

A Thematic Exploration of Three Countries' Government Communication during the COVID-19 Crisis and Corresponding Media Coverage

Abstract

This study attempts to add to the current literature on crisis communication by exploring differences in COVID-19 governmental crisis communication and variances in the media coverage of that communication through thematic quantitative content analysis across three countries: New Zealand, The United States and The United Kingdom. Specifically, this research attempts to find the extent to which media ideology plays a role in reporting health crises. Results demonstrated that universally, press conferences were based on scientific advice and relied upon symbols that contributed to the clarity of health communication about COVID-19. Conversely, media coverage stressed economic challenges overall, but conservative newspapers focused more on health and the economy, whereas liberal newspapers leaned more towards politics. These findings demonstrate that even in major health crises, the ideologies of newspapers can play an important role in the framing of information.

Keywords: COVID-19, crisis communication, government, ideology.

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

Introduction

During the early quarter of the year 2020, COVID-19 went from being a suspicious virus in inland China to the deadliest pandemic since the Spanish Flu of the 1920s. In the first few months of 2020, COVID-19 infected over one hundred thousand people in 114 countries (Huang et al., 2020).

Different governments around the world addressed this medical emergency differently. The most common response actions were the prohibition to travel and the imposition of mandated national and regional lockdowns, which drastically changed the way people worked and studied. Additionally, sanitary practices within most communities were promoted and encouraged, such as hand washing, mask-wearing and social distancing (Lazarus et al., 2020). Furthermore, some governments' responses included financial relief policies, such as prioritising health care budgets, reducing working hours and activating hiring freezes (Maher, Hoang, & Hindery, 2020).

In terms of the government communication during the pandemic, the most common practice was to hold press conferences informing citizens of the number of people infected and deaths due to COVID-19. These press conferences also allowed for people to learn about hospitals' capacity, their country's economic struggle, and how the situation was developing internationally (Maher et al., 2020).

This research conducts a thematic quantitative content analysis examining the differences and similarities between the COVID-19 press conferences held by President of the United States, Donald Trump, Prime Minister of The United Kingdom, Boris Johnson, and Prime Minister of New Zealand, Jacinda Ardern, as well as the newspaper coverage of these events. In the first instance, this research examines if there was any presence of scientists, face masks, or scientific advice in the press conferences. This study also asks if governments emphasised the health challenges, the public good and/or the economic impact

of COVID-19. This research then examines whether the press in each home country covered these aspects of the press conference in the day following the conference and how they framed the conference in general. This analysis was done across an ideological spectrum to detect any bias in reporting, and therefore asks if there are any differences in the crisis communication of each country and if the mainstream media in each country, along an ideological spectrum, accurately transmitted the events of each conference. The results of this paper have implications for the study of crisis communication as well as for research that explores the framing of crisis communication in governmental press conferences by the mainstream media.

Governmental Crisis Communication

The execution of crisis communication carries a series of ethical aspects that need to be considered in the creation of messages. These aspects are generally different in every community as they carry social, cultural, historical and political histories (Lundgren & McMakin, 2013). Crisis communication management has been reshaped as the audiences have evolved in how they assess the government's messages. Specifically, it has moved away from transmitting precise information to the public, to actively trying to gain public approval, so that their message might be shared and supported (Granger, 2002). This situation raises concerns in regards to the authoritative role of the government in crisis management.

The communication of a crisis entails informing about the crisis itself through specific, chosen language that highlights the inclusion or exclusion of groups at risk as well as who is held accountable when mistakes are made (Lundgren & McMakin, 2013). The use of language places discursive importance on the communication of the crisis. For instance, the use of words like 'low risk' or 'high risk,' need to be carefully considered as these words may not be perceived the same way by different groups (Lundgren & McMakin, 2013).

The government's communication needs to consider factors that contribute to higher or lower vulnerability in different communities and address their social context within a wider community (Bullard, 1992). For example, the level of risk during a crisis can be different in poor and rich groups, as well as in different ethnic groups. Governmental communication must consider these factors as they could lead to the cohesion of all groups towards addressing and overcoming the crisis. It is also important to address who is in charge of each aspect in the management of a crisis (p. 62). This can be considered an ethical issue, as, during crises, the audience is very likely to have their own perception of who is responsible for mistakes made during crisis management and crisis communication must address that hierarchy of responsibility.

A significant theory to consider in government crisis communication is the 'rally-around-the-flag' theory, which refers to the support and trust that governments receive from the public in times of crisis. Though a key factor to consider here is that in these cases there has been little criticism from the opposition to the government (Van Aelst & Blumler, 2022). Additionally, it is acknowledged that past research on this theory has not considered the role of the media in the increase or decrease of public support to the government during a crisis. This last factor is important as media are considered not only a spreader of government statements and measures during a crisis, but also the ones who decide what messages to amplify and what actors to consider or ignore in their reporting (Van Aelst & Blumler, 2022, p. 3).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the 'rally-around-the-flag' effect was seen in several countries, even though it lasted longer in some regions than others. This discrepancy may be related to the perceived consequences of the governments' actions and how positive those governments are regarded by the public. Specifically, at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the tensions surrounding fears of infection by an unknown virus and the

anticipation of its arrival in a specific region, resulted in the ‘rally-around-the-flag’ effect taking place in several countries, such as Germany, Australia and the UK (Van Aelst & Blumler, 2022). However, the stability of this effect is a direct result of how the policies taken in each government were perceived by the citizens. In Germany and Australia, it is argued that government measures were seen as following scientific advice, timed properly and kept the number of cases low. However, the government in the UK started to receive criticism for the management of COVID-19 as policies were seen as confusing and inconsistent. This led to a faster decrease of the ‘rally-around-the-flag’ effect in the UK than in Germany and Australia, for example (Van Aelst & Blumler, 2022, p. 5).

This ‘rally-around-the-flag’ effect has arguably lasted longer in New Zealand because the measures of this government led to significantly lower infection numbers and deaths due to COVID-19 in comparison to other western nations. Though, others have argued that Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern is especially unique in using crisis communication that is relatable and appeals to the collective good (McGuire, Cunningham, Reynolds, & Matthews-Smith, 2020). For example, Prime Minister Ardern uses social media channels for direct interaction with the public and frames New Zealand citizens as ‘the team of five million’ when encouraging them to follow COVID related restrictions.

Media Framing

Gitlin (1980) defined frames as ‘persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organise discourse’ (p. 7). A frame determines what is ‘relevant’ (Hertog & McLeod, 1995, p. 4) and ‘suggests what the issue is’ (Tankard Jr., Hendrickson, Silberman, Bliss, & Ghanem, 1991). Frames (both textual and visual) are ‘organising principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world’ (Reese, Gandy Jr., & Grant, 2001, p. 11).

The role of media frames during crisis communication is also key in keeping citizens from engaging in panic or actions that might worsen things. News media disseminate official information, suggesting ways to address the crisis and relating the government handling of the crisis to the public (Walaski, 2011). For instance, when communicating a crisis, the most used frame is the attribution of responsibility, followed by economic and human interest frames, in that order (Walaski, 2011). This active framing of a crisis implicitly organises and classifies different aspects within the crisis, which aligns with audience preferences, and also brings out the possibility of official information being modified in the process (Walaski, 2011).

Government and media frames work to expose the delicate interaction between different information sources and the audience in the management of a crisis. These factors become even more challenging with large and diverse populations, where messages can be interpreted differently and result in a lack of uniformity in actions, which decreases the impact of a crisis. Furthermore, the active and purposeful frames from politicians and the news media will constantly affect each other as they will take shape according to each other's information (Yahya, 2019). In other words, if the news media portray the government negatively in their attempts to fight a crisis, there may be a recognition and change of approach from the government. However, if the actions from the government are framed as appropriate in the news media, then the government will likely gain confidence and continue its framing of the crisis. Any of these scenarios will play a role in the audience's opinion about governmental crisis management and its support towards the government, which can have profound implications on the effectiveness of fighting any crisis (Yahya, 2019), such as the spread of COVID-19.

In terms of the media framing of the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been argued that this global crisis has opened room for new framing categories (Nwakpoke Ogbodo et al., 2020).

In addition to Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) five generic frames, conflict, human interest, economic consequences, morality and responsibility, two extra frames have been added, fear/scaremongering and hope. The fear/scaremongering frame was defined as "stories that are exaggerated to cause fear and panic among the public" (Nwakpoke Ogbodo et al., 2020, p. 258) and the hope frame as "stories that give people hope and reassure them even in the midst of the crisis" (Nwakpoke Ogbodo et al., 2020, p. 258). A content analysis on eight high circulation media outlets in the US and Europe found that most of the reporting uses language that primed fear for the readers (Nwakpoke Ogbodo et al., 2020). However, it is important to note that this study did not consider reporting of the government's crisis communication but rather focused on the reporting of the number of COVID-19 related deaths.

Ideology in the News

Media are not one monolithic voice. Rather, media are ubiquitous, dynamic and multi-directional in approach. The public's main understanding of social issues is largely derived from a framed construction provided by the news media (i.e. Gamson, 1992; Ryan, Carragee, & Schwerner, 1998). News media create purposefully framed images after a complex negotiation of contributing forces that can be seen to be politically motivated (Street, 2001). This is not a structurally deterministic process whereby media simply disseminate elite, dominant messages. Rather, 'there is an interaction within the media, who operate as both structures and agents, not passively disseminating dominant ideologies (as suggested by structural accounts) but playing an active role in their creation, construction articulation and communication' (Allen & Savigny, 2012, p. 280).

Actively constructed and co-created messaging coalesces to form a broader ideological perspective, which then provides researchers with a framework to better understand similarities across large groupings (Thompson, 1990). Some have found an

omnipresent, capitalistic, corporate-focused ideology across news media (Kenix, 2013; Zollmann, 2009). However, if consumer preferences play an inordinately large role in dictating content (Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2010), then a news outlet's readers may demand newspaper content that engages with their political ideology.

The issue of assessing objectivity and bias in news media is a complicated one, with a long history of examinations that have conflicting results (Fedler, Smith, & Meeske, 1983). These contradictions exist because objectivity itself is a contested term complicated by assumptions embedded in high-level abstractions like 'justice, democracy, freedom, mankind, Communism, peace with honour, and law and order' (Severin & Tankard, 1997, p. 97). Despite this complexity, the news media have largely maintained their adherence to the norm of objectivity (Donsbach, 1995) even though there has been widespread public opinion that a particular newspaper holds a particular political bias (Lane, 2022).

Political biases ideologies are transmitted through mediated content in the same way that they are communicated through verbal communication – through words, phrases, emphases on particular aspects of a shared narrative and the specific framing of current events. The larger public associates meaning to these political identifiers symbolically (Conover & Feldman, 1981) and feels the 'relative' esteem of ideological conventions communicated by elite media (Schiffer, 2000). Thus, it is possible that 'given the high salience of ideological labels in elite discourse ...that the middle-dwellers have been exposed to enough of the one-sided information flow to be persuaded by it' (Schiffer, 2000, p. 299). Indeed, individuals can 'take cues' from elite messaging and then cast dispersions on political ideologies that they feel counter those positions (Watts, Domke, Shah, & Fan, 1999). Thus, this research examines media content in accordance with ideology to ascertain if any differences exist that may persuade the readers of a particular newspaper on the efficacy of a particular government's crisis communication.

This study examines *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times* in the United States, *The Guardian* and *The Times* in the United Kingdom and *The New Zealand Herald* and *Stuff* in New Zealand. *The Wall Street Journal* started in the early 1900s. In 2007, it was sold to Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, which also owned multiple other media. Since then, the newspaper has been charged with taking a conservative stance in its reporting (Hughes, 2021). By comparison, the *New York Times* was founded about 50 years earlier than the *Wall Street Journal* and is regarded as being left of centre, focusing on issues such as civil rights and health (Puglisi, 2006).

In the United Kingdom, *The Guardian* and *The Times* newspapers were established in the 19th and 18th centuries, respectively. Since the 1980s, News Corporation became the owner of *The Times*. By comparison, *The Guardian* is owned by Scott Trust and is generally regarded as leaning towards leftist politics (Britannica, 2020a, 2020b; Schaeffner, 2010).

In New Zealand, the *New Zealand Herald* was established in the 19th century. Currently, this newspaper is owned by APN News & Media, and despite in the past having been regarded as a centre-right newspaper, some have recently perceived it as leaning towards leftist ideas (Rafeeq, 2007). *Stuff* is a digital news site owned by Stuff Ltd. and, from all the newspapers selected, this is the youngest one, having been founded in 2000 (Nielsen, 2018). In terms of its political tendency, it could be argued that this news site is in line with progressive ideas as it has shown clear support of civil rights and environmental issues, such as the approval of same-sex marriage or climate change activism (Stuff, 2013).

The United States, The United Kingdom and New Zealand

President Donald Trump took office in The United States in 2016. His political behaviour stood out in relation to past presidents due to his confrontational style. He would often use his social media channels to directly call out his opponents and defend his

government against criticism (Dimock, 2021). These actions led to political tensions between the Republican and Democratic parties, which contributed to Donald Trump's impeachment. Despite this, President Donald Trump stayed in office until the end of his 4-year term. His management of the COVID-19 pandemic was criticised due to inaccurate statements made by him that would later be questioned or rejected outright by health experts. For example, he stated that warm weather would help eliminate COVID and that this was a temporary situation that would disappear soon (Paz, 2020).

In the United Kingdom, Boris Johnson became Prime Minister in 2019 after being voted in by the majority of the Conservative party following Theresa May's resignation (Hainey, 2022). In terms of the management of the pandemic, Prime Minister Johnson's government has been criticised in terms of its decisions around lockdowns, the high mortality rate of elders and ethnic minorities, and the lack of attention to scientific advice (Booth & Sample, 2021). For example, the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies, an organisation in the UK that provides scientific and technical advice to support government decision-makers during emergencies, believed that the first lockdown in the UK was too late, which resulted in a high number of deaths (Booth & Sample, 2021). Moreover, deaths at elders' homes and within minority groups also seemed to be higher than the general population, which led to questions around the government's care for vulnerable people. Moreover, health experts believed that the government did not implement efficient testing systems, neither it seemed to follow scientific advice. All these instances contributed to a political atmosphere where Prime Minister Johnson's announcements on COVID-19 related measures were the subject of criticism by his opponents (Booth & Sample, 2021).

New Zealand presents a considerable different context, both in the election of Jacinda Ardern as Prime Minister, and the management of the COVID-19 pandemic. Jacinda Ardern became Prime Minister shortly after becoming the leader of the Labour party with a high

level of public approval. This is argued to be due to her perceived strong connection with citizens and genuine care for them (John, 2020). Furthermore, New Zealand's management of the COVID-19 pandemic featured early strict lockdowns, strong border closures and high goals for vaccination rates. Specifically, New Zealand implemented quarantine processes for arrivals, set the goal of over 90% of citizens vaccinated and a requirement for vaccine passes. Even though it seemed like the majority supported these measures, there still was resistance in parts of the population at the time of this study (Robert, 2020).

These differences in government (two right-leaning leaders and one left) may have affected the level of emphasis found in the two newspapers sampled in each country. Of course, the governmental focus is not predictive of media content but may provide important context to the findings.

Research Questions

RQ1: Are there differences in the crisis communication of the governments of the United States, the United Kingdom and New Zealand?

RQ2: Are there differences in the newspaper reporting of the press conferences from the United States, the United Kingdom and New Zealand?

RQ 2a: Do the news media accurately report government press conferences in the United States, the United Kingdom and New Zealand?

RQ3: Did newspapers in the United States and the United Kingdom differ according to ideology?

Methodology

Data Collection This quantitative content analysis aimed to examine the government communication about COVID-19 in the United States, United Kingdom, and New Zealand and its coverage by local newspapers. As the pandemic hit these countries at different times, this study starts in February 2020 and runs until August 2020, which is when countries were fully into periods of lockdown and had offered financial relief. This elongated timeframe

allowed for visibility of any trends and changes in the communication from the three selected governments on the COVID response.

For this research, government communication was examined through the transcripts of each leader's official press conferences, which were collected from the official government websites in each of the three countries. Media articles related to the press conferences were selected by relevance through date of publication and the presence of certain keywords (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 118). Specifically, news articles had to be published on the same date as the press conferences or a day after and had to contain the keywords *coronavirus* and/or *covid* as well as, the keywords *Donald Trump*, *Boris Johnson* and *Jacinda Ardern* in newspapers from the United States, United Kingdom and New Zealand, respectively. These keywords were used to secure stronger links between the information in the articles and the press conferences. This approach allowed the study to narrow the data available in the newspapers to relevant publications for this research.

The newspapers selected for this study were *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times* in the United States, *The Guardian* and *The Times* in the United Kingdom and *The New Zealand Herald* and *Stuff* in New Zealand. These newspapers were selected given they are the highest circulated nationally, respectively in each country (Peiser, 2018; Pew Research Center, 2018). Their numbers of circulation were cross-checked through three different sources (Agility PR Solutions, 2017; IPFS, 2018; Statista, 2018). The total number of texts gathered, between newspaper articles and press conferences transcripts, was 738 (Table 1).

Data Analysis

Two coders were employed to analyse this data. The second coder examined 10 percent of articles to ensure intercoder reliability while the first coder examined the entirety of the sample. In this case, intercoder reliability refers to the extent to which two independent

coders agreed on the coding when applying the same coding scheme. Intercoder reliability values of kappa greater than .75 indicate excellent agreement beyond chance alone and suggest a strong standard measure of reliability (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 1998). *Scott's Pi* was also computed, which represented the inter-coder agreement after chance has been removed.

The creation of codes depended upon ascertaining repeating patterns or themes to answer the research questions in an objective and quantifiable manner (Gunter, 1999). The thematic analysis of texts gathered was guided by a coding sheet, which was created following previous decisions in terms of likely themes that would allow the finding of patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initial identification of themes was made first when examining the entire dataset and then those themes were continually refined after closer readings of the text. This included the mentioning of the press conference, the acknowledgment of government advice on health precautions, and whether the texts aligned with the government or not. During this process, principal themes, that could not have been uncovered through segmented or cursory readings, began to emerge. An emerging narrative was the manifestation of that positioning and how the coders began to understand the content. This method allowed for a systematic research process that could highlight the frequency with which certain keywords appear in the newspapers' issues and it is not 'wedded to any pre-existing theoretical framework' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 81). Moreover, the use of content analysis also could bring out other lexical terms associated with the words selected (Asa Berger, 2020), which made it possible to explore the framing used in the reporting of COVID-19.

Results

Chi-square correlations (χ^2), expected values, adjusted residual scores (ASR), degrees of freedom (df), simple percentages, and frequencies were used to answer the stated research question. Adjusted residuals, or the difference between expected and observed counts, were

used to demonstrate actual influences of any given relationship. Strong influences of a particular case of one variable on a particular case of another variable were found if adjusted residuals were +/- 2.0 points.

The Cohen's Kappa inter-coder reliability coefficient was utilised to indicate the coding scheme's reliability. Inter-coder reliability, as measured through Cohen's Kappa, ranged from .834 to .916 for all of the coded variables in 10 percent of the content. The overall inter-coder Cohen's Kappa was .867, suggesting a highly robust coding scheme (Krippendorff, 2004). Values of kappa greater than .75 indicate excellent agreement beyond chance alone and suggest a strong standard measure of reliability (Riffe et al., 1998). *Scott's Pi* was computed at .826, representing the inter-coder agreement after chance has been removed, suggesting a reliable coding scheme was utilised.

There was 44.0 percent of articles from New Zealand, 49.6 from the United States and 17.4 percent of articles in this sample were from the United Kingdom. Overall, governments were extremely supportive of following scientific advice (53.7 percent) even though politicians were often without scientists at press conferences (54.6 percent). Press conferences strongly emphasised health (86.1 percent), strongly emphasised the public good (64.8 percent), and did not mention economic impacts (42.6 percent). The media articles in this sample were more likely to mention the press conferences (55.9 percent) than not. When they did, articles were framed with a health focus (48.3 percent) and articles mentioned that the government's strongly emphasised health (59.1 percent).

Research Question 1

The first research question asked, 'Are there differences in the crisis communication of the governments of the United States, the United Kingdom and New Zealand?' Six variables were coded to measure differences in crisis communication from governments. These variables were: if the government displayed any valence toward the media in a press

conference, if the government followed scientific advice in a press conference, if there was a scientist in a press conference, if the government emphasised health challenges in a press conference, if the government emphasised the public good in a press conference, and if the government emphasised economic impacts in a press conference.

There was a significant relationship between the national location of a press conference and the general view of media ($\chi^2(8, N = 108) = 110.39$, Cramer's $V = .715$, $p < .001$) (Table 2). The adjusted residuals demonstrated that New Zealand was somewhat supportive of the media (ASR = 2.8), the United States was more neutral toward the media (77.2 percent of 66 articles from the United States, ASR = 4.1), and the United Kingdom was less neutral toward the media (ASR = -6.3), than expected by chance alone.

There was a significant relationship between the national location of a press conference and the following scientific advice in a press conference ($\chi^2(6, N = 108) = 110.39$, Cramer's $V = .315$, $p = .002$). The adjusted residuals showed that New Zealand was extremely supportive of the scientific advice less than expected by chance (ASR = -2.8) and the United States extremely supportive of the scientific advice more than expected by chance (ASR = 2.6, 63.6 percent of 66 articles from the United States).

There was a significant relationship between the national location of a press conference and the presence of a scientist ($\chi^2(2, N = 108) = 110.39$, Cramer's $V = .715$, $p < .001$). The adjusted residuals demonstrated that scientists in New Zealand were not present in press conferences as much as would be expected (ASR = -2.1), whereas scientists in the United States were present in press conferences more than would be expected (ASR = 4.5, 54.5 percent of 66 articles from the United States), and scientists in the United Kingdom were not present in press conferences as much as would be expected by chance alone (ASR = -3.4, 95 percent of 20 articles from the United Kingdom).

There was a significant relationship between the national location of a press conference and the emphasis on health challenges ($\chi^2(4, N = 108) = 29.208$, Cramer's $V = .368$, $p < .001$) and emphasis on public good ($\chi^2(6, N = 108) = 42.941$, Cramer's $V = .446$, $p < .001$). The relationship between the national location of a press conference and the economic impacts was not significant. The adjusted residuals demonstrated that New Zealand did not strongly emphasise health challenges as much as would be expected (ASR = -4.8, 54.5 percent of 22 articles from New Zealand) or the public good (ASR = -5.6). The United States emphasised health challenges (ASR = 2.4, 94.2 percent of 66 articles from the United States) more than would be expected by chance alone and the United Kingdom emphasised health challenges more than would be expected (100% of 20 articles from the United Kingdom, ASR = 2.0). The United States emphasised the public good (ASR = 2.2, 72.7 percent of 66 articles from the United States) more than would be expected by chance alone and the United Kingdom emphasised the public good more than would be expected (95% of 20 articles from the United Kingdom, ASR = 3.1).

There was a significant relationship between the national location of a press conference and the general view of media ($\chi^2(2, N = 108) = 110.39$, Cramer's $V = .715$, $p < .001$). The adjusted residuals demonstrated that New Zealand was somewhat supportive of the media (ASR = 2.8), the United States was more neutral toward the media (ASR = 4.1), and the United Kingdom was less neutral toward the media (ASR = -6.3), than expected by chance alone.

Research Question 2 and 2a

The second research question asked, 'Do the news media accurately report government press conferences in the United States, the United Kingdom and New Zealand?' and 'Are there differences in the newspaper reporting of the press conferences from the United States, the United Kingdom and New Zealand?'

Seven variables were coded to measure differences in the media representation of governmental crisis communication. These variables were: if an article mentioned the press conference that had just occurred, if an article displayed any valence from the government toward the media in a press conference, if an article stated that the government followed scientific advice in a press conference, if an article stated that there was a scientist in the press conference, if an article stated that the government emphasised health challenges in a press conference, if an article stated that the government emphasised the public good in a press conference, and if an article stated that the government emphasised economic impacts in a press conference.

There was a significant relationship between the national location of a newspaper publication and media mention of the government's perception toward the media ($\chi^2(8, N = 650) = 20.271$, Cramer's $V = .125$, $p = .009$) (Table 3). The United States press was more likely to portray the government as somewhat adversarial to the media (ASR = 2.3) whereas the press in New Zealand was less likely to portray the government as somewhat adversarial to the media (ASR = -2.2).

Media mention of how government's viewed the media ($M = .10$, $SD = .498$) was significantly different than the view of media portrayed at the press conference ($M = 2.26$, $SD = 1.241$); $t(112) = 17.851$, $p = 000$) (Table 4). Over 60 percent of press conferences mentioned the media but portrayed the media with a neutral frame (62 percent) whereas 95 percent of news articles did not mention the media.

There was a significant relationship between the national location of a newspaper publication and media mention of the government's perception toward scientific advice ($\chi^2(10, N = 650) = 55.086$, Cramer's $V = .206$, $p = <.001$). The New Zealand press was more likely to portray the government as extremely supportive of scientific advice (ASR = 4.8)

whereas the United States press was less likely to portray the government as extremely supportive of scientific advice (ASR = -3.7) than chance alone.

Media mention of how the government viewed the scientific advice ($M = 1.44$, $SD = 2.049$) was significantly different than the view of scientific advice at the press conference ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 1.728$); $t(161) = 13.212$, $p = 000$. Governments in press conferences were extremely supportive of scientific advice (53 percent) whereas 64.5 percent of news articles did not mention if the government was supportive of scientific advice or not.

There was a significant relationship between the national location of a newspaper publication and media mention of the government's emphasis on health challenges ($\chi^2(4, N = 650) = 22.993$, Cramer's $V = .133$, $p = <.001$). The New Zealand press was less likely to portray the government as strongly emphasising health (ASR = -3.5) whereas the United Kingdom press was more likely to portray the government as strongly emphasising health (ASR = 3.6) than chance alone. Overall, 59.1 percent of press coverage portrayed the government as strongly emphasising health challenges. Another 9.2 percent found that the government somewhat emphasised health challenges.

Media mention of how government's viewed health challenges ($M = 1.860$, $SD = 1.391$) was significantly different than the view of health challenges at the press conference ($M = 2.680$, $SD = .830$); $t(222) = 8.478$, $p = <.001$. Almost all of the press conferences strongly emphasised health challenges (86.1 percent) whereas 59.1 percent of news articles strongly emphasised health challenges.

There was a significant relationship between the national location of a newspaper publication and frame used in newspaper articles ($\chi^2(6, N = 650) = 26.178$, Cramer's $V = .142$, $p = <.001$). The health frame was the most predominant overall in the media (48.3 percent) but New Zealand was more likely to emphasise the economic frame (ASR = 2.4) and

the United States was more likely to emphasise the political frame (ASR = 3.0), than expected by chance alone.

There was a significant relationship between the national location of a newspaper publication and media mention of the press conference ($\chi^2(2, N = 650) = 24.398$, Cramer's $V = .194$, $p < .001$). The United States was more likely not to mention the press conference (ASR = -3.6), whereas the United Kingdom was more likely to mention the press conference (ASR = 4.6) than expected by chance alone. In the overall sample, coverage of the press conference was almost evenly split with 55.9 percent of articles mentioning the press conference that immediately preceded publication and 44.1 percent of articles not mentioning the press conference.

The relationship between the national location of a newspaper publication and media mention of the economic impact and also mention of contrary perspectives to the government were both insignificant. It should be said that media mention of how the government viewed economic challenges ($M = .81$, $SD = 1.249$) was significantly different than the view of economic challenges at the press conference ($M = 1.06$, $SD = 1.183$); $t(149) = 2.017$, $p = .045$. Almost half of the press conferences did not mention economic challenges (42.6 percent) whereas 66.0 percent of news articles did not mention economic challenges.

Research Question 3

Conservative papers from the United States and the United Kingdom made up 55.9 percent of the total while liberal papers in this sample were 44.1 percent. The third research question asked, 'Did newspapers in the United States and the United Kingdom differ according to ideology?' Seven variables were coded to measure differences in the media representation of governmental crisis communication. These variables were: if an article mentioned the press conference that had just occurred, if an article displayed any valence from the government toward the media in a press conference, if an article stated that the

government followed scientific advice in a press conference, if an article stated that there was a scientist in the press conference, if an article stated that the government emphasised health challenges in a press conference, if an article stated that the government emphasised the public good in a press conference, and if an article stated that the government emphasised economic impacts in a press conference.

There was a significant relationship between the political ideology of newspapers and media frame ($\chi^2(3, N = 422) = 31.965$, Cramer's $V = .275$, $p < .001$) (Table 5). Conservative papers were less likely to emphasise the political frame whereas the liberal papers were more likely to focus on politics (ASR = ± 5.6). Conservative papers were more likely to emphasise the health frame whereas the liberal papers were less likely to do so (ASR = ± 3.6). Overall, the majority of conservative papers 46.6 percent (110) focused on health, while 55.3 percent of (103) liberal papers focused on politics. The effects of the economic frame were not as strong but still over the 2.0 threshold with conservative papers being more likely to emphasise the economic frame whereas the liberal papers were less likely to do so (ASR = ± 2.3).

There was a significant relationship between political ideology of newspapers and media mention of the press conference ($\chi^2(1, N = 420) = 48.932$, Cramer's $V = .341$, $p < .001$). Conservative papers were more likely to not mention the press conference (59.4 percent of conservative articles) whereas the liberal papers were more likely to mention the press conference (74.7 percent of conservative articles) (ASR = ± 7.0).

The relationship between political ideology of newspapers and media mention of the government's perception toward the media was significant ($\chi^2(3, N = 422) = 19.493$, Cramer's $V = .215$, $p < .001$). Conservative papers were more likely to not mention that the government was extremely or somewhat adversarial to media whereas the liberal papers were

more likely to mention that the government was extremely or somewhat adversarial to media (ASR = +/-2.5, 3.6).

There was not a significant relationship between political ideology of newspapers and media mention of the government's perception toward scientific advice or the media mention of the government's emphasis on health challenges or the media mention of the economic impact, were all insignificant.

The relationship between political ideology of newspapers and media's contrary perspectives to government was significant ($\chi^2(3, N = 422) = 18.705$, Cramer's $V = .211$, $p < .001$). Conservative papers were more likely to not mention the government as contrary to the news media whereas the liberal papers were more likely to mention the government as contrary to the news media (ASR = +/-3.9).

Discussion and Conclusion

This study has shown several features in the patterns of government communication regarding the COVID-19 crisis and the media's coverage of it. The results of this content analysis may be categorised into two main themes: the characteristics of the government communication to face the spread of COVID-19 and the news media dissemination of that information.

Even though in different degrees, the fact that all three governments did show a level of collaboration and neutrality towards the media in press conferences, reflects the claim that in moments of crisis, the cooperation between politicians and the media is key for the appropriate dissemination of messages that can help to overcome a crisis (Walaski, 2011). This cooperation gave a sense of transparency to the government, which served as a tool to persuade citizens to follow the rules. It could be argued that the severity of the COVID-19 crisis did not allow for political tensions as, at the time, and instead created a 'rally-around-the-flag' nationalistic effect (Van Aelst & Blumler, 2022). It is important to note that this

nationalistic cooperation can result in the highlighting of certain information, potentially overlooking relevant data regarding the government's crisis management.

Additionally, the findings show that in the three countries sampled, the press conferences demonstrated that decisions were based on scientific advice, with the United States and New Zealand featuring the presence of scientists in the majority of appearances. These results demonstrate the importance of symbols that contributed to the clarity of communication in terms of precautions and regulations to address the spread of COVID-19. The presence of scientists served as a way to give increased credibility and validity of the government's regulations to the audience. In this sense, it is worth noting that there was an absence of segregation of COVID-19 into different ethnic or racial groups. The messages were concrete and were directed to the population as a whole, which did not consider potential challenges that different groups might have faced in following the government's instructions. This is an important omission considering the numerous and diverse populations of each country in this study (Bullard, 1992).

In terms of the media's coverage of governmental communication, the results provide valuable insights on the influence of frames and ideologies in the news-making process. Even though the press conferences in each of the three countries had a strong focus on health and acknowledged scientific advice, the follow-up articles did not reflect that fully. Just over half of the articles in this analysis were a direct report of the press conferences, with the rest only using the press conferences as a reference to their own takes of the crisis. For instance, economic challenges had more presence in the news articles than in the press conferences, even though the press conferences were mostly around health measures. This is a clear example of how editorial and personal biases can influence the processing of news for public dissemination, which can leave out information prioritised by the source (Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2006, p. 280).

The bigger contrast of ideologies in reporting could be seen in newspapers from the United States. Conservative newspapers focused more on health and economy, whereas liberal newspapers in the U.S. leaned more towards politics. Additionally, liberal newspapers highlighted tensions between the media and the government, something that was not as strong in the conservative newspapers. Although the media was supportive overall, there was a more adversarial relationship between the press and the governments in the UK and the US, which were both right-leaning at the time. As to where is stated earlier, this is not at all predictive but provides an interesting context for that emphasis. Future studies should explore this further.

These findings demonstrate that even in major crises, the ideologies of newspapers can play an important role in the framing of information and the creation of news articles. In the three countries considered for this study, the comparison between the government's communication and coverage of that communication by the media indicates that the information reported in the media emphasized different aspects of the pandemic from one another. This raises questions concerning the potential distortion of governmental messaging when amplified by the media, which may be a result of several factors that should continue to be examined: namely, the local political context, bias and partisanship. This paper demonstrated a difference in emphasis across outlets. Further research should continue to explore why those differences exist.

Table 1. Breakdown of number of press conferences and news articles gathered by country and newspaper

Country/Newspaper	Number of press conferences/news articles.
New Zealand	22 press conferences
United States	56 press conferences
United Kingdom	20 press conferences
New Zealand Herald	108 news articles
Stuff	120 news articles
Wall Street Journal	213 news articles
New York Times	97 news articles
The Guardian	79 news articles
The Times	23 news articles

Table 2: Description of findings for Research Question 1

Research Question 1	Are there differences in the crisis communication of the governments of the United States, the United Kingdom and New Zealand?		
Significant Relationships National Location of a Press Conference X ...	P Value	Chi Square	Adjusted Residuals +/-2.0
The General View of Media	.001	110.39	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Zealand somewhat supportive of the media • The United States neutral toward the media • The United Kingdom less neutral toward the media
Following scientific advice in a press conference	.002	110.39	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Zealand less extremely supportive of scientific advice • The United States extremely supportive of the scientific advice
Presence of a Scientist	.001	110.39	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Zealand & The United Kingdom less presence of scientists • The United States more presence of scientists
Emphasis on Health Challenges	.001	29.208	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Zealand not emphasising health challenges • The United States & The United Kingdom emphasising health challenges
General View of Media	.001	110.39	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Zealand somewhat supportive of the media • United States neutral toward the media

Table 3. Description of findings for Research Question 2

Research Question 2	Do the news media accurately report government press conferences in the United States, the United Kingdom and New Zealand?		
Significant Relationships National Location of a Newspaper Publication X...	P Value	Chi Square	Adjusted Residuals +/-2.0
Media Mention of the Government's Perception Toward the Media	.009	20.271	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The United States more likely to portray the government as somewhat adversarial to the media. • New Zealand less likely to portray the government as somewhat adversarial to the media.
Media Mention of the Government's Perception Toward Scientific Advice.	.001	55.086	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Zealand more likely to portray the government as extremely supportive of scientific advice • The United States less likely to portray the government as extremely supportive of scientific advice
Media Mention of the Government's Emphasis on Health Challenges	.001	22.993	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Zealand less likely to portray the government as strongly emphasising health • The United Kingdom more likely to portray the government as strongly emphasising health
Frame Used in Newspaper Articles	<.001	26.178	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Zealand more likely to emphasise the economic frame • The United States more likely to emphasise the political frame
Media Mention of the Press Conference	<.001	24.398	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The United States more likely not to mention the press conference • The United Kingdom more likely to mention the press conference

Table 4. Description of findings for Research Question 2a.

Research Question 2a	Are there differences in the newspaper reporting of the press conferences from the United States, the United Kingdom and New Zealand?		
Significant Relationships Media Mention of How Government's Viewed the Media X ...	P Value	T Test	Highest Percentages
View of Media Portrayed at the Press Conference.	.000	17.851	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 62% Press conferences portray media neutrally • 95% Press conferences do not mention media
View of Scientific Advice at the Press Conference.	.000	13.212	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 53% Governments extremely supportive of scientific advice • 64.5% News Articles do not mention government support of scientific advice
View of Health Challenges at the Press Conference	<.001	8.478	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 86.1% Press conferences strongly emphasise health challenges • 59.1% News Articles strongly emphasise health challenges
View of Economic Challenges at the Press Conference	.045	2.017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 42.6% Press Conferences do not mention economic challenges • 66.0% News Articles do not mention economic challenges

Table 5. Description of findings for Research Question 3

Research Question 3	Did newspapers in the United States and the United Kingdom differ according to ideology?		
Significant Relationships Political Ideology of newspapers X...	P Value	Chi Square	Adjusted Residuals +/-2.0
Media frame	<.001	31.965	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Conservative papers less likely to emphasise the political frame & more likely to emphasise health frame . Liberal papers more likely to emphasise politics
Media Mention of the Press Conference.	<.001	48.932	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Conservative papers more likely to not mention the press conference. . Liberal papers more likely to mention the press conference
Media Mention of the Government's Perception Toward the Media.	<.001	19.493	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Conservative papers more likely to not mention that the government was extremely or somewhat adversarial to media
Media Contrary Perspectives to Government	<.001	18.705	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservative papers more likely to not mention the government as contrary to the news media • Liberal papers more likely to mention the government as contrary to the news media

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