



Balancing independence, collective interests, and media responsibilities: a framing analysis of COVID-19 coverage in the Sydney Morning Herald

Mehwish Yaqoob Khan¹, Vivian A. Martinez-Diaz²

¹Digital Contents School, Hallym University, Chuncheon, Republic of Korea

²Dept. of Anthropology, Universidad de Los Andes, Colombia, Colombia

Abstract:

This study conducted a framing analysis of the Sydney Morning Herald's media coverage during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021. Five main frames and themes were identified: (1) cases and numbers (e.g., active cases, recovered people, deaths, and tests), (2) awareness (of spread, prevention, treatment), (3) state policies, (4) collective interest and well-being, and (5) promotion of civic values. While all of these themes decreased in 2021 due to an overall decrease of reports in our sample (from 252 to 98 articles), the awareness frame increased, likely due to increasing coverage of vaccination awareness. In conclusion, the coverage of the pandemic reveals how the SMH prioritizes the Australian government's interests in the control of the COVID-19 disease and how it promotes values of civility to protect human life. Since the SMH disseminates discourses that serve the interests of the Australian government, ethical principles of the media and journalism, such as independence, are compromised to promote civility that helps protect life.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, Media Responsibilities, Australian News Media, Sydney Morning Herald, Framing Analysis

Received: September 14, 2022

Revised: May 20, 2024

Accepted: May 30, 2024

Corresponding author

Mehwish Yaqoob Khan

Digital Contents School, Hallym
University, Chuncheon, Republic of
Korea

Email: mehwish_yaqoob@yahoo.com

Introduction

By 13th April 2024, the COVID-19 pandemic led to approximately 704 million cases and about 7 million deaths, whereas the 26 million population of Australia faced 11 million COVID-19 cases and 24,414 deaths (Worldometer, 2024). In contrast to other countries, Australia experienced the COVID-19 pandemic through strong health measures, the world's longest lockdown, geographical isolation, and closed borders (Nolan et al., 2024). The public and political entities have effectively implemented these precautions, resulting in Australia's successful and sustained healthcare standard. Thus, Australia is recognized as a successful country in treating and preventing COVID-19 globally (Van-Nguyen et al., 2021). Globally, various media platforms, including digital, social, and print, have been inundated with information on how to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 through public awareness of its severity, mortality rates, and contagion mechanisms (Thomas et al., 2020; Tsoy et al., 2021). This flood of information, often contradictory or misleading, has led to an 'infomedia' situation, where readers are bombarded with excessive information, making it challenging to discern the correct information (World Health Organization, 2020). New media, however, have stepped in to mitigate this situation through 'risk communication' (Sugiarto & Prihatini, 2022). With greater responsibility for reporting correct and authentic information, news

media plays a significant role in educating people. Responsible news exchange becomes more important when there is a higher amount of misleading and false information (68%) in Australia than the global average (56%) (University of Canberra, 2022). Specifically, in global emergencies, news media reporting and information are key elements of spreading important messages. Digital and print media are used as communicative tools between government officials and the public for counter-measures.

In Australia, the government announced that information campaigns through digital and print news are a primary source of information (The Prime Minister's Office, 2020). News media quickly covered the pandemic's impact on society, economy, and health (Duckett, 2022). Newspapers and television extensively reported public guidelines mandated by the Australian government, such as the pathogenesis of infectious disease and numerical modeling (Thomas et al., 2020). During COVID-19, the public, government, and news media collaborated to disseminate useful information to control the interventions. Due to modeling demonstration, Australia avoided a high mortality rate due to COVID-19 compared to the USA, UK, and Europe (Nolan et al., 2024).

Previous studies suggested that news media's timing to report important and accurate information greatly affects public trust (Nolan et al., 2024). For example, during the Avian flu

and influenza outbreaks, the media emphasized the importance of following government-mandated instructions to maintain public trust (Thomas et al., 2020). Framing media responsibilities during a national emergency is useful in coping with the situation. However, this also leads to stigmatization among public domains (Dasgupta, 2022; Thomas et al., 2020). Australia has a modern and flourishing mass media industry which is ceaselessly growing and changing. The coronavirus disease has affected how Australian media inform relevant events to the audience (Cunningham & Turnbull, 2020).

The Sydney Morning Herald (SMH) is Australia's oldest newspaper (founded in 1831) and has been the largest tabloid newspaper. It has 8.4 million readers and is widely read in Australia. Thus, this research analyzed the Sydney Morning Herald's (SMH) role, responsibilities, and ethical considerations of reporting information during the COVID-19 pandemic through framing analysis.

This paper argues that the SMH's coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic portrayed specific frames in news, topics, and events. Since 2020, SMH has constantly reported about the coronavirus disease in Australia to promote prevention awareness. Also, the SHM has informed about national and international situations regarding COVID-19 to promote civic values, such as solidarity, collaborative care, and respect for the rules and policies of the Australian government. These trends showed the civic mission of media in Australia: protecting public interest, life, and rights. This paper argues that the media's responsibility is to protect Australians, and the SMH coverage of coronavirus reflected this commitment rather than private interests. Nonetheless, this displacement was contradictory when the SMH created discourses on legitimate national government actions during the pandemic, jeopardizing critical ethical guides in media and journalism, such as independence. Thus, the present study sought to evaluate the role and responsibilities of the SMH in COVID-19 pandemic coverage by analyzing its ideological alignment with the collective interests of Australians, such as the search for justice and truth and the promotion of civic values. SMH's ethical behavior is explained considering problem areas, such as independence, the possibility of refutation, criticism by the audience, and the deception and fabrication of information to favor the private interests of companies and public institutions. It is understood that SMH's responsibilities are disputed amidst power relations in Australian society, which attributes certain information based on beliefs, cultures, and practices.

Normative Media Responsibilities

Discussions regarding responsibilities are inherent to the professional practices of journalists and creative workers within media industries. In this regard, the responsibilities are crucial for all working in these industries. For example, journalists usually examine their moral practices and ethical principles to develop news coverage and writing. Furthermore, journalists analyze their responsibilities and rights, relationships with their employers and the audience, and goals. Hence, journalists must constantly criticize themselves. The responsibilities are close to the moral nature of people and groups and their motivations to act correctly (Ward, 2011). Responsibilities can be distinguished from morality because this concept is closely connected with rules or customs. Moreover, responsibilities have an individual and social character in philosophy. The coronavirus pandemic has threatened the quality of life,

economic status, and social attributes globally (Nolan et al., 2024). Global media have presented contributions to mitigating COVID-19 transmission by informing the public about the severity, mortality, and contagion mechanisms (Sugiarto & Prihatini, 2022). The media represented life experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic in several ways, such as suffering, deaths, guidelines, precautions, and grief, which have adversely impacted mental health and well-being (Godinic et al., 2020). It has changed media roles and responsibilities. Sometimes, this leads to informative sources, and sometimes, it develops stress. Anwar et al. (2020) criticized that the media coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic revolved around geographical lockdowns, quarantine issues, death numbers, panic situations, and socioeconomic hardships induced psychological distress. Consequently, when examining media roles and responsibilities in the coverage of COVID-19 pandemic-related events, it is essential to ponder the ethical implications of publishing certain information to the public.

A New Virus and Global Emergency

The COVID-19 virus is highly contagious and causes respiratory illness (Brooks et al., 2020). In 2020, COVID-19 rapidly spread through droplets, contact, and touching fomites. This coronavirus was confirmed as a novel β -genus coronavirus (2019-nCoV) (Arshad et al., 2020). It began in Wuhan, China, and quickly spread across the globe. The population has been under lockdown while those infected with COVID-19 anxiously awaited a cure (Brooks et al., 2020). COVID-19 has changed the entire world, including Australia (Nolan et al., 2024). People faced several hardships, such as lockdowns, stagnation, isolation, confusion, shock, and fear of infection. Pandemics can significantly impact individuals' mental and emotional well-being (Lu et al., 2020). Many countries were trying to cope with the psychological effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Most countries have adopted the Chinese model to battle against COVID-19 and take strict measures like official quarantine, isolation, and lockdown. Taking cues from successful pandemic control measures, the Australian government imposed a nationwide lockdown and placed a strong emphasis on adhering to public health guidelines (Sugiarto & Prihatini, 2022). This official announcement has shocked many people, like businessmen, corporates, lawyers, teachers, and students (Barkur et al., 2020). A massive amount of information was spread through digital sources, including newspapers. The drastic measures were guided through news media (Nolan et al., 2024). The authorities have implemented measures to protect people from infectious diseases. As a result, outdoor activities have been prohibited (Petersen & Meer, 2020). This lockdown has had a psycho-social impact on Australians engaged with news media (Thomas et al., 2020). It is hard for people to understand scientific information regarding the coronavirus family (Van-Nguyen et al., 2021). People had huge debates and discussions about misinformation, disinformation, and fake reporting (Sugiarto & Prihatini, 2022; Thomas et al., 2020). Australian people were concerned about their understanding of scientific approaches and measurements according to the guidelines about that new virus (2019-nCoV).

Global Coverage of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The role of print media in disseminating information to the

masses is of paramount importance, although the landscape has evolved with the advent of technology, leading people to prefer electronic newspapers over traditional print ones (Nolan et al., 2024; Parvin et al., 2020). The challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, such as the difficulty in delivering physical newspapers to households, underscored the significance of electronic news platforms. This transition to electronic media was not without challenges. The pandemic inundated these platforms with a deluge of information about the destruction caused by COVID-19 (Sheresheva et al., 2021). As China faced the initial brunt of the pandemic, other Asian countries confronted the virus at different times and under varying circumstances, resulting in a global flood of news coverage (Anwar et al., 2020).

Dudden and Marks (2020) argue that restricting journalists from reporting on distressing information provided governments that were averse to criticism with solace, but it left the public less informed and secure. Electronic newspapers rose to the occasion by reporting, disclosing, informing, and critiquing government responses through the perspectives of experts and journalists (Sugiarto & Prihatini, 2022). For instance, *Time Magazine*, a prominent U.S. publication, published a staggering 41,000 articles related to “coronavirus” in 2020 (Parvin et al., 2020). In the realm of global print media, the most prominent publications assumed multifaceted roles during the COVID-19 pandemic, including *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Guardian*, *Hindustan Times*, and *The Wall Street Journal* (Sheresheva et al., 2021). In India, “*Hindustan Times*” took a proactive approach, highlighting COVID-19 news and China’s response measures (Parvin et al., 2020). The newspaper provided insights into infection rates and their global economic impact. Beyond COVID-19, *Hindustan Times* extended its coverage to other areas influenced by the pandemic’s potential to disrupt lives and economies.

These publications upheld journalistic standards while serving as reliable sources of current and accurate COVID-19 data, government responses, and public health guidance. Their investigative reporting shed light on critical aspects of the pandemic’s impact and held governments accountable (Dudden & Marks, 2020). Likewise, the *Korea Herald*’s editorial even likened South Korea to the “Second Wuhan” in the world (Parvin et al., 2020). Those sources adopted a global perspective, reporting on diverse countries’ experiences and disparities in responses, healthcare systems, and vaccine distribution. Furthermore, these print media outlets engaged in policy advocacy, using their editorial sections to advocate for specific policies, public health measures, and societal changes. Their contributions influenced public discourse and policymaking addressing pressing pandemic-related issues (Thomas et al., 2020). By interacting with readers through interactive features and forums, these publications fostered a sense of community and support during a time marked by social isolation. They also leveraged data visualization tools to present COVID-19 statistics comprehensibly, aiding the public in making informed decisions (Fadilla et al., 2021).

The Covid-19 Pandemic Coverage by the Sydney Morning Herald

SMH is the largest newspaper in Sydney and has historically been distributed in several cities in Australia. It was founded by employees of the *Sydney Gazette* (*Sydney Morning Her-*

ald, 2024). SMH initially belonged to Fairfax Media Limited, which merged with Nine Entertainment in 2018. Since then, Nine Entertainment has been renowned as the prominent owner of SMH. The editorial position of the SMH is strictly located in the political center, which promotes liberal ideology sustained in a free-market approach to economy and development, democracy, human rights defense, and responsibilities.

The altruistic nature of the coverage elaborated by SMH was reflected in the production of two special sections dedicated to COVID-19. One of these sections was *As it happened* and listed the most relevant events to understand the coronavirus expansion in Australian regions. In addition, this news incorporated information on Australian government actions to mitigate the pandemic’s spread, exciting facts, and instructions for the population to access tests, vaccines, and care programs. In parallel, SMH created another section, renowned as *As the day unfolded*, for transmitting daily information on COVID-19 in Australia.

This section provided updates on daily events related to the coronavirus disease and shared important information on taking care of yourself. In addition to these special sections, SMH produced news on COVID-19 concerning lifestyle, health, economy, politics, and foreign relations. Moreover, SMH featured stories that motivated citizens to practice solidarity, question their privileges, and contribute to protecting life and civic order in Australia. The journalistic production of SMH revealed an editorial intention associated with protecting life and promoting civic values, which fit into a liberal ideology. Thus, in SMH, the incidence of the media in society and politics is corroborated.

Method

First, a limited number of major Australian newspapers were used for the investigation. The newspapers were accessed via Factiva, an electronic database. A total of 8,679 articles were reviewed. Eventually, *The Sydney Morning Herald* (SMH) was selected as the newspaper for the investigation. The criteria for choosing this newspaper were based on a few factors. First, the newspaper had a high readership. Second, it was inclined to diverse political orientations that made it seem more objective or unbiased. Third, its readership demographics were considered more diverse than other newspapers for inclusion in this study. Finally, the newspaper had to be originally a print newspaper due to its higher credibility and reputation than online-only newspapers.

For this research, we defined the population using news articles about the COVID-19 pandemic published by the *Sydney Morning Herald* (SMH). We created specific keywords and selection criteria to search for news about the expansion of the coronavirus disease and to identify the population for our research. The search utilized keywords like “COVID-19,” “coronavirus,” and “SARS-CoV-2.” Additionally, possible variations of these keywords were considered, including “COVID-19 disease,” “COVID-19 pandemic,” “COVID-19 outbreak,” “coronavirus disease,” “coronavirus pandemic,” “coronavirus outbreak,” and “acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus type 2.” For this research, relevant news articles were selected based on their reference to COVID-19. The selection criteria used are displayed in Table 1.

After applying the selection criteria and using a purposive sampling method, including only Mondays (which were the days with most announcements due to government briefings,

Table 1

Selection criteria for electing SMH news regarding COVID-19

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • News genre. • News produced and published by SMH. • News that incorporates keywords and their variations in titles and content. These search terms must appear in both titles and content. • News and content produced between 2020 and September 2022. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opinion genre. • News produced by other Australian media. • News that does not incorporate keywords and their variations in titles. • News that does not include keywords and their variations in content. • News published by the SMH before 2020 or after September 2022. • News articles with no mention of the term COVID-19 or related terms. • News articles with few details or content on COVID-19.

etc.), 350 news items remained, including 252 articles in 2020 and 98 in 2021.

The selected articles were copied from Factiva to Microsoft Word and organized into individual articles by date. The study applied the method of framing analysis. Human coding was used to allow for the understanding of the various comprehension of the sample articles that have been selected beyond their literal implications. The approach was selected due to the capability to identify common frames for a data set. Reading the content was done to familiarize myself with the contents of the selected articles. Themes and frames were then developed. The frames developed were further refined to give rise to other frames for the study.

The data analysis had two parts. Initially, the number of news items produced by the SMH between 2020 and 2022 was counted, including the leading national and international events surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, the volume of news per year was determined to establish the priorities of SMH information concerning the coronavirus disease. Between 2020 and 2022, a descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to identify dominant information trends. Likewise, the SMH news that reflected specific civic values for protecting Australia's life was interpreted through the descriptive statistical approach. Framing analysis was adopted to evaluate the role of SHM's responsibilities and balancing level during the COVID-19 pandemic mentioned above. Using this approach, the researchers investigated themes, cultures, patterns, and critical elements of coverage responsibilities. Media reporting and coverage issues are considered through allegiances and deception of manipulation in favor of specific entities such as politics, media houses, and any private interest.

Framing Analysis

Framing exists when the media selects specific issues to focus on and provides meaning within a particular context. This process greatly influences media issues and can amplify concepts related to pandemics. Presenting an aspect in the media can significantly affect how people perceive and understand the information being conveyed. Media is the most significant form of framing, and based on the information they share, they can easily influence how their audience perceives the news. They can sway their audience to think in a certain way about an is-

sue and dictate what and how to think about it.

Entman (2004) defined framing analysis as pinpointing a series of events, issues, and facts and connecting them to publish a specific evaluation. Frames manifest through specific sentences, phrases, symbols, and even with words. Entman (2004) categorized them as substantive and procedural. The substantive category is based on a minimum of two out of four functions at the major level. Meanwhile, the procedural category consists of limited functions with narrower focuses. He devised a "cascade model" to produce and absorb this framing, including mass media, government officials, experts, politicians, and audience. Government, politicians, and experts influence media and set frames for it in either modification or reinforcement ways. The greater the alignment between a frame and the prevailing schemas within the political culture, the higher its chances of achieving success (Entman, 2004). According to Goffman (1974), people can interpret what goes on around them through a primary framework, either natural or social. The natural framework happens in the literal perspective, while the social perspective views issues as socially influenced. This can be done through manipulation. Natural frameworks give rise to social frameworks. Individuals transitioning from the natural to social framework could either be aware or unaware. The framework and frames greatly determine how data is processed, interpreted, and communicated. The framing process can be done through metaphors, cultural mores, contrast, stories, spin, slogans, artifacts, and others (Goffman, 1974).

In political analysis, Nelson et al. (1997) understand framing as a process by which a communication source can construct and define a social or political issue by its audience. Hence, the significance of frames for public political opinion. Consequently, it is crucial to consider the psychological mechanisms by which framing persuades political opinion. For instance, Nelson et al. (1997) suggest that framing is not shaped by mere persuasion but by political attitudes. In addition, framing theory can be related to how agenda-setting is signified by mass media and audience members. In other words, what is presented to the audience, which is the frame, influences people's elections, opinions, and decision-making.

Framing analysis approaches have been incorporated in political science, sociology, anthropology, and media studies to explore how significant issues for public policymaking and elections are represented (Pan & Kosicki, 1993). By understanding frames, analyzing public opinion formation in several countries can be possible. In addition, news and press discourse can be assumed to be a socio-cognitive process involving sources, journalists, and audience members operating in shared cultures. In the context of these shared cultures, frames emerge. For this reason, framing analysis is a constructivist approach that leads to understanding how media framing issues are displayed in news texts.

Results

The framing analysis analyzed information frames and specific aspects of the role of the SMH during the coronavirus pandemic. First, the study shows the differences between the news in 2020 and 2021. Second, framing analysis reported which information topics predominated on the SMH's editorial agenda, such as its proximity to the Australian government's interests in protecting life amidst the coronavirus disease. Furthermore, concerning the role of the SMH during COVID-19, it was con-

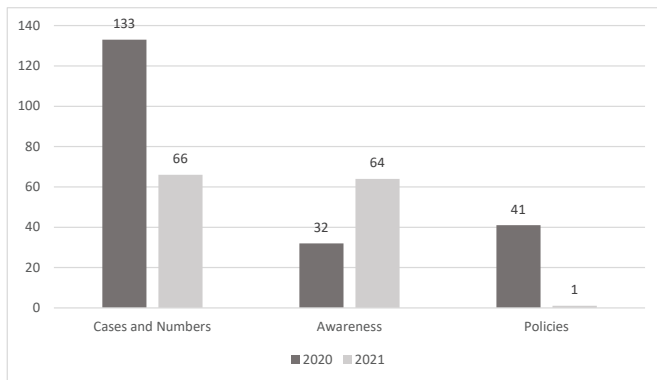
firm that the SHM sacrificed journalistic independence since it was ideologically aligned with the Australian government’s speeches on the disease. This ideological alignment legitimized restrictions on mobility imposed by authorities at the federal and local levels. Similarly, awareness was raised about vaccination and questioning citizens’ privileges to eradicate selfishness and strengthen civic values such as solidarity.

Information Frames Regarding COVID-19

Before identifying frames and themes in SMH coverage, it was essential to explore the concentration of news on the coronavirus disease each year. Australia’s highest amount of news on the COVID-19 disease was concentrated in 2020 (n=252). The explanation for this news concentration lies in Australia’s coronavirus outbreak contingency and the need to legitimate the public policies implemented to reduce contagion rates and promote collaborative care. In 2021, SMH exhibited a particular trend in information broadcasting because news volume decreased considerably to 98 articles (28% of articles, compared to 72% in 2020). This fact has two possible causes. On the one hand, the emergence of a vaccine could remove pressure to create content regarding the pandemic in SMH. On the other hand, institutions and citizens learned how to cope with the pandemic, eliminating this pressure to produce news in 2021. Between 2020 and 2021, the SMH news on COVID-19 in Australia revealed several frames. First, in 2021, the SMH decided to publish free access news on the coronavirus disease for people with access to the Internet. This decision was crucial because it indicates that SMH operates independently from private and corporate interests, such as obtaining profits from subscriptions, advertising, and views. Figure 1 demonstrates the frames in information production between 2020 and 2021.

Figure 1

The Frequencies of COVID-19 Frames: 2020 vs. 2021

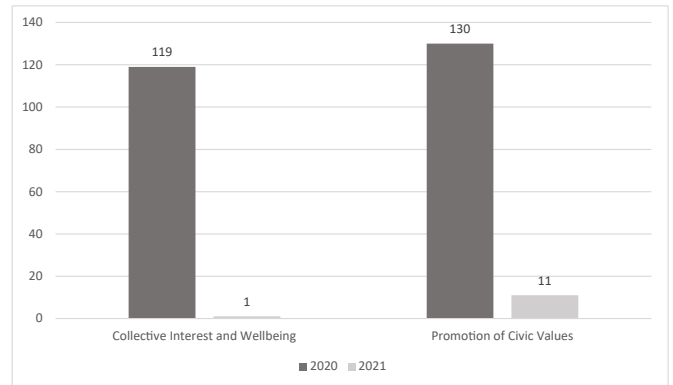


The main frame and theme in 2020 were on cases and numbers, such as information on active cases, recovered people, deaths, and tests on SMH news in 2020. In addition, issues such as awareness about the existence of the virus (awareness of spread, prevention, treatment) and state policies to deal with contagion were predominant in the news sample explored. Overall, while information on cases and numbers and policies decreased, information on awareness increased.

Additionally, in the news published in 2020, SMH promoted crucial values for the collaborative care of Australian citizens against the coronavirus, such as abandoning selfishness to alleviate the suffering of families who experienced this disease or

Figure 2

The Frequencies of COVID-19 Frames Concerning the Media Roles: 2020 vs. 2021



the loss of loved ones. Similarly, promoting civic values, such as highlighting acts of kindness and encouraging responsible behavior, was strong in 2020. Other issues related to media ethics, such as fundamental rights, independence, and morality in reporting, were left aside. Figure 2 indicates that, in general, all issues decreased in 2021.

Discussion

The SMH COVID-19 pandemic coverage framing analysis revealed how this Australian media constructs news. This analysis has identified 5 main frames, which were especially present in 2020 and to a smaller degree in 2021 due to a general decrease in stories in that year. SMH had high coverage of cases and numbers (active cases, recovered people, deaths, tests, etc.) for both years. Awareness (of spread, prevention, and treatment) was also a main frame, though this was the only one that even increased in 2021, probably due to raising additional awareness of the newly released vaccines at that time. Finally, policies were especially highlighted in 2020 when governments started implementing them. In addition to these specific frames, there were also some more general frames present, such as emphasizing the collective interest and well-being of following the rules and, in a more general way, promoting civic values by e.g. showing people who actually followed the rules. SMH’s coverage builds a social order based on civility and the protection of life since it disseminates information not subject to private interests. Information on COVID-19 published by SMH is public, and users can read some news without registering. This decision reflects SMH’s altruistic intention in covering the coronavirus pandemic in Australia.

The SMH produced two special sections dedicated to COVID-19, reflecting their altruistic coverage. One of these sections is *As it happened* and lists the most relevant events to understand the coronavirus expansion in Australian regions. In addition, this news incorporates information on Australian government actions to mitigate the pandemic’s spread, exciting facts, and instructions for the population to access tests, vaccines, and care programs. In parallel, SMH created another section, renowned as *As the day unfolded*, for transmitting daily information on COVID-19 in Australia. This section recounts daily events concerning the coronavirus disease and appealing information regarding care.

In addition to these special sections, SMH produced news on COVID-19 concerning lifestyle, health, economy, politics, and foreign relations. Also, SMH features stories that motivate citizens to practice solidarity, question their privileges, and

contribute to protecting life and civic order in Australia. For example, in October 2020, SMH published a story called 'Privilege' to Care: Nurse leaves retirement to join the COVID-19 frontline. In this story, journalist Timna Jacks narrated the story of Marion Richardson, who returned from her retirement to support fellow nurses in Australian health institutions. Jack's narrative gathers Richardson's memories of her nursing practice in the 1960s, her family history, and the events that led her to cooperate with Australian hospital nurses and abandon what she assumes is "the privilege of retirement." Jack's story about Richardson aims to teach the importance of setting aside self-privilege and helping others during a global health crisis.

The journalistic production of SMH reveals an editorial intention associated with protecting life and promoting civic values, which fits into a liberal ideology. Thus, in SMH, the incidence of the media in society and politics is corroborated. Cushion (2019) argues that interpreting the political impact of the media is essential to understanding how society is included in decision-making and pondering their well-being. Moreover, as Berger (2016) and Barker (2002, 2004) argue, media produce messages that display interactions between power, culture, and meaning translated into a particular ideology.

SMH is indeed an ally of the Australian government because it supports all its initiatives by disseminating information about the importance of vaccination and respecting mobility limitations. By informing on these issues, the SMH also helps to reinforce the Australian government's legitimacy. This role is palpable in how SMH covers events related to people who reject vaccination postures. SMH portrays this rejection as a social anomaly that must be overcome to create a social order focused on protecting lives. Vaccine refusal is also represented as something that contradicts solidarity and citizen cooperation to overcome the harmful effects of COVID-19 on people's daily lives. In other words, SMH coverage reflects its intention to promote civic values to build a new social order based on respect, cooperation, and citizen solidarity. Nonetheless, it also aligns with the Australian government's interests, proving a weak ethical standpoint in the SMH coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conclusion

This study conducted a framing analysis of the COVID-19 pandemic news coverage by SMH in 2020 and 2021. While some differences between the years have been found, the coronavirus disease coverage supported the construction of a new order based on following the new rules established by the government. These rules and established values were seen as mechanisms for protecting life in the country. Nonetheless, although the intention of SMH to help during the pandemic, it also reflects an ideological alignment with the Australian government's interests. Therefore, SMH plays a role in legitimizing power, which makes its civic and ethical stance, e.g. in terms of freedom of speech, ambivalent.

This paper provided an analysis of the role of the media in societies experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic. In this regard, the paper contributes to explorations of the media's role in Australia and fills a knowledge gap about its role in the global spread of the coronavirus. However, it also has limitations. For example, it is not possible to create generalizations about the role of the Australian media based only on the case of SMH. As a result, it is crucial to produce comparative studies of numerous Australian news outlets in the future. Future research

may also consider framing analysis methods of editorials. Editorials reflect the media's political and ideological position, which is undoubtedly important in examining their role during the COVID-19 emergency. Indeed, the role of the media in the circumstances surrounding the coronavirus is a fruitful field for mass media and communication studies in Australia and more work needs to be done.

Data Availability Statement

The datasets used and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Funding Information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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