



# Public health intervention: Exploring crisis communication elements in media reports on COVID-19 in Bangladesh

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## ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the public health, as well as the economic and sociocultural dimensions of many societies. By publishing news with various frames, the media plays an informative and discursive role in ensuring that the public stay informed and help one another in containing the virus and alleviating the adverse effects of the pandemic. This paper aims to explore the crisis communication elements in the media framing of COVID-19 in Bangladesh. The contents of two major dailies, *The Daily Star* and *The Business Standard*, were analysed to determine the framing of COVID-19 news. For the study period, 34 news stories that met the inclusion criteria were selected for analysis. The analysis of data reveals that COVID-19 was framed using the following frames: mortality-casualty, treatment-management, active-participation, collective-altruistic narratives, economic crisis, international relations, and fake news. The study also demonstrates that these identified frames have crisis communication elements that may be effective in crafting messages to address the pandemic with implications for public health interventions. The paper argues that news framing has a crucial function during a pandemic in ensuring that the news reports foster discourses among the media, government, and the public, to shape public health policies for the greatest good of the society.

Keywords: **COVID-19, crisis-framing, media-framing, news culture, public health**

## INTRODUCTION

In an uncertain situation or crisis, the role of news media is very crucial as it significantly shapes public perception and behavioural response as well as facilitates management and policy intervention by providing accurate information and framing of the issue (Crayton & Meier, 2017; Dorfman & Krasnow, 2014; Gursoy et al., 2022; Kilgo et al., 2018; Ogbodo et al., 2020; Olowoporoku et al., 2012). The demand for accurate information increases with the rise of uncertainties, fear and stress. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted different parts of the world in multiple ways. Scholars from various fields continue to attempt to understand the pandemic from multiple perspectives. Notably, most of the debates and discussion have revolved around public health, life and livelihood, and policy intervention issues (Ali et al., 2021; Braam et al., 2021; Lancaster et al., 2020). However, very few studies have looked at the phenomenon using the media framing and crisis communication approach.

On January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization officially announced the novel coronavirus outbreak (2019-nCoV) as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) (WHO, 2020). Since then, the cases have dramatically grown to almost 25 million with about 800,000 deaths at the time of writing, based on a report by Johns Hopkins University (as cited in *The Guardian*, 2020). This pandemic has not only caused negative effects to global public health, but also affected the economy, international relations, peace, and cultures amongst nations (Das et al., 2022; International Labor Organization, 2020; The World Bank, 2020). Furthermore, COVID-19 has taken a toll on social justice, which resulted in the stigmatisation and stereotyping of certain races and nationalities (Sotgiu & Dobler, 2020). With the emergence of these issues due to the unprecedented public health crisis, it is not an exaggeration to say that the world order has been disrupted, readjusted, and reshaped. Therefore, the world has entered a new normal era, posing more questions and demanding immediate answers. And one of the sectors that has a huge role in our quest to finding the answers to the world's current problems is the news media.

In times of public health crisis, the news media is expected to exercise its critical, informative, and societal role in making sure that members of the public and stakeholders stay well-informed (Dorfman & Krasnow, 2014; Gursoy et al., 2022; Kilgo et al., 2018). People resort to several forms of communication channels such as television, radio, newspaper, Internet, and social media to receive updated information about the current crisis, so that they can make informed decisions about how to act for safety, survival, and crisis resolution (Guidry et al., 2017; Park et al., 2019; Pavlik, 2021).

One of the critical debates in news reporting of global health crises is related to news framing (Choi & McKeever, 2019; Wagner & Reifegerste, 2022), because framing is a communicative process in which realities or crises are selected, defined and emphasised as a call for action to address the selected or defined crises (Entman, 1993). Scholars point out that news framing has an impact on public perception and overall crisis response attitudes and behaviours (Gursoy et al., 2022; Lee, 2021; Nwakpu et al., 2020). Information dissemination plays a huge role in health crisis intervention as discussed by Xu et al. (2020), who studied how COVID-19 was framed by the news media. They found that the news media is essential in making sure that crisis information benefits the public. News media framing has also long been studied in public health using various case studies such as communicable and non-communicable diseases, air pollution, violence, and transportation (Crayton & Meier, 2017; Olowoporoku et al., 2012; Whyte, 2012).

As a contribution to the growing corpus on public health and crisis communication, this paper aims to provide an analysis of frames used in the online news reporting of COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh. Similar to other countries, Bangladesh faced several

challenges in dealing with the current crisis, given that the country is classified as a lower-middle income country and one with the densest population (Anwar et al., 2020). Looking at the plurality of news reporting in different spaces and context is vital in providing diverse strategies and ways of delivering information to the public, forming the agenda, and making the issue visible and accessible for discourse in times of crisis. Hence, offering a local view of news frames will provide a specific case that is worthy of analysis as it will serve as a point of reference to other public health crisis scenarios in various spaces and environments.

Through a qualitative and inductive content analysis of news reports on Facebook, the study situates news framing in the context of crisis communication and public health. Given that the analysed news reports are solely about COVID-19 pandemic, it can be assumed that they were published for information dissemination and as a form of crisis intervention. Hence, this research aims to answer the question: How do selected news media in Bangladesh frame the COVID-19 pandemic as a crisis communication response? The objectives the study hopes to fulfil are: a) to determine the frames used by two major online news periodicals in Bangladesh for COVID-19 reporting; b) to analyse how these news frames function as crisis intervention strategies; and c) to determine the cultural components of these news frames.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Mass media in Bangladesh and its role in public health issues*

Media in Bangladesh have proliferated in number and reach with the support of the neo-liberal market system and deregulation (Rahman, 2016). In its current report, the Department of Film and Publication (2021) stated that 1,279 daily newspapers are published in Bangladesh while another study revealed that 45 private television channels, 28 FM and 32 community radio stations operate in the country (Riaz & Rahman, 2021). The government runs Bangladesh Television, the national television channel, and one radio channel, Bangladesh Betar. Most of the private electronic and print media outlets are driven with political and business agendas under the control of business and political groups (Riaz & Rahman, 2021).

Scholars have mixed opinions about the role of mass media in raising awareness about health issues and the application of communication to prevent diseases in Bangladesh (Aziz et al., 2020). This can be attributed to the limited or lack of research over big samples which are considered as target audiences of selected campaigns and are supposed to change behaviours in social and health issues in the long run. However, in three different studies, it was found that television channels, community radios and other available channels play positive roles in developing awareness about vaccination, health and nutrition, youth leadership, and women empowerment (Al- Mamun, 2019; Mamun-ur-Rashid, 2019a, 2019b). In the context of COVID-19, it is noticeable that the government and NGOs are utilising electronic and digital media platforms to raise awareness about preventing COVID-19 and other diseases. For example, the websites and social media pages of Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (n.d.) and Directorate General of Health Services (n.d.) of Bangladesh Government are always updating information about the health interventions to address COVID-19. These channels serve as the prime sources of emergency contact, telemedicine and vaccinations, in addition to busting myths about the disease and encouraging the public to practise preventive measures, such as using masks and washing hands.

### *The role of media in public health crises*

In times of crisis, people turn to the media for information (Austin et al., 2012; Lee, 2021; White, 2011). Ideally, the media works in between sectors of society to ensure that information is disseminated through different channels to reach the public. News networks and publishers have crucial roles in linking the government, the experts, and the public while making sure that information flow is maintained from the moment a crisis breaks out until it is resolved (Bjørkdahl & Carlsen, 2018; Zhang et al., 2020). As such, Nwakpu et al. (2020) argued that the public response to the pandemic situation, and the government's response, will be highly influenced by media framing.

Scholars argue that the news media have in one way or another become instrumental in creating negative impacts on the public's perception of health crisis. For example, Mutua and Oloo Ong'ong'a (2020) found that news media have contributed to creating racist imageries of East Asians in reporting the COVID-19 pandemic. At the start of the coronavirus outbreak, several media reports emphasised the origin of the virus in the Wuhan province of China. This resulted in deleterious remarks against Chinese nationals all over the world, questioning and typecasting even their lifestyle and hygiene. Similarly, McCauley et al. (2013) reported that the media facilitated in the construction of stigmatised narratives against Mexicans and Latinos during the H1N1 pandemic. Based on these cases, it can be presumed that news reports are powerful rhetoric that produces symbols that greatly influence how the public think about health issues and crises in general.

The media also serve as conduits for public service and social responsibility. Nwakpu et al. (2020) reported that several Nigerian newspapers focused on local reporting as opposed to highlighting news reports about the international state of the pandemic. Moreover, Poirier et al. (2020) ascertained that the Canadian media have emphasised the importance of social impact by making narratives that inspire the public to help one another, and to help Canadians who are in other countries during border shutdowns/closures. These cases present the positive role that certain news media outlets have undertaken in moments of crisis. Thus, the media can be a powerful means in bringing the public together in pursuit of altruism, patriotism, and goodwill.

### *Media framing*

Scholars have used frame analysis in various multidisciplinary studies (Ardèvol-Abreu, 2015; Borah, 2011; Gursoy et al., 2022; Ogbodo et al., 2020). Entman (1993) emphasised the strong capacity of framing to influence communication processes. He stated, "Analysis of frames illuminates the precise way in which influence over a human consciousness is exerted by the transfer (or communication) of information from one location — such as speech, utterance, news report, or novel — to that consciousness" (p. 52). Ardèvol-Abreu (2015) and Entman (1993) explained the causal, evaluative, and solution-oriented functions of frames by presenting how frames work in several components of the communication process such as the source (communicator), text, receiver, and culture. Communicators create the frames (which can be deliberate or unintentional) that guide their thoughts and choice of words. The texts or messages are frames and themes that include "certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotypes images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments" (p. 52). The receivers interpret the frames, which may not be in coherence with the intended effect of the message itself. And culture provides context to frames based on the discourses and way of thinking of people from different communities. To build frames, patterns of texts and symbols should create a strong association with the public culture (Entman et al., 2009). Furthermore, frames also

create cues and memories in the consciousness of the public that influence future message perceptions (Ardèvol-Abreu, 2015; McCauley et al., 2013).

The news media, however, does not just deliver random information they get from the elite sources to the public. There are ways information is disseminated for specific purposes: some messages are intended to warn the public while others to comfort and provide assurance, and yet others to urge them to act. In other words, media frames the news. Framing the news is a process of crafting the broader narrative of a phenomenon or a crisis that influences the way people perceive or think about it. According to Entman (1993) along with Poirier and fellow researchers (2020), framing involves “selection” and “salience” in that the news producers choose information that they know will appeal to the audience based on its news value. For the COVID-19 pandemic, various scholars identified news frames that have been used in various communities around the world such as Sinophobia, crime, geopolitics, international relations, misinformation and fake news, and human interest frames (Mutua & Oloo Ong'ong'a, 2020); public health and economic frames (Deslatte, 2020); “awareness, containment, fatality, conspiracy, political influence, effect, mobilization, support/aid, misinformation and stigmatization/boycott frames” (Nwakpu et al., 2020, p. 196); health crisis, economic crisis, Chinese outbreak, social impact, and helping Canadians (Poirier et al., 2020); entertainment and medical frames (Park et al., 2020); and war frame (Benziman, 2020). From these frames used in different countries, Mutua and Oloo Ong'ong'a (2020) contended that each community, nation, or society has its own news culture that may affect the way information is presented, reported, and narrated to the people. These frames are generally crafted to create an intended effect on the public. However, Nwakpu et al. (2020) and McCauley et al. (2013) explained that this intended effect may not always be achieved because the public have their own way of interpreting the message based on factors such as cue convergence or associative priming where previous experiences and historical phenomena may affect the current perceptions of frames.

Vasterman and Ruigrok (2013) highlighted the relationship between the sources of information and the news producers in the way they conceptualise framing. For them, it is a result of negotiated messages between the source and the media. This relationship between the source and the media sparks a huge debate in news coverage during a crisis. Most of the time, national crisis communication intervention follows a top-down communication where the sources of information are commonly composed of officials and experts. Poirier et al. (2020) found that one newspaper in Canada used the political frame to emphasise the active role of the national government in crisis intervention. These news sources influence the news professionals in crafting “interpretive frameworks” of messages (Ardèvol-Abreu, 2015). Nevertheless, the literature discussed above provide specific contexts where framing has been applied.

The notion that each community has its own news culture inspires this study to provide a specialised analysis of COVID-19 reporting in Bangladesh. Although the subject matter works within the realm of the current global health crisis, a local perspective is necessary to offer a subaltern or inductive view of crisis reporting. This study calls for more specialised analyses of news framing to provide diverse ways of understanding crisis communication from spaces that are not often reported in the international media. Scholarly analysis of the current pandemic can have the tendency to be westernised or highly focused on issues in the western world as explained by Poirier et al., (2020). Thus, this study contributes to the international discourse of COVID-19 response from the subaltern perspective.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative content analysis of news reports on COVID-19 by two major daily newspapers in Bangladesh, *The Daily Star* and *The Business Standard*. *The Daily Star* was chosen because it is the prominent English newspaper in Bangladesh with a focus on diversified community issues (Ubayasiri, 2019). *The Business Standard* was selected due to its specific focus on business and economics with a substantial online presence (About Business Standard, 2021). Both news outlets were observed to have a strong social media presence on COVID-19 and related issues. A report confirmed that online news readership rose dramatically when the pandemic broke out in Bangladesh because of the lockdown policies with stay-home and quarantine measures (Khan, 2020). Since the public can no longer easily access print newspapers, online news websites and platforms have become their primary sources of information (Panday & Kaioum, 2020). Hence, for this study, these two main newspapers represent the sources of information to the citizens during this pandemic.

The main data for this research were drawn from the news reports made available on Facebook by *The Business Standard* (2019) and *The Daily Star* (n.d.). It was observed that Facebook has been instrumental in providing news access to people during this time of public health crisis (Panday & Kaioum, 2020). Facebook is widely used in Bangladesh as one of the major news sources (Sorun & Tarafder, 2015). In addition, Facebook is a practical site for qualitative data because it offers configurations (such as likes, shares, and reactions) that can be used as categories or criteria for choosing the units of analysis. For this research, the news reports with the highest number of “likes” from March to August 2020 were chosen. A total of 34 representative samples were selected through judgment sampling (top 34 news reports with the highest number of likes) and content analysed 566 sample universe of news reports downloaded in portable document format (PDF). The qualitative content analysis process for this study was employed in recursion from coding to interpretation (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). An inductive approach was employed to grasp the emergent patterns from the set of data and how these same patterns create sets of meanings (Ali et al., 2016; Daymon & Holloway, 2011; Liamputtong, 2013; Tracy, 2013). The analysis of data follows the hermeneutic spiral that employs a non-linear process, which goes back-and-forth from the creation of meaning units and codes through the development of categories and themes (Daymon & Holloway, 2011; Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017; Tracy, 2013). This process allows the researchers to clearly identify the frames and make sense of the overarching meanings and symbols that transpired in the COVID-19 news reports. The themes that informed the frames were identified based on codes developed from keywords, phrases, and sentences from the news stories and reports. For this study, two researchers coded the data in Microsoft Excel manually, and performed triangulation of preliminary results to validate the consistency of interpretation and themes. To check the validity of the codes, an inter-coder reliability check was performed using Holsti’s (1969) method. Both researchers reached a 78% similar agreement on the codes and themes of this study.

Furthermore, the literature suggests that most of the recent news framing of COVID-19 in various countries were investigated using quantitative content analysis (Deslatte, 2020; Mutua & Ong’ong’a, 2020; Nwakpu et al., 2020; Poirier et al., 2020). Therefore, the current study addresses the need to conduct qualitative studies on COVID-19 news framing to extract more latent content from themes that may further depict crisis reporting and news culture (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017; Ogbodo et al., 2020).

## RESULTS

From the collected online news articles published by *The Business Standard* and *The Daily Star*, the researchers determined the following frames: mortality-casualty, treatment-management, active government participation, collective-altruistic narratives, economic crisis, international relations, and fake news. As the samples show, both newspapers produced articles on public health measures, and dealt with fake news and miss-information, but *The Business Standard* focused more on the social and economic impacts of COVID-19, international support and diplomacy.

Both newspapers used the frames of mortality-casualty, treatment-management, active government participation, collective-altruistic narratives, economic crisis, international relations and fake news. The news reports that employed the mortality-casualty frame used statistics and numbers as main contents. The treatment-management frame is composed of news contents that reported medical advancements, the search for the vaccine and drugs, lack of facilities and hospitals, virus containment, and medical access. Additionally, the active government participation frame is represented by the news content on activities accomplished by national officials and the actions undertaken by the government to address the pandemic. Moreover, the collective and altruistic narratives frame was derived from feature stories and news that highlighted the acts of extending help to one another and prioritising the people of Bangladesh above all else within the local setting; this frame also involves exchange of goodwill and donations between Bangladesh and other concerned nations. The economic crisis frame covers the news reports about the financial loss of business companies due to the pandemic, decline of international trade between Bangladesh and other countries, growing fiscal payments, and hindrances to the economic growth of the country in general. It was also clear that the international relations frame encapsulates news reports on strengthening the socio-political ties between Bangladesh and various countries through exchange of donation and medical resources. Furthermore, the fake news frame represents reports that covered the spread of misinformation and disinformation on Facebook including falsification of facts through the misuse of religious teachings.

The seven identified frames provide an overview of how news is reported in Bangladesh. These frames characterise reports that ranged from highly numerical information, such as the use of statistical data in the majority of the reports to narrative storytelling of the actions by certain people and organisations that contribute to the global fight against COVID-19. The abovementioned frames correspondingly represent rich latent contents that explain the broader news culture in Bangladesh.

## DISCUSSION

The media has the power to shape public opinion about health through frames that may directly or indirectly prioritise one issue over the other without the conscious knowledge of the information receivers (Dorfman & Krasnow, 2014; Kilgo et al., 2018; Ogbodo et al., 2020). The examination of news frames also extends to the area of crisis communication in a pandemic (An, 2011). Prompt, accurate, and strategic information dissemination are some of the precepts of crisis communication (Ali et al., 2021; Chung & Lee, 2016). It is therefore imperative for crisis communication intervention that the message design speaks to the public in ways that invite action and participation, maintain order and composure, and provide correct information. It is apparent that officials and medical experts are the main source of information from the data gathered for this study, which the news media producers and journalists use to relay the official and expert information to the public.

The following paragraphs provide further descriptions of the frames used by *The Business Standard* and *The Daily Star* to cover news about the COVID-19 pandemic (mortality-casualty, treatment-management, active government participation, collective-altruistic narratives, economic crisis, international relations, and fake news). The frames were also examined through the lens of message appeals, culture, and policy implications. By understanding the frames in relation to these dimensions, we generate a broader depiction of how news is crafted and relayed to the public.

### *Mortality-casualty*

During a public health crisis, people need to know how to act and respond to alleviate the threats of the disease. Therefore, messages are expected to be persuasive and have the effective potency to actuate the public to act accordingly. To manoeuvre message in a more persuasive form, the “fear-arousing communication” strategy is used by the media in their contents (Ali et al., 2019; Wagner & Reifegerste, 2022). It is evident that studies in crisis communication include fear appeals through stories that highlight death and human casualty.

On April 9, 2020, *The Daily Star* published a news story with the headline “**COVID-19 Symptoms: 15 more die in 24 hours**”. Words and phrases such as “samples”, “died”, “victims' bodies”, “locked down the victims houses along with their neighbouring buildings”, “fever”, “cold”, and “cough” were used in this story to describe the causalities and severity of the pandemic.

A similar example can also be found in another news story of the same newspaper with the headline, “**Bangladesh passes Italy: Becomes 15th worst hit by Covid-19**” (2020, August 7). The news story reported that Bangladesh had surpassed Italy in terms of the intensity of the infection and death rate due to COVID-19. It writes: “Over 23 people on average have died every day since March 18, the day the country recorded its first Covid-19 death”.

The use of numbers may strengthen the persuasive effect on the public that prompts them to participate in the collective effort of lessening the adverse effects of the pandemic while at the same time, may render a paralysing effect (boomerang) through alarmism. Additionally, these numbers can be seen as less substantive, overwhelming, and confusing. Numbers and statistical data may also deceive the public into thinking that the pandemic is approaching severity or positively declining. Conversely, facts are backed up by statistics that strengthen the persuasiveness of the message. Thus, achieving a balance between narratives and statistics creates news that has rich contexts and established facts.

### *Collective-altruistic narratives*

The news stories that feature good deeds of people such as the least fortunate person who donated everything to support the needy people or those who are serving on the frontlines with utmost sacrifices to address this crisis. On April 26, 2020, *The Business Standard* published a feature titled, “**Heroes of our time**” (Devnath et al., 2020), to bring forth the contribution of an array of frontline workers. In this feature, it was depicted how doctors are serving under pressing circumstances, cleaners dealing with wastes including dumped PPE and masks, and how volunteers are providing food for the underprivileged people in different parts of Dhaka city. To exemplify, the feature mentioned the heart-warming case of a Bangladeshi social worker, who said, “My wife then gave me Tk 40,000 (500 USD) that she had saved up for one of our children's education. I purchased food items the next day with that money and started distributing packages among the poor” (Devnath et al., 2020).

The crisis communication frames are used to humanise the message to connect to people (Yang et al., 2010). By highlighting an ordinary person who rises above the crisis to help others, this may inspire the public to extend comfort to one another as well. This supports the idea that public health is not only the responsibility of the officials and government institutions but a collective effort of all members of society (Dorfman & Krasnow, 2014; Ogbodo et al., 2020). This frame also captures the stories that report the exchange of donations between local and international non-government, non-profit, profit, and government institutions to accumulate enough funds and medical supplies needed to address the pandemic. For example, on April 26, 2020, *The Business Standard* reported the support of the Chinese government with a news story, headlining “**Chinese medical team on way to Bangladesh to join fight against COVID-19**”. Showing these narratives provides contexts for the public to understand the socioeconomic and cultural factors that affect how a society should deal with the global health crisis. It also indicates the capability of the citizens to take collective action.

### *Treatment-management frame*

This frame is essential to realise the issues of treatment and management of COVID-19 in the social, political, and economic dimensions. It had been reported that some critically ill citizens were denied treatment due to hospital pandemic protocols that resulted in health deterioration and death. On April 7, 2020, *The Daily Star* published a report about a denial of hospital treatment to a Dhaka University (DU) student (“DU student dies after hospitals denied treatment”, 2020). The story reported that the student died after suffering from cancer and was denied treatment at a critical stage in several hospitals for fear that he had the coronavirus. The student lost his life without proper treatment and medicine during this pandemic due to another disease. In relation to this news story, it is important to note that the environment where the person lives influences their overall health (Dorfman & Krasnow, 2014).

This frame also represents reports about the lack of hospital facilities and testing units that halt the timeliness of pandemic responses. Reports under this frame also revealed the falsification of testing results for illegal profit affecting the epidemiological information and the larger pandemic response of the country. On July 6, 2020, *The Daily Star* covered a story on a raid by law enforcement agencies on a hospital that produced fake COVID-19 test certificates for workers who were processing their papers to visit foreign countries (“Fake COVID-19 results”, 2020). The news article also added that the hospital violated their agreement with the Bangladesh government by producing fake COVID-19 certificates without any tests, in exchange for money from the clients.

The treatment-management frame emphasises the necessity of reporting the pandemic response as a complex public health intervention and crisis management involving various socio-economic and political facets.

### *Active government participation frame*

This is important to highlight because the public should be aware that the government is part of the solution to the current pandemic. In most crisis situations, the public demands for effective leadership and visibility of actions from the government officials and concerned institutions. The government needs to show effective leadership during crisis situations as the pandemic is not just an individual responsibility but largely a government responsibility as well. This frame involves reports about specific activities organised by the Bangladesh Prime Minister’s office and other government agencies that support the public through monetary, medical, and social means. For example, on May 14, 2020, *The Daily*

*Star* published a news story with the headline, “**PM launches disbursement of cash aid for 50 lakh poor households**” (2020). In another news article by the same news organisation, it was reported that the Bangladesh government was developing a database to ensure an efficient distribution of food aid to needy people hit by the lockdown and pandemic (Islam & Parvez, 2020).

### *Economic crisis frame*

*The Business Standard* mostly used economic framing in reporting the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the researchers found that *The Daily Star* also published numerous news that highlighted the status of the nation’s economy and the world in general during this pandemic. For example, with the write-up titled, “**Pandemic will change the aviation industry forever**” (Hasan, 2020), *The Daily Star* tried to demonstrate the negative impact of COVID-19 on the private aviation industry of Bangladesh. In the same month, *The Business Standard* focused on the role of International Monetary Fund (IMF) to support “the health, social protection and macroeconomic stabilization measures” and “meet the urgent balance-of-payments and fiscal needs arising from the Covid-19 outbreak” in Bangladesh (“IMF approves \$732m”, 2020).

The economic crisis frame comprises news reports regarding financial declines of private businesses, the unprecedented use of government funds and external earnings, slow recovery of the banking sectors, demands of local businesses for loans, economic disparities experienced by low-middle income citizens, and the general threat of economic slowdown of the nation. The use of this frame complicates the analysis of COVID-19 intervention. Hence, the economic frame should not be seen as a competing frame that distracts the public from what is important to know in these trying times, but rather included in public opinion and social issues because policy makers must realise that economic crisis tremendously affects the nation’s success over the pandemic.

### *International relations frame*

Both news networks utilised this frame in several reports by emphasising how Japan, Korea, and China are helping Bangladesh with their pandemic intervention through monetary and material support. On June 21, 2020, with the headline “**Difficult to say whether pandemic reached its peak in Bangladesh or not: Chinese experts**” (2020), *The Business Standard* covered a story of Chinese medical experts visiting Bangladesh to provide technical and advisory support to curb the pandemic. The news story outlined the warm relationship between Bangladesh and China by discussing the key aspects of their visit including their observations of the COVID situation in Bangladesh. Similarly, a story on June 19, 2020 of the same newspaper reported that Bangladesh received medical aid from South Korea (“COVID-19: BAF aircraft”, 2020).

This frame primarily features close international ties between and among these countries that define this pandemic as global health crisis requiring all nations to help each other. This frame also shows how other countries such as the United States (US) were engaged in negotiation with Bangladesh for tariff withdrawal, production, and export of personal protective equipment (PPE), and vaccine production agreements. For example, a story titled, “**Govt invites United States to produce Covid-19 vaccine in Bangladesh**” by *The Business Standard* emphasised the need to work together with US to remove all obstacles in producing medical equipment and medicines to address COVID-19 together (Kashem, 2020).

### *Fake news frame*

The rise of infodemic or the overwhelming burst of competing information about COVID-19 on social media has posed a challenge to the truism, accessibility, and credibility of news information found online (Pavlik, 2021). The discourse of COVID-19 online has now been clouded by noises that dissuade people to arrive at incoherent interpretations of the pandemic (Cinelli et al., 2020). This frame underlines numerous news about the consistent production of falsehoods on social media, particularly on Facebook, that results in bigotry, fear, and complacency in behaviour in terms of individual response to contain the virus. The fake news frame also covers reports on how the government of Bangladesh responds to the said issue. For example, through its news story titled “**Rumours over coronavirus: Police looking for 82 admins of social media pages**” (2020), *The Business Standard* covered the response of law enforcement agencies in tracking down the admins of different social media pages who were promoting fake news on coronavirus in Bangladesh. Similarly, another news article with the headline “**Govt asks Facebook to delete pages spreading COVID-19 rumours**” (Shawki, 2020) highlighted the ongoing active role of the Bangladesh government in stopping the spread of misinformation and fake news on COVID-19. The use of this frame may be interpreted as a form of metacommunication for the public to be more vigilant and aware of how to fathom the facticity of information that may affect their individual and collective response to the pandemic.

## CONCLUSION

This study presents seven key frames gathered from COVID-related news reports published by *The Business Standard* and *The Daily Star*, namely: mortality-casualty, treatment-management, active government participation, collective-altruistic narratives, economic crisis, international relations, and fake news. It was found that these frames have crisis communication elements that may be perceived as strategies to strengthen the public knowledge about the pandemic and participation in public health interventions at the individual and society levels. This study argues that news frames can be utilised as elements of message design for crisis communication during a pandemic. Furthermore, the study reveals the cultural aspect of news from the collective-altruistic narratives frame characterising the close social ties in the Bangladesh society and maintaining a balanced approach between government and media to report the COVID-19 crisis.

Framing the news is an essential concept to look at because it is through news that public health issues achieve a certain level of visibility that elevates the importance and necessity of public health issues to the public and policy makers (Dorfman & Krasnow, 2014; Koon et al., 2016; Ogbodo et al., 2020; Pavlik, 2021). It is important to note that public health intervention has changed shape following the identification and spread of this pandemic (Ali et al., 2021; Braam et al., 2021; Lancaster et al., 2020). While addressing this pandemic, public health intervention not only focuses on awareness activities but also on providing essential support to those in need, sharing experiences with foreign experts, negotiating with different stakeholders, identifying gaps in health services, and involving law enforcement agencies to curb illegal activities and misinformation. The frames which were discussed above highlight these major aspects and define the current public health intervention approaches, providing implications to public policy and highlighting issues that need immediate attention especially when the nation is dealing with a crisis. By studying the various frames used by the news media in reporting a public health crisis, practitioners and scholars can enhance their competence in developing media advocacies and health

campaigns to engage both the public and policy makers in crafting health policies for the greatest good and the society at large.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The first author gratefully acknowledges the support of Ms. Erika Schneider, Mr. Al-Kaviul Sarker, MH Haider, Mr. Aminul Islam and Mr. Tanzimul Islam for this paper.

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