the country's failure to effectively counter the threat. This was assumed, given the discrepancy in the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the United States and China. In the United States, 100 people died, whereas in China, there were 20,000. Even though the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the

United States skyrocketed after 19 March, the day the item was published, *The Daily* lacked evidence of a failure to deal with the virus.

The Daily also implied that the racial labelling of the virus by some Americans was justified, but it ignored a post from China's foreign ministry spokesperson that blamed the United States military for delivering the illness to Wuhan. When it comes to assertion bias, both *The Daily* and the *Post* are notoriously bad at keeping their opinions out of their writing. The writer of *The Daily* piece only presents one side of the argument. He mentioned only offensive labels and remarks of a racist nature. Through the article, this was emphasised. However, the writer muted several calls from the United States, including those from major news agencies and politicians who condemned this categorisation, to keep it concise. The statement gave the impression that most people agreed with the characterisation. When a reporter uses the pronouns "we" or "us" to contrast with "they" or "them", this reflects statement bias because it shows that the writer is clearly on the side of the "us" and opposed to the "them" and their beliefs or methods.

6.7. IDEOLOGY

The categories addressed, and the reporting's attitude can be used to examine how ideologies are portrayed in media texts. *The Washington Post*'s article diverts blame for the COVID-19 pandemic to the Chinese government, using an inclusive tone to reassure readers that they are not the problem, especially Chinese and Asian Americans. Instead, the local Chinese and international populations view Chinese officials as unjust and problematic. While praising the Chinese people, the author of *The Washinton Post*'s article criticises the government, which is charged with having a negative impact on cultures that are free and democratic.

The author of this article states that they hoped to provide comfort to Asian Americans and Chinese people by advocating unity and inclusivity in response to the use of labels

like "Chinese virus", "Wuhan virus", and "Kung flu" by some individuals in the United States. The author claimed that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was aiming to split Americans along racial, ethnic, and political lines. By referring to the infection as the "CCP virus", the article aimed to comfort Chinese people while excluding the entire public from the labelling. This suggests that the Chinese leadership did not speak for the Chinese people and was not chosen democratically. As a result, the author makes it clear that the Chinese people in the essay are government officials rather than members of the ordinary populace.

The author of *The Washington Post* article used principles and ideas that the intended audience holds dear, such as inclusivity and democracy, to appeal to American readers. In contrast to authoritarian systems, American society promotes and supports democratic practices. The CCP is criticised by the author for its brutality, oppression, and negative effects. In this way, the opposition between democratic and autocratic ideologies and political systems is exposed.

Overall, ideology can be seen in media texts through the choice of categories and the reporting style and tone. *The Washington Post*'s article on COVID-19 blames the Chinese government and emphasises its undemocratic policies. The article seeks to reassure Chinese and Asian Americans by excluding the general population from the labelling and promoting inclusivity and unity. The author appeals to American readers' values and ideologies, such as democracy and inclusivity, opposing authoritarian systems. Political systems and persons demonstrate the struggle between democratic and autocratic practices and ideas.

The *People's Daily* article takes aim at outsiders, specifically American voters, and accuses them of attempting to manipulate public opinion by labelling the virus as Chinese. According to the article, this labelling is an effort to divert attention from how the American government handled the outbreak. By placing focus on the safety and well-being of people, the article creates a negative impression of the American

government's failure to safeguard these values. The *People's Daily*'s writer aims to establish a negative public opinion by using words like "defending", "deflect", and "failure" to describe the American response to the pandemic.

In contrast, the article from *The Washington Post* targets the Chinese government rather than American voters and criticises its "aggressive practices" and undemocratic nature. The writer praises the Chinese people but criticises their rulers, implying that the government is not representative of the people. The article appeals to American values of democracy and inclusiveness, positioning the conflict as between democratic and autocratic policies.

Another example is when the article in the *People's Daily* subtly commends the Chinese authorities 'effective and successful management of COVID-19 while criticising the American government for its poor handling of the pandemic. In China, efficiency is a highly valued quality. The above articles present many media ideologies with various objectives. The article in the *People's Daily* attempts to appeal to human values like efficiency and equality by highlighting the handling of the medical crisis and racial remarks, while the article in *The Washington Post* promotes democracy and democratic practices in the United States by criticising the aggressive behaviour of the Chinese authorities.

6.7.1. Domination

The concept of dominance is explored in the articles using foreground and background events. The emphasis in the first article is on the Chinese government's aggression and repression, rather than their successful response to the pandemic. While new COVID-19 cases in China have decreased, the author did not provide any context or mention the Chinese government's efforts to combat the virus. Instead, the author chose to focus on political issues, which may have hampered the Chinese government's response to the pandemic. The article aimed to highlight wrongdoing and downplay right-doing, with the goal of suggesting to readers of Asian and Chinese descent that the labelling does not apply to them. In contrast, the *People's Daily* article emphasised the mishandling of the pandemic by the United States government and highlighted the use of "racist" labels. By doing so, the article attempted to shape public perception of the administration and influence the upcoming elections. However, the article did provide some context by noting that a Chinese Foreign Ministry official had first blamed the United States military for the outbreak of the virus.

In various articles, COVID-19 was referred to in a way that either left a good or bad impression on various demographic groups. At the same time, *The Washington Post* article and the *People's Daily* article utilised terms like "Chinese virus", "Wuhan virus", and "Kung flu" to promote a bad impression among Chinese and Asian Americans. The *People's Daily* piece highlighted the United States government's poor handling of the virus, while *The Washington Post* article attempted to downplay the Chinese government's achievements in battling the infection by putting it in the background. .

6.7.2. Connection to theory

Within the context of media coverage during the COVID-19 pandemic, the concept of "otherness" emerges as a prominent theme. Media outlets have played a pivotal role in constructing and perpetuating the sense of "otherness" when it comes to marginalised racial groups, particularly Asians and Black people. This phenomenon is reinforced by the terminology, framing, and narratives employed in news reports, headlines, and discussions, as well as the racial perceptions in play by both the news reporters and consumers. Through the highlighting of vulnerabilities, the suggestion of an inability to manage the disease, and the portrayal of potential threats posed by these groups, media outlets have contributed to the reinforcement of this notion of "otherness". The impact of racial perceptions extends beyond merely distorting the views of the majority population about Black and Asian people; it also fosters distrust of the media within these racial communities. This mistrust is further exacerbated by the concepts of "otherness" and racial perception, which can give rise to what is known as hostile media perception. This phenomenon is closely related to the hostile media effect, which refers to the tendency of individuals with partisan viewpoints to perceive media as biased against their beliefs (Gunther & Schmitt, 2004). In the context of racial minorities, hostile racial media perception emerges when individuals perceive media content as biased or hostile towards their racial or ethnic group. This perception can reinforce feelings of marginalisation and alienation, exacerbating the deeply entrenched power dynamics and societal hierarchies within society.

The agency is also a critical theme in the decolonial framework. The concept is defined as the ability to reject or resist colonial power by subjects of colonisation through the initiation of actions targeting resistance to colonial rule (Coates, 2020). An unprecedented number of technological and media platform inventions characterise the current digital era (Crosby, 2021). However, prejudice levels in different media sources are dependent on the content and exposure and the consequential polarisation, which is

often characterised by a connection to the media source exposure (Croucher, Nguyen & Rahmani, 2020).

During the COVID-19 crisis, Africanisation has been demonstrated in various contexts. Undermining Africans 'ability to manage the crisis is a form of prejudice and discrimination that has been seen on various media platforms, and this has, in turn, influenced the growing cases of racism globally (Stephan & Stephan, 2000). Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Black people's inability to live in good environments, such as less crowded neighbourhoods, has been linked to the escalating rates of infections and deaths from the virus compared to their White counterparts. Africans have also been portrayed as being unable to afford standard healthcare, thus linked to the persistence of the disease and other conditions, such as mental health disorders connected to the SARS coronavirus (Meghji & Niang, 2022).

6.8. THE ONSET OF THE OMICRON VARIANT

It is unbelievable how editors reviewed and published racist headlines concerning how the Omicron variant was first detected in South Africa. On 24 November 2020, the first case of Omicron, a new variant, was reported in South Africa. This news spread so fast that most countries around the globe became aware of the discovery in just twenty-four hours, thanks to the media. The media has constantly proven its ability to spread information across the world but is disappointing in other aspects, such as bias, which ends up clogging the coverage. A good example was the reporting of the Omicron variant. After the announcement was made by the relevant persons, wealthy states in the North were quick to put in place travel bans on Southern African countries and, later, on other African states. This move was labelled by African governments as "racist, unsupported by science, and hypocritical". Particularly because some Northern states had not imposed similar bans despite having higher infection rates compared to the Southern African states ("*The Media Coverage of the Omicron Variant is Biased Against Africa*", 2022)

The humiliation was extended to other countries of the South, which also imposed travel restrictions on South Africa. Such prompt actions of these governments imposing restrictions were considered by some to be racist, as most of those countries had not realised that they already had cases of the Omicron variant even before it was identified in Botswana and South Africa, which did not originate from any of the mentioned countries ("*The Media Coverage of the Omicron Variant is Biased Against Africa*", 2022). Many media articles described the first Omicron case in South Africa as dangerous and heavily mutated, compared to the initial COVID-19 virus and how a new wave of infections was to be expected. These reports had countries such as the European Union members, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada ban travellers coming from South Africa and other African countries ("*The Media Coverage of the Omicron Variant is Biased Against Africa*", 2022).

Some nations had selective banning of states, which was questionable. Even though South Africa reported the first case of the Omicron variant, news reports revealed that some Western countries already had it spreading in their region ("*The Media Coverage of the Omicron Variant is Biased Against Africa*", 2022). It remains unclear where the virus came from, but instead of applauding these scientists for the good work of discovering the already-existent variant, the country became a victim of bias from Western nations beginning with Britain, followed by others such as the United States. Criticism of the bans imposed on South Africa and other adjacent countries was not an ignorant disregard for the safety of the Omicron-free states, but instead a concern for the apparent bias that was depicted in the preventive measures that were taken by some of these states.

Mmusi Maimane, a South African politician, responded to the racist headlines published by numerous countries from the West, saying that the Omicron variant discovery had exposed the "deep-seated, anti-Africa attitudes from the international community". These news outlets were forced to offer an apology to the offended individuals for their

biased reviews on the matter. On 30 November the Spanish newspaper, *La Tribuna* published a note stating their intention behind the cartoon was not to connect the transmission of the variant to positions of their non-discriminatory and equity values. This was, however, not received kindly by many such as the editor-in-chief of the German newspaper, *Die Rheinpfalz*, who apologized and specifically stated that there were no excuses for such inhumane mistakes. A similar excuse was published days later following the racist headlines by *Bangkok Post*, saying that their intention was not to look down on anyone or use racist language, such as the term "hunt" in the headline "Govt hunts for African visitors" (NPR, 2022). It is challenging to comprehend how such headlines were published even though they still apologised for their acts.

The media, which is a powerful communication tool, played a significant role in how the most powerful countries reacted to the discovery of the Omicron variant in South Africa ("*The Media Coverage of the Omicron Variant is Biased Against Africa*", 2022). Numerous articles have been published since the discovery of the Omicron variant, and Africa has been portrayed with bias and discrimination. Aside from the adverse light shone on Africa as a continent, these articles have been written by people who are not Africans. This questions the information provided in these articles, but this is unfortunately ignored, as is evident from most of the Westerners who still bear twisted ideas and notions on how life in Africa is awful and how hostile, starved, and disease-stricken it is ("*The Media Coverage of the Omicron Variant is Biased Against Africa*", 2022). Such prejudices in existence explain the panic witnessed in the European and Western countries after a new variant had been reported in an African country.

As a result of media coverage of African countries 'response to the pandemic, stereotypes have been perpetuated and otherness has been reinforced. The exoticisation of African countries and the representation of their health systems as inadequate, undermined these nations and their resilience. Instead of acknowledging African countries 'successful strategies and innovative approaches, the media amplifies

the challenges without providing a comprehensive perspective. Some African countries were, in fact, more successful at handling the COVID-19 virus.

6.8.1. How countries dealt with COVID-19

More than 358.55 million people have been infected with the coronavirus since it first surfaced in 2020, and millions of people have lost their lives to it. During these turbulent months, some nations have handled the situation better than others. Different governments enforced lockdowns at various times, considered different techniques to help deal with the virus, and even imposed varying levels of restrictions. For instance, according to reports, the countries that had the most deaths were Peru, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Montenegro, consecutively. On the other hand, those with the fewest deaths were Burundi, China, Bhutan, and New Zealand. From the above statistics, we can tell that despite African and Asian continents being discriminated against for bringing about the virus, they were the best at handling it and had the least number of deaths as opposed to Western countries.

As per an October 2020 BBC report, the continent of Africa and its population of more than one billion had approximately 1.5 million cases. This is a figure much lower than those in the Americas, Europe, or Asia. The death toll and case-fatality ratio for COVID-19 were also indicative of less severe outcomes among African countries. Despite their early and continued effective response to COVID-19 there remained few positive portrayals in the Western media. While the lower figures in African nations were often dismissed as the result of limited testing, Dr John Nkengasong, the head of African Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) pointed out that there is no indication that many COVID-19 deaths had been missed (Soy, 2020). Failure to acknowledge where African countries succeeded in handling the COVID-19 pandemic diminishes these nations and reflects instances of integrated threat theory as established by Fitzgerald in the theoretical framework detailed in Section 3.3. Additionally, it reflects race as a fabrication based on physical appearance, ethnicity, habits, or culture (de Melo & Figueiredo, 2021) as discussed in Section 3.2. Western

mischaracterisation of how African nations handled the COVID-19 pandemic reflects an unwillingness or a refusal to look beyond the uncivilised stereotypes associated with these nations, their healthcare systems, and their infrastructure. This fundamentally reinforces the eroticisation of African nations while perpetuating otherness and domination, herein pertaining to beliefs of Western superiority reflecting in-group members' discrimination towards members of the out-group (Hertzberg, 2020).

6.8.2. Connection to key theories
6.8.2.1. Media richness theory

Media richness theory also referred to as the information richness theory, can explain how the continued use of some words to report on COVID-19 by various newspapers has augmented discrimination towards minority groups, especially Asians and Black people. This model explains the ability of the media to reproduce information accurately and appropriately as it has been received. Thus, it applies to research relating to the mass media's representation of minorities in the pandemic. It gives insights into the role played by the media and highlights how different forms of media disseminate essential information to the public. The theory postulates that media richness relies upon prompt feedback availability, public information, and language cues. Media richness theory believes that the communication model in media will be chosen based on equivocality as well as its effectiveness in communicating critical messages to individuals in the public (Ishii, Lyons & Carr, 2019). For example, news media prefer visual communication forms to captivate the public. This theory is based on the notion that mass media can transmit critical information whenever needed.

However, some factors, such as prejudice and discrimination, may inhibit the dissemination or transmission of information. Although most news study articles between 2021–2022 focused on spreading awareness to stop the discrimination and prejudice that had increased in 2020, some of the words they used, in a real sense heightened these issues. Media richness theory posits that the ability of a news media

to effectively transmit information depends on the use of the information as well as the frequency of this information during uncertainty or equivocality.

The media richness theory is built on language cues, variety, public information, and prompt feedback availability. According to the theory, the mode of communication in media will be selected based on equivocality and how effective the medium is in communicating messages to the public (Ishii, Lyons & Carr, 2019). For instance, news media prefer visual forms of communication to appeal more to the public. The theory presents the idea that the mass media can transmit crucial information whenever needed, although there are factors, such as prejudice, which inhibit the transmission or dissemination of information. The news media's ability to effectively transmit is dependent on the utilisation of the information and its frequency during equivocality or uncertainty. Unfortunately, due to the media's influence on people's thinking and attitudes, it has been used to spread prejudice and hate speech towards Asians, who are presumed to have created the virus and spread it to other nations due to political differences, as well as the Blacks who are presented as being unable to appropriately manage the disease due to their economic and social status (Ishii, Lyons & Carr, 2019).

6.8.2.2. Conflict theory

Conflict theories also apply to situations that entail inequality of either social class, ethnicity, gender, or race (Meghji & Niang, 2022). They highlight who owns and controls the media outlets. Being that minorities only comprise a significantly lower percentage of the total population in the USA and Canada, they are underrepresented in the media industry, which is dominated by the White, who, in this case, pioneer the negative representations of minorities (Meghji & Niang, 2022). This asserts that the powerful people in society, and those highly ranked in the social institutions, have a major influence on what circulates through the media as well as the kind of media available for consumption by the public, serving as a subtle form of gatekeeping.

While scholars have increasingly recognised racism as a public health crisis (Lopez Bernal et al., 2021), early media coverage of the pandemic did not consistently employ such a frame. Systemic racism and structural discrimination are key determinants of racial health disparities in the United States (Feagin & Bennefield, 2014). Public health researchers and advocates have a responsibility to engage with news outlets and call attention to the role of racism in perpetuating and maintaining health inequities (Orr et al, 2021). By incorporating a racial justice lens into media coverage, the public can gain a more accurate understanding of the structural factors contributing to racial health disparities and support transformative solutions.

The lack of trust in the media by Black Americans perpetuates a vicious cycle of poor outcomes during the COVID-19 pandemic, including higher vaccine distrust within Black communities, due to the absence of trust in the mainstream media as well as government bodies. Rebuilding trust and confidence in the media among Black Americans requires addressing these concerns and improving the coverage of Black communities. By featuring diverse perspectives, the media can challenge prevailing narratives and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the racial dimensions of COVID-19. This inclusive approach can help counteract colour blindness and contribute to more effective public health responses. By bridging the divide between Black Americans and the media, we can foster a more informed and equitable response to the challenges presented by the pandemic.

Mass media has the potential to raise awareness of health disparities between different racial and ethnic groups. It can increase the perceived importance of the issue, promote beliefs about social determinants of health, and foster policy support to reduce health disparities. In its current form, the lack of coverage of issues perceived by Black Americans as being related to them can be viewed as a form of gate-keeping bias with only certain matters being covered. Moreover, media coverage can encourage participatory action, empowering communities to address health disparities (Basu & Dutta, 2009).

Black media representation and grassroots movements in the United States are presenting the possibility to foster and develop a new, more trusted, avenue through which Black Americans may receive their news. An analysis of 100 Black-owned news outlets over 15 months between March 2020 and May 2021 (Centre for Community Media, 2021) revealed six times as much coverage of issues pertaining to Black communities compared to mainstream media counterparts, including issues of racism and COVID-19 health disparities.

As demonstrated by Meghji and Niang (2021), conflict theory is deeply ingrained in the media's role in perpetuating racial biases and discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in Chinese and Asian stigmatisation. Conflict theory sheds light on racial slurs and society's profound disparities (Schiller & Schiller, 1969). Analysing how dominant groups, often dictating the narrative through media ownership, interpret and respond to minority challenges is crucial. The study underscores that such interpretations lead to confrontations that sustain racial inequality and unfavourable views in media representations (Meghji & Niang, 2022).

The in-depth analysis in the study demonstrates how conflicts in media ownership and distorted portrayals are intertwined, unveiling power dynamics during the pandemic. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the media had ample opportunity to modify public attitudes that perpetuated racial inequality (Zougheibe et al, 2023). With its concentration on power conflicts and dominance, conflict theory offers a compelling framework to comprehend these intricate events. The study's emphasis on conflict in media ownership goes beyond mere observation; it provides a critical perspective to understand how these power struggles shape public narratives, exposing the profound impact of the media on societal attitudes and racial biases (Crowley, Wong &, 2020).

Conflict in media ownership are systematic representation of societal power differentials, as indicated by the study. Media outlets 'narratives perpetuate racial biases and discriminatory stereotypes by illustrating the intricate relationship between dominant

and minority populations (Zougheibe et al, 2023). Through the lens of conflict theory, the study illustrates how power dynamics perpetuate racial inequality. Conflict theory can provide a robust explanation for this temporal study, revealing the persistence of racial inequities in media narratives during the epidemic (Meghji & Niang, 2022). According to conflict theory, the media's engagement in sustaining racial biases during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly against Chinese and Asian communities, is deeply entrenched (Meghji & Niang, 2022).

Herbert Schiller's insightful viewpoint on globalisation, with an emphasis on conflict theory in media ownership, is mirrored in the comprehensive analysis. Schiller's 1969 observations prompted him to study media corporations, especially those from the Global North, and their immense influence on global information dissemination. This approach, which is seamlessly integrated into the study, aligns with Meghji and Niang's (2021) conflict theory lens, establishing a solid framework for understanding the far-reaching repercussions of media ownership dynamics. Schiller's timeless ideas underscore conflicts inherent in media corporations concerning information dissemination in a globalised society. This analysis effectively incorporates Schiller's ideas into its narrative, demonstrating how these conglomerates, predominantly in economically affluent regions of the Global North, shape global issues like the racial dynamics of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Through the use of discriminatory terminology like "Kung flu" and "Wuhan virus", the media propagated a threat-centric narrative (Opdam, 2023). These terms perpetuated detrimental preconceptions and amplified Asian discrimination, violence, and harassment. According to Eason (2023), media sensationalisation of minority crimes heightens fear and distrust, sustaining low outcomes for these groups. The emotional and physical health of Black and Asian Americans was also impacted by the media's pandemic coverage (Opdam, 2023). Research has demonstrated that daily exposure to negative and biased narratives may escalate stress, anxiety, and depression. Discrimination and violence may dissuade individuals from seeking medical care,

exacerbating health inequities (Eason, 2023). This investigation underscores the necessity of addressing the media's role in racial discrimination. Comprehending integrative threat theory mechanisms and their emergence in media coverage can aid in resisting negative narratives and fostering more equitable depictions of minority communities.

The theory underscores the importance of media literacy and critical thinking. Educating individuals about media biases and prejudices can empower them to deconstruct and resist harmful myths. Cultivating a more diverse and inclusive media landscape can also amplify minority voices more effectively (Hedrick, 2023). By critiquing discriminatory language, partial reporting, and damaging preconceptions, individuals can encourage the media to be more ethical and responsible. Due to the media's representation of racial discrimination against Black and Asian Americans during the COVID-19 outbreak, these communities have endured significant hardships (Huang & Zhu, 2023).

6.8.2.3. Integrative threat theory

The integrative threat theory elucidates the mechanisms and extensive effects of media bias (Khunti et al, 2020). Addressing these concerns through media literacy, diversifying media ownership and leadership, and media accountability can contribute to creating a fair and just society that values all communities.

The pervasiveness and insidious impact of racial discrimination on Black and Asian Americans have been underscored by the COVID-19 epidemic (Huang & Zhu, 2023). Critical race theory challenges the notion of race as a biological concept and asserts its role as a social construct intended to uphold power and privilege for dominant groups (Mills & Godley, 2017). According to this theory, racism permeates even neutral entities like the media. The media's representation of Black and Asian Americans during the pandemic illustrates how storytelling and narrative framing fuel racial discrimination (Opdam, 2023). Media coverage of the COVID-19 epidemic has employed prejudiced terminology like "Kung flu" and "Wuhan virus", which is disconcerting (Lampropoulou et

al, 2023). By dehumanising and stigmatising Asian communities, these labels intensify anti-Asian prejudice, violence, and harassment. The media's use of such terminology has directly contributed to the racialisation of the COVID-19 epidemic (Mills & Godley, 2017), aligning with the critical race theory's emphasis on the social construction of race. The theory's researchers assert that racial discrimination is ingrained in society's institutions and structures (Tessler, Choi & Kao, 2020). The dominant media perpetuates racial biases and stereotypes, sustaining marginalisation by representing Black and Asian Americans as threats, criminals, or model minorities. Furthermore, the media's focus on sensationalised minority crime and violence fosters fear and distrust, reinforcing the bleak outcomes for these communities (Lampropoulou et al, 2023).

Critical race theory scrutinises the mainstream media's emphasis and perpetuation of minority group deviance and criminality while downplaying systemic issues causing social inequality (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). This investigation emphasises the imperative of addressing the media's role in racial discrimination. Understanding critical race theory and its manifestation in media coverage can facilitate the development of strategies to combat detrimental narratives and promote more equitable depictions of minority populations. Holding the media accountable for their coverage of minorities is imperative (Eason, 2023). By scrutinising discriminatory language, biased reporting, and damaging preconceptions, researchers may encourage the media to be more ethical and accountable.

6.8.2.4. Hegemony

The representation of the Omicron variant and Africa by the media during the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed negative biases and colonial narratives (Opdam, 2023). In accordance with hegemony and postcolonial perspectives, media representations are shaped by power dynamics and assumptions. Hegemony, as defined by Gramsci (1971), is the consent-based dominance of a group. Media hegemony refers to the ability of powerful organisations to covertly change narratives and public opinion without force (Hall, Evans & Nixon, 2013). By advancing the interests of the dominant group and suppressing opposing views, the media reinforces hegemonic authority.

The media attention on the Omicron variant exemplifies media hegemony. The narrative depicting Africa as a threat emerged when the variant first appeared in South Africa and other African countries, coupled with travel bans (Bigham et al, 2023). This framing sustained existing preconceptions of Africa as a disease-ridden and unstable continent. Postcolonial ideas critique the representation of non-Western cultures as inferior or exotic by Western media. These depictions stem from colonial power structures and uphold Western domination, as noted by postcolonial researchers such as Said (1978). The media coverage of the Omicron variant further entrenched these colonial narratives by sensationalising its African roots and portraying it as a threat to the West (Huang & Zhu, 2023). This depiction reinforced the assumption that Africa is problematic and that Western nations are superior in solving issues. Beyond mere stereotyping, biased coverage has serious consequences (Bigham, 2023). Media representations of Africa as a threat, contribute to an unjust and ineffective global health system. This analysis underscores the need to critically examine media depictions, challenge stereotypes, and confront colonial narratives. Understanding hegemony and postcolonialism can assist in creating more truthful and equitable media representations of Africa and other non-Western regions.

The diversification of media ownership and leadership is crucial. Varied voices in the media reduce biases and stereotypes inherent in hegemonic power structures. Raising

public awareness and promoting critical thinking can mitigate biased media coverage, empowering people to challenge harmful stereotypes and demand fair depictions by fostering an understanding of power relations and encouraging narrative questioning (Adekunle et al, 2023). Ultimately, the media's bias towards the Omicron variant and its tendency to depict Africa as a threat, perpetuate damaging preconceptions and colonial narratives (Bigham, 2023). To eliminate these negative portrayals and promote more equitable and truthful media depictions of Africa and other non-Western regions, one must comprehend these dynamics through the lenses of hegemony and postcolonialism (Hall, Evans & Nixon, 2013). Promoting diversity in media ownership, and media literacy, and combating negative stereotypes can contribute to a more just and equitable global media landscape.

Black Americans harbour distrust towards mainstream media due to perceived biases and inconsistencies in reporting on Black communities, evident during the COVID-19 pandemic (Opdam, 2023). The basis of symbolic interactionism lies in the social creation of meaning through interactions and perceptions. Symbolic interactionism posits that people comprehend the world through interactions with others and symbols (Goffman, 1974). Media depictions of Black communities can influence perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours, according to symbolic interactionism. Distrust among Black Americans towards mainstream media arises from historical marginalisation, stigmatisation, and adverse representation of Black communities (Opdam, 2023). This legacy of racism has instilled doubt and cynicism among Black individuals regarding the media's ability to accurately depict their experiences and viewpoints (Bigham, 2023). Media coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this suspicion, particularly among Black Americans who exhibited hesitancy towards vaccination (Alhomsi et al, 2023). The media's emphasis on sensationalised stories about vaccine side effects among Black individuals, coupled with downplaying immunisation benefits, reinforced the perception that the media is unreliable and inaccurate. The health of Black communities has suffered due to this mistrust in mainstream media (Alhomsi et al, 2023). Vaccination efforts may be deterred if Black communities feel misrepresented, leading to a lack of access to accurate health information and hindering efforts to

address health inequalities. This approach underscores the significance of symbolic interactionism in media coverage of Black communities. Overcoming mistrust and fostering more equitable and truthful media representations can be achieved by examining how these representations impact perceptions and behaviours. Promoting diversity in media ownership and leadership facilitates the representation of Black voices and influences narratives about Black communities (Huang & Zhu, 2023). Black communities can scrutinise media representations and challenge prejudices by promoting critical media literacy.

Ultimately, the distrust of mainstream media among Black Americans, rooted in perceived shortcomings in reporting on Black communities, has contributed to adverse health outcomes, particularly COVID-19 vaccine reluctance (Opdam, 2023). Overcoming mistrust and achieving fair and accurate media representation requires an understanding of symbolic interactionism. A more just and equitable media landscape, serving all communities, can be created by increasing diversity in media ownership, promoting media literacy, and confronting harmful stereotypes.

6.9. EXAMINING DISPARITIES IN MEDIA REPRESENTATION: DIFFERENTIAL TREATMENT OF WHITES, BLACKS, AND ASIANS AMID THE PANDEMIC

6.9.1. Ethnic disparities and press prejudice

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the prevalent issue of media partiality and its substantial impact. Rosa (2023) and the Shorenstein Centre for Media, Politics, and Public Policy identified ethnic bias in pandemic media coverage. These investigations revealed how White individuals were represented favourably as pandemic victims, whereas Black and Asian individuals were typecasted and disadvantaged. Media coverage accentuating White victimisation distorted the pandemic's consequences on diverse communities and undermined minority trust in the media. As per Rosa (2023), this biased representation established a "narrative of exclusion" for Black and Asian populations, exacerbating bias and discrimination. The predominant narrative of White victimhood distorted minority experiences.

Rather than being recognised as individuals confronting comparable challenges to White individuals, minority communities were often reduced to statistics, or unjustly held responsible for the virus's transmission. Marginalisation hampered the mainstream media's capacity to convey public health messages and cater to minority needs. This distrust bred misinformation and misunderstanding, widening societal divides. Prejudiced pandemic media coverage was perpetuated, which sustained damaging Black and Asian stereotypes with tangible repercussions. The Shorenstein Centre's (2023) research illustrates how early sensationalised coverage of the COVID-19 epidemic in Wuhan, China, nurtured anti-Asian sentiment and discrimination, resulting in an uptick in hate crimes against Asians. This prejudiced representation distorted the pandemic and marginalised Asian people.

Presenting Black communities as less compliant with public health mandated obstructs endeavours to offer crucial information and resources. Rosa (2023) discovered that biased representation exacerbated vaccination rates and healthcare disparities,

intensifying the pandemic's impact on Black communities. Stereotypes bolstered discrimination and undermined public health initiatives to establish a more just and inclusive society. Adverse stereotypes of Asians in the initial coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic in Wuhan, China, unveiled media bias against Asians. Huang et al (2023) demonstrated how media sensationalism and visuals fuelled anti-Asian prejudice and discrimination, disseminating detrimental perceptions that exerted a significant influence on Asian populations globally.

The media exaggerated the Wuhan outbreak, accentuating its exotic and peculiar aspects. Instead of delving into the disease's scientific and medical aspects, terms like "Wuhan virus" and "Chinese virus" became widespread, endorsing the notion that the virus was particularly associated with a specific ethnicity and nationality. The sensationalised media propagated anti-Asian sentiment, instilling fear and suspicion in Asian individuals (Huang et al, 2023). Throughout the pandemic, biased media coverage transcended dramatic language to sustain damaging stereotypes about Asians as health hazards. This manifested in representing Asians as noncompliant with pandemic protocols and as adherents of unclean or harmful traditions. According to Lampropoulou et al (2023), such stereotypes fortified existing biases and fostered new prejudices, fuelling anti-Asian sentiment and discrimination.

The media's prejudice and anti-Asian stereotypes have had dire consequences. During the pandemic, Asians faced harassment, assaults, and fatalities. Numerous Asian individuals and communities endured social isolation, economic hardships, and mental health issues due to the fear and stigma associated with these stereotypes (Lantz, Wenger & Mills, 2023; Zamri, 2023). Media coverage amplifying anti-Asian sentiment and negative stereotypes jeopardises social unity and diversity (Hedrick, 2023). The media has sowed fear, mistrust, and division by perpetuating and cultivating biases. This has impeded efforts to forge a more inclusive and equitable society where everyone feels valued and respected (Hedrick, 2023; Eason, 2023).

However, several initiatives suggested that a multi-faceted approach to counteract media anti-Asian sentiment and stereotyping could address the fundamental causes: advocating for diversity in media ownership and leadership, instilling critical media literacy across all audiences, and enforcing media accountability in reporting (de Cesari, 2023; Garbe, Selvik & Lemaire, 2023). The COVID-19 outbreak underscores the imperative to combat media bias and anti-Asian sentiment. These biases have inflicted severe harm on Asian communities and weakened societal bonds. Promoting diversity, media literacy, and confronting bias can contribute to establishing a more just and inclusive media landscape that authentically represents all individuals and fosters a fair and inclusive society.

Richard Dyer's perceptive exploration of how media constructs and perpetuates whiteness enriches critical whiteness studies 'discourse on prejudiced coverage, underscoring media's pivotal role in shaping perspectives and power dynamics. In his 1997 publication "White", Dyer scrutinises how the media sustains racial hierarchy by reinforcing whiteness. As evidenced in its scrutiny of racial discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic, the investigation adeptly incorporates Dyer's insightful observations to expose how media prejudices shape whiteness and its ramifications. Dyer concentrates on the "white gaze" and its impact on culture. The research dissects media reporting of the pandemic through this standpoint, illustrating how whiteness in society influences the representation of racialised incidents such as the Omicron variant response (Dyer, 1997; Meghji & Niang, 2022). The study's exploration of the media's impact on perceptions aligns with critical whiteness studies. Following Dyer, the media actively manufactures and sustains whiteness, mirroring the study's revelations on skewed COVID-19 reporting (Arthur, 2023). The investigation demonstrates how whiteness is a constructed identity, that permeates media narratives (Dyer, 1997; Meghji & Niang, 2022).

The study also assesses how the media shapes racial identities. It illustrates how race, representation, and authority intertwine through biased media reporting, reinforcing

238

Dyer's assertion that the media shapes racial convictions. The research affirms Dyer's findings on the media's role in the racial hierarchy, exposing bias in media coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic and demonstrating how the media can perpetuate power imbalances and racial disparities. Ultimately, critical whiteness studies, particularly Richard Dyer's insights, furnish a comprehensive theoretical framework for the examination of skewed media coverage during the COVID-19 pandemic. Dyer's scrutiny of the media's role in whiteness elucidates how media biases sustain racial hierarchy (Dyer, 1977). The study utilises Dyer's critical insights to explore the media's impact on society and power dynamics in racial discrimination.

6.9.2. Differential representations of loss and struggle

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the media's representation of disparities between White and minority groups. White individuals were frequently depicted through personal narratives of hardship and loss, evoking sympathy, and comprehension. In contrast, Black and Asian individuals were largely overlooked or downplayed. The suffering and casualties among White people during the pandemic received extensive media coverage. These empathetic stories humanised White individuals, casting them as victims of the pandemic (Windarti et al, 2023; Lampropoulou et al, 2023). This narrative resonated with viewers, eliciting a sense of loss. Conversely, media coverage of the pandemic often disregarded the experiences of Black and Asian communities. Their tales of loss, adversity, and resilience were frequently reduced to statistics or general narratives, lacking the personal touch and emotional impact evident in White experiences (Windarti et al, 2023; Lampropoulou, 2023). This marginalisation obscured the hardships faced by minority communities, distorting the diverse effects of the pandemic. As evidenced by Windarti et al (2023) and Lampropoulou et al (2023), media bias during the COVID-19 pandemic was a complex interplay of distorted narratives, eroded trust, and reinforced stereotypes.

6.9.3. Impact on minority communities

Minority groups have borne the brunt of skewed media coverage during the COVID-19 pandemic. Beyond influencing public opinion, biased media coverage has harmed minority communities by eroding trust in the mainstream media, restricting access to factual information, and hindering public health initiatives (Huang et al, 2023). Distrust in the mainstream media due to bias is prevalent among minority communities (Huang et al, 2023). When their experiences are consistently misrepresented and disregarded, minority individuals are less inclined to trust the media. This lack of trust may lead to a decreased likelihood of adhering to guidelines or seeking preventive measures within minority communities (Opdam, 2023).

Media bias can impede access to accurate information, particularly for minority communities lacking the means or cultural expertise to navigate complex media landscapes (Huang et al, 2023). Minority individuals may grapple with health and well-being decisions when presented with biased or misleading information, potentially resulting in poor health choices (Lampropoulou et al, 2023). The mistrust in mainstream media and the absence of reliable information have impeded public health efforts, particularly in minority populations (Huang et al, 2023). According to Huang et al (2023), minority individuals have been less inclined to follow public health recommendations such as social distancing, mask-wearing, and vaccination due to a lack of trust in the media. This scepticism can contribute to worse health outcomes and increased virus transmission within minority populations (Eason, 2023). Health disparities exacerbate the adverse effects of discriminatory media coverage on minority groups (Huang et al, 2023). Higher poverty rates, limited healthcare access, and healthcare bias in minority communities (Alhomsi et al, 2023) make it more challenging for these populations to adhere to public health guidelines or access preventive care, intensifying the skewed media representation.

6.9.4. Media bias and its ripple effect

Media bias impacts employment, interpersonal relationships, and access to crucial resources beyond public perception. As Perry et al (2021) emphasised, media bias contributes to individual prejudices and erects structural barriers for minority communities, hindering their attainment of true equity and inclusion (Huang et al, 2023). The influence of media bias on employment is evident. It perpetuates unfavourable preconceptions about the talent, work ethic, and qualifications of minority communities (Perry et al, 2021). These public stereotypes can result in prejudiced hiring practices, making it more challenging for minorities to secure jobs that align with their skills. The inability of minority communities to secure equal jobs and professional advancement opportunities obstructs individual career paths and contributes to economic inequities.

Media prejudice also undermines interpersonal trust and understanding between different races and ethnicities. Negative representations of minorities foster fear and suspicion among the majority (Perry et al, 2021). This environment impedes meaningful partnerships, escalating community distrust and separation. Disruptions in interpersonal relationships impede social cohesion and societal progress towards a harmonious and inclusive future (Alhomsi et al, 2023). Correcting distorted media narratives and fostering understanding, empathy, and collaboration across diverse communities are necessary to address this issue.

Media prejudice significantly affects housing, healthcare, and education access. Landlords, healthcare providers, and schools engage in discrimination based on stereotypes of minority communities (Perry et al, 2021). These actions perpetuate a cycle of resource inequality that disproportionately affects minorities. Biased depictions can influence housing policies, leading to discrimination in minority house rentals or sales. Healthcare providers influenced by biased media perceptions may deliver inadequate care, exacerbating health inequities (Steuter & Martin, 2023). Educational

institutions may inadvertently reinforce systemic biases, hindering the academic and professional success of minority students.

The systemic nature of media bias must be acknowledged to comprehend its effects. Biased media representations generate negative preconceptions and assumptions that permeate institutional practices and policies (Perry et al, 2021). Breaking this cycle requires rectifying prejudiced narratives, implementing structural changes in various sectors, promoting inclusivity, and actively dismantling systemic barriers that harm minority communities. Ultimately, media bias shapes society and conventions beyond individual ideas. Recognising and addressing these prejudices are crucial for creating an equal and inclusive society that values everyone's diverse experiences and contributions.

6.9.5. Connection to theory

Black Americans tend to hold an above-average distrust towards the media according to a study conducted by the Centre for Media Engagement, questioning Black Americans at the University of Texas in Austin. While Black Americans expressed some level of trust in journalists, they were sceptical about their ability to accurately report on Black communities. In this regard, they were not trusted storytellers. Few Black Americans had experienced meeting journalists and were put off by the lack of diversity within newsrooms. The coverage of Black communities was deemed inadequate, with participants highlighting a lack of context, one-sidedness, and incompleteness in media reporting. (Masullo et al., 2022)

The lack of trust Black Americans have in the mainstream media, due to the continued examples of their failings to report on their communities comprehensively (with full consideration of factors such as systemic inequality and racial realities), self-perpetuates poor health outcomes particularly as it relates to the COVID-19 vaccine. Vaccine hesitancy among Black Americans increased their already heightened COVID-19 risks. People of colour have centuries of examples of their trust being violated which

contributes to vaccine hesitancy (Yao et al., 2022). Vaccine hesitancy, coupled with the increased likelihood of relevant pre-existing conditions due to systemic inequalities in the healthcare system, worsens health outcomes even further. And if the media and American institutions continue to fail Black Americans, disparities such as the stark contrast in COVID-19 health outcomes are likely to continue.

Inspired by Schiller's paradigm, the study systematically explores how media corporations perpetuate power imbalances and exclude opposing perspectives in their narratives (Meghji & Niang, 2022). Globalisation, media ownership, and conflict theory are interlinked, illustrating how media power concentration sustains social hierarchies and marginalisation. The study's examination of media dynamics during the COVID-19 pandemic bolsters Schiller and Schiller's assertion that powerful entities exploit media ownership to manipulate information (Schiller & Schiller, 1969; Meghji & Niang, 2022). The report contends that media conglomerates contribute to "gatekeeping", where a select few determine which messages reach the public, crafting a biased narrative that reinforces power systems. This supports Schiller and Schiller's contention that media ownership enables dominant parties to influence information transmission and societal narratives (Schiller & Schiller, 1969).

While covering the entire COVID-19 pandemic, the study deepens Schiller and Schiller's theories in a contemporary setting. It allows researchers to scrutinise how media conglomerates from the Global North shaped discourse on racial dynamics as part of globalisation and the conflict theory. This nuanced research underscores the significance of Schiller and Schiller's perspective on media ownership in a globalised world and its alignment with Meghji and Niang's (2021) contentions. The study's exploration of media conglomerates, power differentials, and racial biases relies on Schiller and Schiller's perspective on globalisation as conflict theory in media ownership. Schiller and Schiller's viewpoint enhances the study by providing a

theoretical lens to comprehend how the worldwide media ecosystem influences societal narratives and marginalises divergent opinions.

COVID-19 has exposed the media's deleterious involvement in racial biases and discrimination, particularly against Black and Asian communities. According to the integrated threat theory, society is inherently contentious, with factions vying for scarce resources and power (Khunti et al, 2020). From this standpoint, the media aids dominant groups in maintaining power, marginalising minorities (Oschatz, Stier & Maier, 2022). This examination demonstrates that the media's online and print coverage of racial prejudice against Black and Asian Americans during the pandemic perpetuated adverse outcomes (Eibschutz et al, 2023). As postulated by the integrated threat theory, the media's depiction of Black and Asian populations as threats during the pandemic bolstered prejudice and discrimination against these groups (Khunti et al, 2020; Hertzberg, 2020).

6.10. SUMMARY

There indeed lies an inherent bias in how the media reports its news, and this was made clear during the discovery of the COVID-19 virus. News reporters, while reporting on COVID-19 cases, needed to report the recovery rates and put its risk into perspective, rather than contributing to hate and bias against specific societies in the name of taking precautions against the spread of the virus. People, mostly those living in Western countries, grow up surrounded by casual expressions or racial discrimination and stereotypical images, which eventually impact their thinking, beliefs, and attitudes towards racialised groups of people (Baldwin, 2017). The damage caused by political leaders, news, social media, and other media outlets during this period is one that could take the longest time to do away with (Meghji & Niang, 2022). It takes time to heal, but even during the writing of this thesis, racism towards Blacks and Asians persists in Western countries, like Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States; that is, the damage from social media and the news media will take time to simmer unless another global crisis that mirrors COVID-19 arises.

Nonetheless, research is needed to enable us to understand the social processes that took place causing an increase in racism as well as the impact it had on the health of those affected and the interventions that were taken to lessen the occurrence of such incidences, together with their mental impact. This study gains vigour from employing a strategy that uses content analysis, which includes a collaboration of data from experts and qualitative researchers. This study implies that the pandemic brought about spillover impacts on racial matters and further reveals that racial prejudices are connected to health issues. Additionally, creating awareness of racial attitudes could have policy effects that are vital for one's wellness.

Chapter 7 of this dissertation will summarise the findings and insights gained from the preceding chapters, providing a comprehensive understanding of the role of the media in perpetuating racial discrimination towards minorities, specifically Black and Asian Americans, during the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter will begin by revisiting the research problem, objectives, and research questions, reflecting on how each chapter contributed to addressing these key elements. It will then discuss the implications and significance of the research findings, highlighting the impact of media representations on racial discrimination and its consequences on individuals and society. The chapter will draw upon the literature reviewed in the earlier chapters to provide a theoretical framework for interpreting the results. It will address the limitations of the study and suggest areas for future research, recognising the complex nature of media influence and the need for continued examination.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION: SHEDDING LIGHT ON A COMPLEX GLOBAL PANDEMIC AND HOW THE MEDIA COVERED RACE

7.1. INTRODUCTION

This study has shed much light on how the media covered race during the COVID-19 pandemic. Firstly, X is utilised by journalists and various influential figures in the political sphere, including politicians and government workers whose influence can shape the news. Terms such as "Kung flu" were used repeatedly to describe the Asian connection to the virus. These terms were pontificated by President Trump and others, making their way into the headlines. To amplify the problem, the study from the American Journal of Public Health reported that 50% of posts about the virus involved key hashtags like #Chinesevirus. While only 20% of posts about the global pandemic containing neutral hashtags like #COVID-19 share similar sentiments. In the case of X, hashtags are used to endorse, support, or go against the sentiment of the text that follows. The research study yields interesting results from posts that utilise race-related words. From the start of the pandemic and throughout its course, posts of hate and doubt were cast on Black and Asian people.

In late 2019, the world was abruptly thrust into the grips of the COVID-19 virus, originating in Wuhan, China. The unforeseen repercussions of this disease, characterised by widespread lockdowns, stringent restrictions, and the unprecedented race for vaccinations, made an impact on societies worldwide. As the unfolding events were witnessed through the lens of news media and propagated across social media platforms, the scope of the pandemic's impact surpassed even the direst predictions. This period, from the initial emergence of the virus to the subsequent rise of the Omicron variant, has been meticulously explored, analysed, and synthesised throughout this research study.

In this concluding chapter, the culmination of extensive research endeavours and analytical insights help to form a comprehensive understanding of the role that the media played in shaping perceptions and biases during this pivotal period. There were several key components of the study in the background, research problems, theoretical frameworks, strengths, and limitations. With each step, the implications of media representation in fostering racial discrimination towards minorities were brought to the forefront. Qualitative content analysis explored the links between media, societal sentiment, and racial dynamics. With a spotlight on theoretical frameworks, including the integrated threat theory, hegemony, otherness, agency, critical race theory, media richness theory, conflict theory, and prejudice, the results of the study can be placed in a broader context.

The strength of this study is derived not only from its meticulous analysis but also from its commitment to presenting a view of the media's role in shaping societal attitudes. As the strengths that support this research have been acknowledged, it has been important to address its limitations as well. The relationship between economic influences, framing, and the mechanics of news production needed to be addressed, acknowledging the complex system within which media functions.

In the ensuing sections, the implications of media representation on racial discrimination will be reflected upon, examining the context in which these representations are created, and the multifaceted ways in which they impact public perceptions.

7.2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The phenomenon of pandemic outbreaks, as history has shown, possesses an unfortunate tendency to ignite a confluence of violence, racism, and discrimination, often directed towards minority groups, with Asians and Blacks in the United States enduring most of these prejudicial biases. This unsettling trend observed not only during the COVID-19 pandemic but also in previous instances like Ebola, H1N1, SARS, and the Spanish Flu, underscores a disturbing recurrence of societal reactions. Amid these health crises, the media's role as a communicator becomes evident, particularly due to the prevalence of conspiracy theories and misinformation that amplify confusion and inaccuracy in reports.

In the past, the media's portrayal of pandemic outbreaks has involved sensationalism, contributing to an environment of fear, stigmatisation, and violence against marginalised communities. Imprecise reporting has led to grave misunderstandings and even racial conflicts. The way in which diseases are framed in media narratives has been pivotal in exacerbating these tensions. Words like "other", and "African", have been employed to describe outbreaks, effectively painting certain communities as the source of contagion and instigating prejudice and stereotyping, as exemplified during the Ebola outbreak (Smith & Joffe, 2015).

Instances of xenophobic attacks targeting Black people due to prejudice and racial discrimination have emerged, highlighting the relationship between media narratives and societal attitudes. Studies have pointed to the role of the media's negative portrayal in fostering animosity and hatred, further underscoring the detrimental consequences of media missteps during pandemics (Khunti et al, 2020). However, while the media played a role in disseminating vital health information, particularly during emergencies, its impact has not always been beneficial. The skewed representation of minorities — particularly African Americans — in past media, due to the domination of the industry by

the majority, has contributed to the harmful effects of media representation during crises (Branston & Stafford, 2010).

The amplification of hate and bias, facilitated by social media posts, media headlines, and language, has been a persistent theme during pandemic outbreaks. These factors propelled the spread of discriminatory sentiments and influenced public perception. This recurring pattern of prejudice and violence witnessed whenever an unknown-origin pandemic emerges, has led to a tragic loss of innocent lives over the years, underscoring the need for interventions and awareness campaigns.

As the current state of media representation is examined in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is imperative to reflect on the ethical principles that should guide media behaviour. The media's role during crises extends beyond sensationalism; it is tasked with guiding the public through accurate problem definition, causal interpretation, and recommendation of preventive measures (Bjørkdahl & Carlsen, 2017). Regrettably, the media has, at times, deviated from these responsibilities, exposing a departure from its fundamental role.

The combination of the pandemic with the political climate and the 2020 general elections in the United States, has further complicated the media's role in addressing issues of racial equality. The turbulence of recent years has underscored the necessity for an unbiased, ethical, and comprehensive media discourse that not only informs but also elevates and unites diverse voices, fostering a sense of shared responsibility and understanding.

The literature underscores the recurring pattern wherein pandemic outbreaks serve as a catalyst for violence, racism, and discrimination against minority groups. Media representation, often marred by misinformation, sensationalism, and skewed framing, has played a pivotal role in amplifying these negative trends. Social media's role in disseminating hate and bias further exacerbates the situation. To combat this disconcerting trend, solutions must emerge from both media outlets and global leadership. Media organisations must exercise their power responsibly, understanding

the impact they have on public sentiments. Moreover, a call to action must be extended to global leaders to foster greater diversity within media corporations, ensuring proper representation and fair portrayal.

7.3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework chapter highlighted the exploration of racial discrimination within media discourse. Beginning with a recognition of the deeply entrenched nature of racial discrimination across global societies, the chapter also brought to light the necessity for theoretical frameworks to properly contextualise racism's manifestations in the media. These frameworks serve as guiding principles for researchers, facilitating the collection of pertinent information and the application of rigorous analytical methods to scrutinise the extent of racial stereotypes and discrimination across diverse economic and social realms.

Focusing specifically on media representations of racism and minorities in the context of multi-channel and digital education practice and research, particularly since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, this study delved into the fundamental elements of racial discourse's social construction. The concepts of stereotyping and binary opposition are integral to the understanding of media representations. These pivotal aspects shape media narratives and amplify their potential to reinforce preconceived notions. The integrated threat theory was presented to dissect the factors that trigger racial prejudice by dissecting the components of a perceived threat among diverse groups. In the context of this study, this theory aids in dissecting the perceptions of threat that underpin the discrimination faced by Asian and Black people residing in the United States.

Critical race theory lends an interpretive lens to analyse digital media texts, examining racialised content such as news articles and negatively stereotyped social media posts, alongside those that counter racial discrimination by promoting anti-racist ideologies. This framework's lens helps analyse the relationship between media representation and

the broader context of racial dynamics. Media richness theory delved into the media's ability to convey transmitted information effectively and accurately, underscoring the impact of the medium on the messages it carries. This theory sheds light on the potential for the media to perpetuate, or counter, racial stereotypes through the richness of its content.

Conflict theory surfaced as a foundational framework, particularly in Western nations where it is linked to the culture of prejudice. This theory discusses racial disparities in society and exposes how those in control of media outlets exploit mainstream platforms for their advantage, contributing to mass media prejudice against Black and Asian people during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The concept of otherness is a lens through which the emerging "us vs them" mentality during the COVID-19 pandemic can be understood. Otherness can be observed by closely examining the language, narratives, and framing techniques employed in media coverage. Newspapers and X play significant roles in shaping racial perceptions during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. They serve to disseminate government information and public discourse, and their choices in how they frame and report on events can either challenge or reinforce racial biases and racial perceptions.

While these theoretical models offer distinct perspectives on racial discrimination, they collectively form a comprehensive method for examining its dimensions. Their distinct principles and perspectives provide a foundation for collecting data and navigating the challenges of data interpretation.

7.4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This investigation utilised the critical theory research paradigm to furnish a cohesive framework encompassing both qualitative and quantitative components. This paradigm facilitated a distinctive examination of media representation and racial discrimination amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Its foundation was laid in social critique, structural analysis, and transformative objectives, serving as a means to unveil concealed power structures, ingrained ideologies, and systemic complexities contributing to racial disparities.

The research design integrated content analysis, offering a framework to analyse both language usage and the broader contextual underpinnings of media representations. This method facilitated a comprehensive examination of how the media construct narratives about racial discrimination against minorities, providing insights into the power dynamics and societal perceptions that shape these representations.

Data collection was executed through purposive sampling, a deliberate selection of content from online and print media sources. This encompassed platforms such as X and newspapers, both digital and physical. The chosen content spans the timeline from the emergence of COVID-19 up until 12 months after its first reported case. This time frame ensures the inclusion of relevant materials within the study's context.

The methodology's strengths and weaknesses were addressed comprehensively. Benefits included the depth of understanding achieved through interpretive analysis, allowing for rich insights into the dynamics of media representation and its effects. However, limitations such as sample bias were acknowledged, considering the vast array of media coverage during the pandemic, which may result in an uneven representation of perspectives. Additionally, the potential influence of the researcher's own personal biases on data interpretation was acknowledged, alongside the impact of attributes like sex, race, gender, and language on accessed data.

The use of content analysis serves as a powerful tool to unveil the language nuances and contextual dimensions of media representations. The data collection method of purposive sampling ensured a targeted and relevant dataset, while the timeframe captured a crucial period for analysis. The chapter concluded by acknowledging both the advantages and limitations of the selected methods, acknowledging the potential biases and the complex nature of this study that necessitated a multifaceted approach.

7.5. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

Qualitative and quantitative content analysis was employed on both X and online news agencies to scrutinise media representations of Black and Asian Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic. The intention was to detect instances of racism and discrimination against these groups in news coverage and explore the representation of race on X.

X was selected as a focal point due to its extensive usage by a diverse array of individuals, including journalists and government figures. This platform holds significance for investigating cultural and racial prejudices given its broad reach and influential nature. The chapter reflected on the immediate and impactful dissemination of news through X, further emphasising its role in shaping public perceptions.

The analysis uncovered various manifestations of racism, including individual racism, cultural racism, institutional racism, and internalised domination. These categorisations were used to categorise and understand the different forms of discriminatory behaviour observed during the pandemic.

The findings illustrated how anti-Asian discrimination not only impacted Asians and Asian Americans but also affected broader society. The racist language used by political leaders and members of society exacerbated existing anti-Asian sentiments and led to negative mental repercussions for the affected individuals.

The implications of the findings on individuals and society were discussed. It highlighted that there is a need for further research to comprehend the social processes that lead to

the surge in racism and its health consequences. This understanding is crucial for devising interventions to mitigate such incidents and addressing their mental health implications.

The data analysis and interpretation uncovered the striking anti-Asian discrimination that emerged during the pandemic, impacting both Asians and non-Asians. The findings underscored how this discrimination disrupted normal lives and inflicted mental repercussions. The study acknowledged the necessity of future research to delve deeper into the social processes that led to increased racism and to comprehend its health impacts. The study's mixed-method approach and collaboration with experts and qualitative researchers strengthened its validity, emphasising the interconnectedness of racial prejudices and health issues.

7.6. THE ONLINE PRESS

Reading the online press aimed to uncover media biases and prejudices directed towards Black and Asian people during the pandemic, like the examination of content on X. There is an existence of inherent bias within media reporting, which became particularly apparent during the emergence of the COVID-19 virus. Instead of contributing to hate and bias against specific societies in the name of precautions against the virus, news reporters should have provided balanced reporting that included recovery rates and put the risk into perspective. It is noted that individuals in Western countries often grow up surrounded by casual expressions of racial discrimination and stereotypical images, which can shape their beliefs and attitudes towards racialised groups of people.

The chapter emphasised the damage caused by several factors during the pandemic, including political leaders, news outlets, social media platforms, and other media sources. This damage is acknowledged to have lasting implications that might take a long time to heal. The persistence of racism towards Black and Asian people in Western countries like Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States is recognised as a continuing challenge resulting from the impact of social media and news media. It is suggested that unless another global crisis like COVID-19 occurs, the simmering effects of this damage might persist.

This underscored the need for research to understand the social processes that contributed to the increase in racism during the pandemic and the associated health impacts on affected individuals. Interventions that were implemented to reduce such incidents and their mental impact should be explored further.

The study concluded that the pandemic had impacts on racial matters and revealed a connection between racial prejudices and health issues. Raising awareness about racial attitudes is seen as having policy implications that are crucial for individuals 'overall well-being.

7.7. CONCLUSION

This research serves as a synthesis of the extensive exploration into the role of media in perpetuating racial discrimination against minority groups, with a specific focus on Black and Asian Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic.

By shining a light on the influence of media representations on perpetuating racial discrimination, the profound impact that biased media content can have on individuals (and society at large) is brought to light. The consequences of such representations are far-reaching, shaping attitudes, behaviours, and social dynamics. The significance of these findings resonates not only within the context of the pandemic but also in the broader realm of racial relations and media ethics.

To provide a theoretical underpinning for interpreting the results, the conclusions drew upon the theoretical frameworks discussed in earlier sections. The relationship between media and racial ideologies, as illuminated by the integrated threat theory, critical race theory, media richness theory, and conflict theory, reinforces the understanding of the mechanisms at play.

Recognising the complexity of the media influence, the study's limitations provide opportunities for future researchers to explore additional dimensions and variations within this multifaceted landscape. This research examined the media's role in perpetuating racial discrimination during a global crisis. The insights gleaned from this research foster awareness about the power the media wields in shaping societal perceptions and the urgent need for responsible and ethical media practices.

At the time of completion of this research, the fallout from the global pandemic on all levels was quite evident: rising food and fuel costs, rising interest rates, economic uncertainty loomed, and considerations for new masking mandates were suggested by countries like Germany, and even the United States. Additionally, crime on all fronts —

violent assaults, carjackings, thefts, vandalism, break-and-enters, and bank robberies, dramatically increased in countries like the United States and Canada. Still, one thing remains certain: the victims of the pandemic were not only those who suffered from the disease. Those who were blamed through the lens of the media, social media, and mainstream online media: the Asians and Blacks were secondary victims. The underlying problem in media coverage during the pandemic was that the media uniformly followed their typical construction of news approach. The manufacturing of news is really like an assembly line process: timing, framing, sourcing, news discovery, and economic influences, which meant that the media reported the pandemic through a uniform approach. The media relied on the narrative from government officials, healthcare providers, and law enforcement agencies, and this resulted in skewed reporting, therefore negatively impacting visible minorities. Asians, in the end, were framed as the ones who created the disease, while Black people were labelled as a group who helped spread COVID-19 and were not able to handle it from a health standpoint.

COVID-19 presented unparalleled challenges to communities, economies, and, notably, media ecosystems. This research explored the intricate nuances of media coverage and social media dialogue on race, concentrating on minority prejudice, in response to these extraordinary circumstances. Media platforms had the potential to either bolster or question biases as societies grappled with the myriad of effects of the pandemic. This investigation scrutinised X data (Chapter 5) and newspaper coverage (Chapter 6) to discern how these platforms could sway public opinion. These chapters acted as lenses, shedding light on how media narratives impact underrepresented communities, particularly African and Asian communities.

The conclusion of these inquiries summarises key findings and sheds light on the intricate involvement of media in racial biases. The ensuing sections explore the dynamics of social media and traditional journalism, unveiling the "what", "how", and "why" of the media's representation of minorities during a global crisis. It weaves a

narrative encompassing discrimination, resilience, disinformation, and power dynamics in the media, enhancing our comprehension of this unprecedented moment.

7.8. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The extensive investigation scrutinised media coverage of the COVID-19 outbreak and its ramifications on race. Chapter 5 analysed X data, while Chapter 6 examined newspaper coverage. These findings reveal the intricate connection between media narratives, racial biases, and societal behaviour. X emerged as a crucial lens for examining racism and discrimination during the COVID-19 outbreak. This comprehensive study employed qualitative text analysis to ascertain the prevalence of discriminatory language in 280 characters or less. Given its immediacy and significance, X amplified social voices, particularly those in positions of power. Its brevity demanded precision, making it a pivotal tool for understanding media-driven discrimination. Serving as a real-time microcosm of popular sentiment, it provided a unique perspective on pandemic-induced racial biases.

The investigation unfolded against a backdrop of troubling levels of discrimination against Asians and Asian Americans. An informative context linked this surge to statements by influential figures, particularly those of President Trump. A thorough exploration of social media terminology commenced with the intentional use of terms like "Kung flu" and "China virus". Qualitative content analysis guided this examination, revealing a spectrum of discriminatory themes on X, including explicit hate speech, implicit bias, stereotyping, xenophobia, scapegoating, discrimination, and conspiracy theories. Each category represented a distinct facet of discriminatory expressions.

Discrimination on X was elucidated through thematic analysis, exploring the subtexts of these themes, and unravelling the complexity of discriminatory language. The concept of active and inactive racism as subcodes helped elucidate these subtleties in language. X underwent analysis using axial coding and a well-prepared codebook, examining over 402 posts, each reflective of societal sentiments. The findings exposed individual,

258

cultural, and institutional prejudice, showcasing the societal and institutional implications of discriminatory language. The study addressed the troubling surge in offensive posts, particularly targeting Asians and Blacks. Implicit bias, subtle assumptions, stereotypes, and explicit hate speech were prevalent. Toxic narratives were perpetuated by subtle prejudices, namely stereotyping. The interconnection of discrimination stood out as a particularly disheartening finding. The study illustrated how explicit hate speech, implicit bias, and stereotyping were interwoven, creating an atmosphere of prejudice and hostility.

X's findings underscored the urgency of condemning overt hate speech and implementing legal and educational measures. A concerted effort was deemed necessary to raise awareness, educate, and challenge ingrained notions about the subtle detrimental impacts of implicit bias. The study proposed placing disease carrier prejudices in their historical context and considering the broader effects of damaging narratives. It exposed the prevalence of biased language on X and its profound impact on societal beliefs. Posts influenced public discourse and individual perspectives beyond the confines of 280 characters. The chapter's conclusion called on society to reflect on its commitment to ending discriminatory language and promoting understanding, empathy, and equity.

The study scrutinised the influence of print and digital media on pandemic-induced racial biases and the roles played by major newspapers (Chapter 6). This examination analysed media narratives from the onset of the pandemic to the debut of the Omicron variant. Through content analysis, the study probed how prominent newspapers depicted the infection. The meticulous dissection unearthed biases and xenophobia against African and Asian communities, illustrating the shaping influence of media narratives on society. The investigation traced media discourses throughout the outbreak, from its early tremors to the emergence of the Omicron variant, showcasing how media depictions influenced public responses. This quantitative content study of thirty news pieces from major outlets like the *New York Post*, *The New York Times*, *The*

Guardian, *NBC*, and *Fox News* revealed alarming patterns. The media's use of terms such as "Kung flu" and "Wuhan virus" unveiled a disturbing undercurrent.

A comprehensive examination brought forth four central themes, elucidating the intricate nature of media narratives. COVID-19 was depicted as a multifaceted menace with global ramifications, characterised by racialisation. Calls for collective action against racialisation and conjectural solutions to combat prejudice highlighted the media's influence on Asian hate crimes and harassment. Subthemes were scrutinised within these overarching themes to furnish additional intricacies. The scrutiny focused on the perils of misinformation/disinformation, the virus as an economic peril, and collective efforts to thwart racialisation, enhancing the comprehension of media dynamics.

Beyond mere headlines and storylines, the survey unveiled instances of media partiality, ideological inclinations, and scepticism. Public perception was shaped through gatekeeping, coverage choices, and bias in statements. Instances from chosen articles exemplified the transformation of the COVID-19 narrative from a medical concern to a political one. Articles from *The Washington Post* and *People's Daily* underscored ideological stances. Disparate narratives showcased how ideological undercurrents shaped media representations, underscoring the imperative need to scrutinise information representation. The examination of media stories 'framing of foreground and background events employed the concept of dominance. Racist attitudes and selective travel restrictions that nurtured prejudices and the sense of "otherness" were laid bare in headlines and media coverage of the Omicron variant. The survey unearthed a deep-seated distrust among Black Americans towards the media. According to the Centre for Media Engagement, deficiencies in journalism, lack of diversity, and inadequate coverage of Black communities perpetuate this scepticism and yield unfavourable outcomes.

The research delved into the significant public health impact of media-induced racism. Against the backdrop of Black American vaccination hesitancy, historical injustices and

systemic abuses underscored the necessity for improved media coverage, diverse perspectives, and a purposeful effort to address historical trust issues. In its intricate tapestry of findings, the study brought to light the interplay between media, racial biases, and outcomes in the COVID-19 pandemic. The study illuminated the extensive repercussions of media-induced racism, spanning from harsh language on X to narratives in prominent newspapers.

Mindful language use is imperative as social media platforms are intertwined with explicit hate speech, implicit bias, and stereotyping. The media's representation of racial discrimination against Black and Asian Americans, whether online or in print, perpetuated adverse outcomes, necessitating a substantial overhaul of media practices. The biased coverage of the Omicron variant exemplified how the media reinforced prejudices and the sense of "otherness". Press bias, ideology, and distrust impact public opinion, perpetuating unfavourable outcomes. The mistrust of mainstream media among Black Americans contributed to health disparities and vaccine hesitancy.

The study sheds light on media-induced racism and provides guidance for a more equitable future. Responsible language, building trust within Black communities, and incorporating diverse perspectives are pivotal for a well-informed and just response to COVID-19 and future health crises.

7.9. CONCLUDING ARGUMENTS

7.9.1. Research question 1: How did the media cover race during the global COVID-19 pandemic?

COVID-19 constituted an unparalleled health calamity that laid bare the intricate correlation between media representation and societal perspectives, particularly in relation to race. The initial goal was to fathom how the media racialised COVID-19. Chapter 6 delineated how the media sculpted the narrative of the epidemic. The examination scrutinised how well-known newspapers 'categorisations and figurative language for the malady contributed to racialisation. The findings indicated that publications such as the *New York Post*, *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *NBC*, and *Fox News* employed discriminatory terms such as "Kung flu" and "Wuhan virus". This objective underscored that these linguistic selections transcended mere description; they actively contributed to racialising the virus, disseminating preconceptions, and fostering racial prejudices.

Building upon the initial objective, the research probed into how media stereotypes and prejudices unjustly singled out Black and Asian communities. Media outlets perpetuated biases through their publications, fostering ignorance and bigotry. The investigation illuminated how media narratives perpetuated existing biases, portraying the pandemic as a multifaceted menace that rendered specific racial and ethnic groups more susceptible. The study demonstrated that derogatory expressions became entrenched in language, influencing public perceptions and fuelling racial discrimination. The inquiry zeroed in on how media representation influences public opinion and tangible outcomes. In Chapter 6, the media's coverage of discriminatory language and skewed storylines showed widespread repercussions. According to the studies, media representation actively perpetuated adverse outcomes. Media practices resulted in discrimination, violence, and harassment against Asians. Racial biases were prevalent and could inflict harm due to the influence of media. The aim was to unveil how media crafted and disseminated distorted narratives. Chapter 6 scrutinised media bias — gate-keeping bias, coverage bias, and statement bias — through content analysis. The

findings indicated that media reporting encompassed prejudiced language and discriminatory narratives. Understanding these systems was crucial to comprehending the "what, how, and why" of media biases. Formulating measures to counteract bias and foster a more comprehensive and responsible media landscape necessitated this comprehension.

Progressing beyond mere critiques of the media to unearth opportunities for intervention and change constituted the final objective. Chapter 6 appraised media coverage and put forth recommendations and prospective avenues. The study formulated targeted interventions by recognising power dynamics within the media and acknowledging racial biases. To instigate positive change, recommendations included employing appropriate language, diversifying newsroom staff, and launching awareness campaigns. This goal recognised that the study's impact extended beyond analysis, aspiring to contribute to discussions on media ethics and societal attitudes. Ultimately, the objectives established a comprehensive framework for comprehending media representation during the global pandemic. The study delved into media practices to identify biases and advocate for a more equitable and inclusive media landscape, cognisant of its profound influence on public perceptions and societal outcomes.

7.9.2. Research question 2: In what ways did the media contribute to the discrimination of racial minorities since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic?

A crucial evaluation of the media's involvement in race-based discrimination since the onset of COVID-19 constitutes the initial research inquiry. The fifth and sixth chapters expose an alarming reality: the media actively endorsed race-based discrimination on social media and in traditional news outlets. Through meticulous qualitative content analysis of X data, the investigation unveiled a disturbing prevalence of explicit hate speech targeting Asians and Blacks. This revelation validates the media's contribution to race-based prejudice linked to COVID-19. X's immediacy, emphasised in the report, amplifies derogatory remarks that escalate racial tensions. The study illustrates how

damaging narratives swiftly disseminate on the network by focusing on discriminatory language, recognising such content, and highlighting X's dynamic role in rapidly spreading harmful comments.

The research scrupulously compiles discriminating language, unveiling the detrimental impacts. The detailed categorisation elucidates the harm caused by blatant hate speech, providing a robust foundation for comprehending the subject for readers and academics alike. The study elucidates how X perpetuates a cycle of discrimination against minorities, resulting in substantial harm. By illustrating the tangible effects of explicit hate speech, the research transcends academic observation, demonstrating that the media, particularly X, actively advocates for race-based discrimination. Therefore, this extensive examination of explicit hate speech is surprising, acknowledging its presence and elucidating its implications. By delving into X's mechanics, the study established a solid framework for comprehending the media's active role in endorsing race-based discrimination.

The thorough analysis uncovered X as an intricate battleground where implicit biases permeated ostensibly innocent statements and conversations. Chapter 5's thematic analysis illustrates how implicit bias, ingrained in preconceptions, subtly infiltrated X. The study's thematic analysis, which meticulously scrutinises recurring patterns and topics, reveals X's hidden intricacies. It expounds the ingrained biases, rooted in society, manifested in 280 characters, illustrating that thematic analysis extends beyond hate speech. The research's penetrating analysis correlates implicit prejudices with explicit hate speech, connecting overt and covert discriminatory language. This insight is pivotal to constructing a narrative beyond bias acknowledgement, demonstrating a continuum of discrimination beyond overt displays by highlighting the dynamic interaction between various components. The study brings to light implicit prejudices, aiding in the understanding of the media's subtle role in discrimination against X. The platform intentionally reinforces minor prejudices in online discussions. This perceptive

contribution moves beyond outright hate speech, suggesting that language and representation can equally shape discriminatory beliefs.

The discovery of implicit prejudices beyond overt expressions alters people's perception of media, especially X, as a source of discrimination. By revealing that prejudiced narratives extend beyond blatant hate speech, the study broadens the media's role in normalising discrimination. The study's exploration of implicit biases on X illuminates media discrimination, supporting the overarching conclusion that the media fostered race-based discrimination, highlighting its nuanced and interconnected nature beyond explicit hate speech. The thematic analysis in Chapter 5 scrutinised the intricate fabric of social media messages, notably on X, unveiling COVID-19 pandemic tropes. This critical examination demonstrates how media, confined to 280 characters, deliberately injected prejudices into posts to shape perceptions and perpetuate discrimination.

The study's thematic analysis unveils X's stereotypes, illuminating how cultural preconceptions were expressed in short-form communication through recurring patterns and topics. The study illustrated how the media, particularly users of X, associated Chinese cuisine with the virus and stigmatised Asian communities. This data supports the notion that social media stereotypes were tangible. Cataloguing these instances demonstrates how media narratives intentionally perpetuated damaging stereotypes. The study's emphasis on X's character limit explains how stereotypes were purposefully employed. Media messages condensed intricate stereotypes into 280 characters. Strategically using brevity to amplify and disseminate prejudices across the internet, normalises discriminatory beliefs.

The study adeptly connects X media depictions to the promotion of race-based discrimination by exploiting stereotypes deliberately. This narrative transcends acknowledging preconceptions and meticulously links media messages 'intentional exploitation of stereotypes to their societal effects. This connection supports the assertion that X deliberately shaped attitudes by perpetuating damaging stereotypes.

Chapter 5's examination of X preconceptions is a revelation, demonstrating how media perpetuated pandemic discrimination. Grounded in thematic analysis, real examples, and X's character limit, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of how stereotypes were strategically utilised to normalise discriminatory beliefs. Chapter 6 elaborates on the exploration of newspapers, encompassing both traditional print and digital formats. A comprehensive methodology utilising content analysis unveils the contribution of major journalistic outlets to racial biases during the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter meticulously scrutinised the dynamics of media power, laying bare the substantial influence newspapers wield over public opinion and behaviour.

The investigation delved into thirty news items, exposing the utilisation of discriminatory phrases such as "Kung flu" and "Wuhan virus" in headlines. Such language served to racialise the virus, intensifying negative attitudes. Unintentionally, newspapers propagated stereotypes, fostering discrimination against African and Asian groups, and establishing a troubling synergy between media representation and societal biases. The centrality of public opinion in the inquiry underscores a nuanced relationship between media representation and social sentiments. According to the study, the media exacerbated Asian hate crimes, discrimination, and harassment. At times, newspapers justified and even encouraged discrimination by framing the virus as a specific threat to particular racial and ethnic groups. In Chapter 6, the analysis of newspaper content identified four principal themes: the racialisation of the COVID-19 virus, its representation as an imminent threat, calls for collective action against racialisation, and speculative solutions to racial discrimination. These interlinked themes contributed to an underlying discourse that fuelled race-based discrimination throughout the pandemic, offering a nuanced perspective on the complex role of newspapers in shaping public perception.

The findings of research question 1 indicate that both X and newspapers perpetuated race-based discrimination during the COVID-19 outbreak. X disseminated prejudiced language swiftly, while newspapers crafted biased narratives with their extensive reach. The media actively propagated and amplified cultural preconceptions, contributing to

discrimination. Whether in 280 characters or news headlines, discriminatory language, explicit hate speech, implicit biases, and stereotypes shaped public perception and behaviour. This discovery underscores the immense responsibility of the media in times of crisis. The study underscores the necessity for a comprehensive reassessment of media practices, focusing on responsible language use, diversity in representation, and a commitment to inclusive and fair discourse. Comprehending how media representation shapes public perception becomes pivotal due to its symbiotic interaction with societal attitudes. Acknowledging its role as a major influencer, the media must acknowledge its contribution to discrimination and strive for positive change. Beyond X's immediacy and newspapers 'reach, the study suggests that media companies should shoulder more responsibility for the potential impact of their narratives on society.

The study sheds light on a crucial aspect of media influence by scrutinising biased headlines. The use of terms like "Kung flu" and "Wuhan virus" exposes journalistic negligence and the media's involvement in perpetuating harmful stereotypes. Headlines, as succinct summaries of news articles, possess the capacity to reinforce prejudices and shape public opinion. The impact on public opinion underscores how media representation fuels discrimination. By emphasising the threat of the virus to specific racial and ethnic groups, newspapers validated and promoted discrimination. Media outlets need to address the broader societal implications of their narratives and their influence on public attitudes and behaviours.

Racism, the depiction of the COVID-19 virus as an urgent threat, calls for collective action to combat racialisation, and speculative solutions contribute to a narrative that fosters discrimination. This research emphasises the imperative for media entities to critically assess their narratives and the risks associated with disseminating discriminatory themes. From X to newspapers, the study illustrates how various channels contributed to a pandemic cycle of bigotry. The immediacy of X facilitated the rapid spread of prejudiced language, nurturing negative narratives. However, the broader reach and influence of newspapers enabled the dissemination of biased

narratives that impacted public opinion. This calls for action, underscoring the crucial role of the media in instigating social change. Media practices warrant re-evaluation as they perpetuate bigotry. This reassessment emphasises responsible language use, diversity in representation, and a commitment to inclusive speech. In addition to academic research, the study underscores the social influence of media narratives. As a significant influencer, the media must acknowledge its role in discrimination and actively work towards positive change. Dismantling damaging stereotypes, challenging unconscious biases, and fostering a more inclusive and equitable society demand deliberate efforts.

7.9.3. Research question 3: How did the media represent minorities during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Chapter 5 deepened comprehension of media-driven discrimination during the COVID-19 outbreak using X data. The posts 'explicit hate speech, implicit bias, and stereotyping underwent scrutiny in this research to unveil the platform's engagement in fostering discriminatory beliefs. X was revealed as a disconcerting source of unequivocal hate speech, targeting Asian and Black people. Racist slurs and severe language in the posts cultivate animosity and discrimination, a perilous aspect of media representation. This revelation poses significant inquiries about the role of social media networks in overseeing injurious content. A thematic study explored the concealed, yet potent, implicit prejudice and stereotyping in posts. Depictions of specific racial groups proved detrimental, mirroring and perpetuating societal biases. The media on X mirrored societal biases, raising apprehensions about the platform's contribution to endorsing unfavourable opinions. The study exposed the intertwining of themes like scapegoating and conspiracy beliefs. X media narratives attributed blame for the outbreak to specific racial and ethnic groups. Scapegoating entrenched discrimination and hostility, nurturing unfounded accusations and conspiracies. This prompts questions about the societal ramifications of unregulated social media narratives.

A tapestry of discriminatory language surfaced from X's explicit hate speech, implicit bias, stereotyping, scapegoating, and conspiracy theories. The platform evolved into a forum for blatant discrimination, covert biases, and conspiratorial thinking. X's diverse racist language necessitated substantial attention and intervention. The data analysis carries ramifications across platforms. It underscores the potency of social media in amplifying discriminatory attitudes, underscoring the urgency to counteract hate speech, implicit biases, and injurious stereotypes. X data aids the study in comprehending media-driven discrimination during a global crisis.

The data illustrates that social media strongly shapes public opinion and discrimination. X's prevalence may normalise prejudiced beliefs by magnifying the discriminating discourse. This study proposes that social media companies should intensify efforts to alleviate discriminatory narratives as society contends with the consequences of unregulated hate speech. Content moderation policies may prove insufficient due to X's manifold discriminating language. This study advocates for a more sophisticated and proactive approach to addressing implicit biases, prejudices, and conspiracy theories lurking beneath explicit hate speech. To adapt content moderation strategies to evolving social norms and challenges, social media companies should seek counsel from experts, advocacy groups, and populations affected by discrimination.

X data from the study also enlightens educators, policymakers, and community leaders. Recognising discriminatory language on social media enables targeted education to eradicate implicit biases and stereotypes. Policymakers can leverage these findings to formulate more secure and inclusive online regulations. To combat discrimination, community leaders can employ this knowledge to establish programmes which will foster awareness, dialogue, and unity. As technology continues to shape public discourse, the study's findings advocate for a collective endeavour to combat social media discrimination. Society can forge a digital landscape that champions equality, diversity, and inclusion by addressing the intricate relationship between explicit hate speech, implicit bias, stereotyping, scapegoating, and conspiracy theories.

Lastly, Chapter 5's X data analysis proves pivotal in scrutinising media-driven discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic. Stakeholders must scrutinise and collaborate in the wake of the study, which exposed X's ubiquity and the interconnectedness of discriminatory themes. This study lays the groundwork for fashioning a digital environment that champions fairness, comprehension, and respect as society navigates technology, media, and discrimination. Chapter 6's investigation into how leading newspapers contributed to racial biases during the COVID-19 pandemic contributes significantly to this analysis. Quantitative content analysis disclosed biased headlines, the racialisation of the virus, the perpetuation of an impending threat narrative, collectivisation, and speculative solutions. This content analysis exhibited that major newspapers employ discriminating phrases in headlines.

The study unearthed that terms such as "Kung flu" and "Wuhan virus" sustained racialised pathogen framing. These expressions promoted the stigmatisation of Asians and Blacks, framing them as dangers. This revelation challenges the concept of responsible journalism and media terminology to avert stereotyping and prejudice.

A thorough examination unveiled press coverage of the racialisation of COVID-19. News portrayed the virus as a health catastrophe and a multifaceted threat to specific racial and ethnic groups. This framing nurtured discriminatory behaviour fuelled by a perceived threat. The media's linking of a health issue to particular populations, exacerbated discrimination. Newspapers depicted the virus as an escalating menace. Through this, they instilled anxiety and urgency by consistently underscoring the threat of the virus. While this narrative might have aimed to convey the seriousness of the situation, it stigmatised Asians. The heightened fear encouraged discriminatory actions as justified responses to an imminent risk, illustrating the delicate balance the media must strike in disseminating information without reinforcing detrimental preconceptions.

Analysis of press coverage brought to light themes of collectivisation and proposed solutions. Some newspapers presented measures to counteract racialisation, which were oversimplified at times. The study found that the media advocated for targeting specific racial and ethnic groups to halt the pandemic. While rooted in public health, this strategy raised ethical concerns about perpetuating discriminatory behaviours to confront a global health crisis. Research on newspaper coverage demonstrated how media outlets shape public opinion and perpetuate racial biases. The use of discriminatory terms in headlines, the racialisation of the virus, the propagation of an impending threat narrative, and the portrayal of collectivisation and speculative solutions all contributed to a media landscape that exacerbated negative perceptions and fostered discrimination.

These findings extend beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, prompting reflections on the media's role in fostering a more inclusive and equitable society. In times of crisis, responsible journalism without discriminatory language fosters understanding and unity. The study critiques media practices and advocates for ethical reporting that avoids stereotypes and societal divisions. The analysis indicates that the media's representation of minorities during the COVID-19 outbreak influenced public opinion. X and newspapers fuelled racial biases by employing discriminatory language, reinforcing stereotypes, and labelling specific communities as threats. The racialisation of the virus and the representation of minorities as threats, heightened unfavourable sentiments, further perpetuating adverse outcomes. In certain instances, media rhetoric and themes actively encouraged racism, discrimination, and harassment towards Asian and Black people. This comprehensive study underscores the imperative for media companies to critically assess their role in fostering discrimination. It issues a compelling call to action for media practices, emphasising ethical and balanced representation as media narratives impact societal attitudes and behaviours.

Several think-tanks and media organisations over the years have been quick to address the issue of racism in the news and on social media, including X. A quick snapshot of 2019 provides us with a look at diversity in newsrooms in the USA. A case in point in

2019: 22% of salaried employees in newsrooms were people of colour; 19% of newsroom managers and editors were people of colour; and 26% of news outlets had a non-white person in a news leadership role (Syracuse University, 2019). What does this tell us? There are not enough visible minorities to prioritise the news, hence creating systematic biases in reporting. The solution: Blacks, Asians, and all minority groups are needed as voices in newsrooms and leadership roles to challenge the status quo. During the pandemic, the media relied on the voice of "officials" when covering the global pandemic, and the result was most obvious: Asian and Black people were stereotyped and the "us vs them" affect came directly into play. The integrated threat theory, hegemony, otherness and racial perception, agency, critical race theory, media richness theory, and conflict theory and prejudice, are foundations that help in deconstructing the news during the COVID-19 pandemic. More importantly, it is the suggestion of this researcher, that mainstream media also utilise voices of alternative media to offer a broader scope of coverage that is less discriminatory.

There is a plethora of podcasts and independent online news channels that the mainstream can partner with to provide more voices and perspectives. Finally, the media, along with government officials and other institutions, need to host more public conferences to address the issue of bias and racism in the media and more journalistic guidelines need to be employed so that the news is more fairly offered to news consumers. In the end, most news and social media users most likely experienced "COVID-19 burnout". The news and posts were endless and any important messages were lost in the thousands of stories and social media posts. This study and its findings should serve as a reminder of how "the other" is portrayed during a crisis, and why more visible minorities and alternative media voices are needed more than ever in the mainstream press. Who knows when the next world crisis may happen; it could be another pandemic, climate change or a financial meltdown. Whatever the case, this study serves as a new voice for change and reforms within mainstream and social media institutions.

7.10. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.10.1 Recommendations for Media Houses and Journalists

Media houses and journalists should prioritize media literacy and practice conscientious journalism. This involves reporting with accuracy, fairness, and impartiality to mitigate the spread of biased and discriminatory narratives. Diversity within media organizations should be actively promoted to ensure a variety of perspectives and reduce the likelihood of one-sided reporting. Training programs focused on identifying and avoiding prejudiced language, one-sided narratives, and stereotyping should be mandatory for all media professionals. Furthermore, editorial policies should include strict guidelines for verifying information and providing balanced viewpoints. Media outlets should also engage in regular self-assessment and third-party audits to ensure adherence to ethical standards and to identify areas for improvement. Encouraging open dialogue within media teams about bias and representation can foster a more inclusive and conscientious reporting culture.

7.10.2 Recommendations for Policymakers

Policymakers should develop and enforce regulations that promote media accountability. This includes implementing policies that discourage discriminatory language and biased reporting. Media platforms should be required to adopt and enforce standards for fair representation of all racial and ethnic groups. Policies should also encourage the monitoring and management of social media content to prevent the spread of negative and biased narratives. Additionally, policymakers should support initiatives aimed at improving media literacy among the general public. Financial and institutional support for independent media watchdogs can further enhance accountability. Policymakers should also facilitate public forums and discussions to allow for community input on media practices and to address concerns related to racial bias. Collaborative efforts between government bodies and media organizations can

lead to the development of more comprehensive and effective guidelines that align with both journalistic integrity and public interest.

7.10.3. Recommendations for Communities and Individuals

Communities and individuals play a critical role in countering media-induced bias and discrimination. Community leaders should organize and support media literacy programs that educate people on recognizing and challenging biased narratives. Individuals should engage critically with media content, actively seeking diverse perspectives and questioning biased representations. Social media users should report discriminatory content and support positive and inclusive narratives. Community-based workshops and seminars can provide practical tools for identifying bias and promoting media literacy at a grassroots level. Additionally, individuals can form advocacy groups to hold media outlets accountable for their content, creating a feedback loop that encourages more responsible reporting. Encouraging local media to highlight positive stories and achievements within minority communities can also help counteract negative stereotypes and promote a more balanced narrative. By fostering a proactive and informed community, individuals can collectively influence the media landscape towards greater inclusivity and fairness.

7.10.4. Recommendations For Future Research

The current investigation has brought to light media-induced bias and discrimination, particularly amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The inquiry unveiled how prejudiced language, one-sided narratives, and stereotyping in both traditional and social media intensify racial biases and perpetuate unfavourable social perspectives. Media representation significantly shapes public opinion, impacting social conduct, bias, and public health. Contemporary research is indispensable for policymaking and swift action. Discriminatory language, skewed headlines, and the role of media platforms in sustaining racial biases facilitate targeted interventions. The report strongly advocates

for media literacy, conscientious journalism, and diversity in media organisations. It also underscores the management of social media content to halt negative narratives.

Future research should fill gaps in the comprehension of media, racism, and discrimination while building on the current knowledge base. The enduring effects of media-induced racism necessitate exploration. Effective solutions entail understanding how prolonged exposure to biased narratives influences public health, mental well-being, and social unity. Researchers should also scrutinise media interventions and policies to diminish racial bias. Assessing educational programmes, initiatives for media literacy, and metrics for diversity will disclose which methods most effectively challenge and alter prejudiced narratives. This information is vital for refining interventions for media equity and establishing evidence-based approaches.

Key research areas include global and cultural variances in media-induced racism. Comparative regional studies can elucidate how social norms, history, and culture contribute to media biases. Understanding these factors is crucial to tailor treatments to sociocultural contexts and promote inclusivity on a global scale.

Future research should also explore technological interventions. Given that social media platforms disseminate discriminatory content, comprehending how algorithms, AI technologies, and platform design amplify biased narratives is imperative. Developing and refining technology to recognise and eliminate biased information aids in mitigating media-induced prejudice. Therefore, while existing research offers a solid framework for understanding media-driven racism and discrimination, future research should concentrate on long-term effects, intervention effectiveness, global variations, and technological solutions. Scholars can establish evidence-based media strategies that foster inclusivity, equity, and responsibility by addressing these research areas.

Overall, this investigation offers a perspective on how the media, encompassing social platforms such as X and conventional channels, influenced the racialisation of the COVID-19 pandemic. Media accountability and inclusivity are imperative as overt hate

speech, implicit prejudices, stereotypes, and discriminatory language are interconnected. Prejudiced attitudes impact the public image, foster discrimination, and exacerbate health disparities. Essential scrutiny and endeavours to champion justice, diversity, and precise representation are necessary to shape media narratives as nations pursue resilience amid global emergencies.

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