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**Mubwandarikwa, Angela**

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***Tracking coverage of the 2014 – 2015 Ebola outbreak: the case study of News 24 and Times Live***

***By Angela Mubwandarikwa: 1242227***

**Supervisor: Ruth Becker**

A research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Journalism and Media Studies

September 2018

**DECLARATION**

I Angela Mubwandarikwa, declare that this research report is my own original work submitted to the University of Witwatersrand's Faculty of Humanities in Johannesburg. This piece of work has not been previously submitted to any other university for any other degree. Citations and acknowledgements have been strictly adhered to in compiling this research report and in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Journalism and Media Studies.

Signature……A.S. Mubwandarikwa……..

Date……28 September 2018……..

Student Number……1242227…….

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**ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATION**

| | |
|---|---|
| CDC | Centers for Diseases Control and Prevention |
| DRC | Democratic Republic of Congo |
| eNCA | e–News Channel Africa |
| EVD | Ebola Virus Disease |
| EWN | Eye Witness New |
| HIV/AIDS | Human Immuno Deficiency Syndrome / Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome |
| IHR | International Health Regulations |
| INGOs | International Non–Governmental Organisations |
| MSF | Medecins Sans Frontieres (Doctors Without Borders) |
| NGOs | Non–Governmental Organisations |
| UK | United Kingdom |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| UNOCHA | United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs |
| USA | United States of America |
| WHO | World Health Organisation |

**Table of contents**

Declaration.....ii

Acknowledgements.....iii

Acronyms and abbreviation.....iv

Table of contents……1

List of tables and figures…….....5

Abstract.....6

**Chapter 1**

1.1Overview of the research.....7

1.2 Introduction.....7

1.3 Research problem.....9

1.4 Aim of the study.....10

1.5 Objectives of the study .....11

1.6 Research questions.....11

1.7 Justification.....11

1.8 Structure of the study.....14

1.9 Conclusion.....14

**Chapter 2**

2.1 Introduction to the South African online media landscape.....15

2.2 Contextualising online media in South Africa.....15

2.3 *Media 24*.....16

2.4 *News 24.com*.....16

2.5 *Time Live*.....17

2.6 The influence of *News 24* and *Times Live*.....17

2.7 Conclusion.....18

**Chapter 3**

3.1.1 Literature review and theoretical framework.....19

3.1.2 Introduction.....19

3.2 Definition of key terms.....19

3.2.1What is an epidemic?.....19

3.2.2 What is Ebola?.....19

3.3 Reporting of Ebola in other countries (Nigeria, Ghana, USA, UK – Africa vs. Western.....20

3.4 Sources and their role in building the media agenda in health reporting.....23

3.5 South Africa's position in relation to other African countries and its media coverage of African disasters.....24

3.6 Theoretical Framework.....25

3.6.1 Agenda Setting.....25

3.7 Framing.....27

3.8 News Values Approach.....28

3.9 Churnalism.....30

3.9.1Conclusion.....31

**Chapter 4**

4.1Research Methodology.....32

4.2 Introduction.....32

4.3 Research design and approach.....32

4.4 Sample selection.....34

4.4.1Timeline.....35

4.5 Data Collection.....36

4.6 Data Analysis.....37

4.7 The coding .....38

4.7.1Quantitative and Qualitative content analysis.....39

4.8 Validity and Reliability.....43

4.9 Limitations .....44

4.9.1 Conclusion.....45

Chapter 5 Presentation of findings

5.1Introduction.....46

5.2 Sample selection.....46

5.3 Total Ebola coverage by *News 24* and *Times Live*.....47

5.4 Frequency of coverage per month by *Times Live* and *News 24*.....47

5.4.1 Nature of coverage by *News 24 and Times Live*.....49

5.4.2 Section or placement of Ebola stories by *Times Live* and *News 24*.....51

5.4.3 Origin of *Times Live* and *News 24 stories*.....*52*

*5.4.4* Number of sources used by *Times Live* and *News 24*.....*53*

*5.4.5* Types of sources used for Ebola stories by *Times Live* and *News 24*.....*55*

*5.4.6* Main themes or angles, topics or frames covered by *Times Live* and *News 24*.....*57*

*5.4.7* Possible news values considered by *Times Live* and *News 24*.....*59*

*5.4.8* Conclusion.....60

Chapter 6 Discussion of findings and conclusion.....*61*

*6.1* Introduction.....61

6.2 Quantitative Content Analysis.....61

6.2.1 Prominence, frequency and how Ebola was on the agenda of *Times Live* and *News24*……66

6.2.2 Sources and their role in building the media agenda in Ebola reporting.....66

6.2.3 Churnalism……..69

6.3 Qualitative Content Analysis.....71

6.3.1 Framing.....71

6.3.2 Framing of Ebola by News 24 and Times Live.....71

6.3.3 Main frames identified in Ebola stories.....73

6.3.4 News values and influence on framing and agenda setting……77

6.3.6 Conclusion……..…….81

Chapter 7 Conclusion and Future opportunities for further study.....81

Bibliography.....83

**APPENDIX**……91

**Tables**

Table 1: Total Ebola coverage by *News 24* and *Times Live*……..*91*

Table 2: *Times Live* Frequency of coverage per month (6 months)……92

Table 3: *News 24* Frequency of coverage per month (6 months)…….....92

Table 4: *Times Live* placement of stories……...94

Table 5: *News 24* placement of stories……..94

**Figures**

Figure 1: Distribution of *Times Live*'s Ebola editorial content (Nature of coverage)……93

Figure 2: Distribution of *News 24* Ebola editorial content (Nature of coverage)…….....93

Figure 3: Origin of *Times Live* stories…….....95

Figure 4: Origin of *News 24* stories…….95

Figure 5: *Times Live* number of sources used, referred to or quoted……...96

Figure 6: *News 24* number of sources used, referred to or quoted……96

Figure 7: *Times Live* sources used, quoted or attributed to for Ebola stories……...97

Figure 8: *News24* sources used, quoted or attributed to for Ebola stories…….97

Figure 9: *Times Live*'s main themes……..98

Figure 10: *News 24* main themes……..98

Figure 11: Possible News values considered by *Times Live*……..*99*

Figure 12: Possible News values considered by *News 24*……..*99*

**ABSTRACT**

# CHAPTER 1

## 1.1 Overview

This chapter outlines the background information, research aim, research problem, research questions, objectives and the context of the study. The chapter also defines the justification of the study and its significance of the study.

## 1.2 Introduction

Between 2014 and 2015, three West African countries, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, were worst affected by the Ebola virus outbreak (*Reuters, 2014;* Centres for Disease Control and Prevention). Although other countries such as Nigeria were partly affected, the epidemic was quickly contained. This outbreak has been described as 'unprecedented' due to the quick spread beyond the African borders and the huge number of confirmed cases and deaths (WHO, 2015; Mazumdar, 2014).

The United States' health protection agency, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), reports that at the end of December 2014, the first year of the outbreak, about 20,171 cases had been confirmed and 7,889 patients including health care workers had died (CDC, 2016). A preliminary report by the WHO on health worker Ebola infections in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, notes that health workers accounted for 3,9% (815 of the 20,955) of all confirmed and probable cases of Ebola recorded between January 2014 and 31 March 2015 (WHO, 2015: 4).

However, Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) outbreaks had occurred prior to the 2014-2015 Ebola outbreak, but these did not affect as many people and the deaths were quite minimal or there were none as indicated by the WHO (2017). For example, a case of EVD was reported in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in 1977and one person is reported to have died. In South Africa, one person who had contracted Ebola in Gabon died in 1996, while in 2005, 12 cases were registered in the Congo (now the DRC) and 10 people died (WHO, 2017). The highest number of deaths from Ebola before the 2014-2015 outbreak stood at 280 and this figure was the highest since the first outbreak in 1976 in Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo) (CDC, 2016; WHO, 2017).

The 2014-2015Ebola outbreak attracted a lot of attention from different societies and sectors that include the media. There was a huge increase in the coverage of Ebola that even surpassed the outbreak itself (Michna, 2016: 1). According to Michna (2016: 1), there were nearly 300

billion articles and 1, 5 million references published about the Ebola virus between May 1, 2014, and October 15, 2014 in 190 countries. However, significant interest only picked up as the virus spread rapidly breaking the boundaries and borders into Spain and then other European countries, and the USA (Cullen, 2014).

The coverage also increased on 8 August 2014 when the WHO, declared Ebola as a 'Public Health Emergency of International Concern'. According to the International Health Regulations [IHR] (2005) and this means that "it is an unusual or unexpected occurrence constituting a public health risk to other countries. This happens through the international spread of disease that would require a more coordinated and immediate international response" (WHO, 2017). The WHO Director–General determines whether an event can be deemed a Public Health Emergency of International Concern and requires the convening of a committee of experts – the IHR Emergency Committee. This committee advises the Director General on the approved measures to be taken on an emergency basis (WHO, 2017: para 3).

The magnitude of the Ebola outbreak in West Africa compelled governments, healthcare experts and the media to emphasise certain messages and highlight some elements more than the others in their reporting. This reportage significantly provides a deeper understanding on how South African media fared in reporting the big story of the day.

The media needed to play a pivotal role in helping stop the spread of the epidemic with responsible reporting (Cullen, 2014). As Cullen (2014) points out, the media were slow to report on Ebola just as it was during the early days of AIDS in the 1980's. The media only started to care about AIDS reporting when the disease was linked with heterosexuality: "Until then, HIV was predominantly framed as a disease of gay people and drug addicts" (Cullen, 2014: para 5). The same can be said with Ebola, for prior to the arrival of the first patient in the United States of America (USA) for treatment on 2 August, 2014, the diagnosis of a case in Dallas, Texas on 30 September, 2014 and the subsequent death of Thomas Duncan, in October 2014 in the USA, the western and especially US media did not care to cover Ebola (Cullen, 2014; Burke, Boddie, McGinty, Pollack et.al., 2017: 1). Duncan had visited his family in Texas from Liberia and his case was a clear indication that Ebola could spread to and within the US (Cullen, 2014). The US was not exceptional though, coverage across the developed world also went up when "Westerners returned from West Africa with the disease. It seems Ebola was seen as a disease of the developing world until it hit the USA and Europe" (Cullen 2014).

It is against this background that this study looked at how South African media, in particular

the *News 24* and *Times live* online news platforms, covered Ebola. The focus here, is particularly and mainly at when they started the coverage, frequency, nature of coverage, sources used and the origin of their stories. The study further explores what the two media outlets considered newsworthy by examining the angles or issues that both prominently highlighted and the sources they used. The study also determines the level of extra effort the media outlets put in doing more analytical stories rather than just using wire copy or public relations tools such as press releases, press conferences, meetings and press briefings as sources of their information.

These issues were especially important to study. Mello (2014: para. 4) notes that if media coverage lacks important information on deaths, comparisons to more familiar epidemics and how it is transmitted or there is some form of dramatisation of the issue, "the public will struggle to properly evaluate and respond to the risk of an Ebola outbreak".

### 1.3 Research problem

To date a lot of research has been carried out on how media covered the 2014-2015 Ebola outbreak. The main focus has largely been on how certain African media, particularly that from West Africa and notably Nigeria, as well as some international media outlets covered or framed the Ebola outbreak (Ogbonna, 2016; Cullen, 2014; Duru, 2016; Moyo 2015; Daniel and Alawari 2016; Michna, 2016; Johnson, Layefa and Taiwo: 2016; Mello, 2014; LSE, 2014; Boddie, Burke, McGinty, Sell et. al 2017; Nwanne, 2014).

There has also been comparative analyses on how West African and Western media - that from the United Kingdom and the USA, covered the Ebola outbreak. However, there has not been much research so far that focus on how the South African media covered the Ebola outbreak. There however exist a few studies, such as Moyo's (2015) which analyses the way audience's reception on health reporting about the Ebola outbreak as presented in the *eNCA* News. As a result, there exists a research opportunity for a unique and specific discussion focusing on online media in South Africa. However, this study focused precisely on how two top online news platforms in South Africa, *News 24* and *Times Live* covered this huge story. The study does not compare the two outlets in anyway as it is a case study that could give an indication on how the media in general and especially online media fared in covering the Ebola outbreak given their influence and their position as top outlets. The objective was to track coverage in terms of frequency and prominence given to issues. The study did not however, measure the

impact of coverage on readers as this is extremely difficult to do.

### 1.4 Aim of the study

The main aim of this study is to track how *News 24* and *Times Live* covered the Ebola outbreak in 2014 from 23 March until 31 August 2014 during its peak looking particularly at what they considered key or prominent, nature, frequency of coverage and the salience given to certain issues on Ebola. The media is considered the main source of health information, a window with which ordinary citizens become aware of health issues and respond to health issues Duhe and Cho (2009) as cited in Duru (2016:8); Leask, Hooker and King (2010: 1). For this reason it is key to also understand how South African media fared in terms of being a 'lamp of enlightenment' to the people especially in relation to how they covered the 2014 ─ 2015 Ebola outbreak.

Ogbonna (2016: 2) points out that the media is "the avenue through which policies on health are explained to people" owing to its privileged position and expected role to cover health issues. Hence, the media's important role in covering Ebola with this study particularly analysing the role played by the South African Media was important. Ironically, it has been shown that some media especially from the West was not responsible enough in their reporting of the Ebola outbreak as the reports were biased and unbalanced (Moyo 2015). It is again for this reason that an analysis was done to assess how *News 24* and *Times Live* fared.

The study also examines the sources and extent to which certain sources were used in reporting. It also looks at how far the media went out of their way to source their own independent coverage or original content and not rely on news wires, foreign copy, use of the public relations machinery such as press releases or statements, events, studies, and press conferences often referred to as churnalism – a practice now often associated with health and science reporting due to its technical nature (Ansolabehere, Behr and Lyengar, 1993:56; Davies, 2009: 53; Goldacre, 2009: 228).

Berger and Masala (2012: 25) note that there is limited amount of self-generated original news on some South African websites such as the *Mail* and *Guardian* and *City Press* in general. This could potentially be the same for *News 24* and *Times Live*. Some outlets relied heavily on news agencies such as the now defunct South African Press Agency (SAPA) for content, thus indicating that there is some form of churnalism that happens on some online platforms. The above assertion could be an indication of the churnalism situation in general in South Africa. This is relevant for this study since the analysis was done to determine whether there was some

form of churnalism by *News 24* and *Times Live*.

### 1.5 Objectives of the study

- To track, determine and evaluate the frequency and nature of coverage of Ebola by *News24* and *Times Live*
- To identify and examine the prominence given to the coverage of Ebola and the prominent issues, themes and angles or topics on Ebola as highlighted by both media outlets
- To measure the number of articles published independently or entirely by *News 24* and *Times live* reporters and not taken off the news wires or foreign publications (churnalism)
- To evaluate the number and type of sources used on Ebola articles

### 1.6 Research questions

1. How prominent and frequent was the Ebola outbreak on the *News 24* and *Times Live*'s agendas from March 2014 to August 2014?
2. Which themes, issues, topics or angles on Ebola did *News 24* and *Times Live* highlight prominently during the peak of the outbreak and which ones were absent?
3. What was the nature or pattern of coverage?

a.) To what extent did both publications drive coverage (looking at how much was self–generated original content versus wire-sourced content?)

4. Who and how many sources of information were used on Ebola Stories?

### 1.7 Justification

This study is especially significant to South Africa as it will bring a new body of knowledge on the existing studies on the nature of coverage and response of South African media to the Ebola epidemic. This study creates an opportunity for a specific discussion focusing on online media in South Africa. Given the magnitude of the 2014 ─ 2015 Ebola outbreak, it is not surprising that there will be potential outbreaks in the future. As a result, it is critical to understand how the media in South Africa covered Ebola – an epidemic that caused fear and killed thousands of people in West Africa. An analysis of the coverage of Ebola also helps in drawing lessons on how the media should report on epidemics in order to stamp them out or stop their spread.

Epidemics remain a huge challenge in Africa due to poor public health systems, natural disasters and conflicts that often lead to the displacement of people, overcrowding and spread of diseases (Alemu, Duale, Kebede and Yokouide, 2010: 21). This study is thus important in that it will encourage South African journalists to keep reporting on epidemics whilst making sure these and other health issues are given the prominence they deserve. Evidence has shown that keeping health issues, especially epidemics, on the spotlight in the media assists people to minimise risks and make informed decisions about their health (Dudo, Dahlstrom and Brossard 2007, as cited in Duru 2016). According to Armstrong, Carpenter and Hoknacki (2006) as cited in Duru (2016:12), less media attention on diseases results in reduced responses in the fight against diseases since policy makers may not see the urgency or importance of addressing them.

South Africa experiences a constant influx of people who visit the country mainly for economic and social reasons and thus marking it as high risk to threats of disease and epidemic outbreaks like Ebola (Health 24 2014). In this regard, the South African media must be vigilant and join in the band wagon of reporting on diseases such as Ebola to spread awareness and keep people informed on the epidemic.

According to Moyo (2015), the media played a vital role in covering the news about Ebola-related deaths and in that way caused alarm and panic. South Africa, like other countries, panicked when the epidemic began to spread beyond the West African borders. Media reports suggested that there was fear and panic with some reports questioning South Africa's preparedness for a potential outbreak (*Health 24*, 1 August 2014). It is an expectation that the media too should be well informed in order for them to report in a responsible manner. The Ebola outbreak was a test case for journalism world-wide. The media had to put Ebola on their agenda to enable the citizens to understand it as an important issue. Instead, fear and panic gripped the nation and the lack of information did not help. Therefore, it is critical to evaluate how the media should report on critical issues such as epidemics in to avoid panic and misinformation.

Mello (2014) notes that agenda setting shows that issues prioritised in the media are likely to be given priority by the public. With more and prominent coverage, the public is likely to consider it as a pressing issue. "…if media coverage lacks important information (e.g., mortality data; comparisons to more familiar epidemics; routes of transmission) or dramatizes the issue, the public will struggle to properly evaluate and respond to the risk of an Ebola outbreak" (Mello, 2014).

It is therefore in this vein that the study strategically evaluated how the top two South African news platforms reported on Ebola and especially how they handled the fear and panic that gripped the nation during the period of the epidemic. Issues that were highlighted more and those that were missing, are analysed to unpack the reasons behind that reality. It is also important to note the lessons or conclusions that can be drawn from this coverage as this will make the media to prepare better for future epidemics.

Previous research has also shown that the complex nature of science and health reporting, as well as other challenges of news production such as churnalism – an influence of public relations in journalism also referred to as 'science reporting by press release', is rife and has even worsened in these beats especially in the digital age (Russell, 2011; Robbins, 2011).

Such research carried out in the Pacific, South Africa, the UK and the USA suggests that big outlets rely more on press conferences, press releases, public relations firms and wire copy to get content which they use to generate stories. Cullen (2014: 200); Robbins (2011), refers to it as an obsession for a diet of press releases, workshop invitations and launches to drive health news. This trend has meant that journalists rarely go an extra mile to produce stories from their own initiative nor put effort to further develop stories nor get other sources except for those given in a press release(Van Dijk, 2009: 116; Lewis et al., 2008:1).

Robbins (2011) argues that journalists engage in churnalism in order to "meet increasing pressures of time and cost without undertaking further research or checking". Quoting BBC journalist Waseem Zakir, Robbins (2011), contends that churnalism is affecting every newsroom in the UK as journalists are becoming "more reactive and less proactive". This is also supported by Croteau and Hoynes (2013: 59), who argue use of news wires is a strategy to cut back on investigative journalism, while increasing profits.

It is therefore under this premise that the study analyses how much effort was put by journalists in crafting investigative pieces rather than relying on pre-packaged material or wire sources when reporting on Ebola. In that way the analysis determines the journalists' commitment to sharing more analytical content that does not only promote fear but is aimed at ending or finding lasting solutions to the Ebola outbreak. The study also, looks at the number of sources used, who these sources were and how extensively they were used. Finally, the period chosen for the study was ideal to observe the nature of coverage as there was a lot of attention on Ebola especially because the outbreak was at its peak.

## 1.8 Structure of the study

The study explores and tracks the coverage of the 2014–2015 Ebola outbreak as reported particularly at *News 24* and *Times Live*. Chapter 1 introduces the study, states the research problem, aim, research questions, justification and the objectives of the study.

Chapter 2 focuses on South Africa's position in relation to other African countries. The chapter also offers a brief overview of the two online media outlets under analysis and the general media landscape in South Africa.

Chapter 3 reviews the literature and theoretical frameworks used in this study.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodology used, units of analysis, sample collection, and limitations to the study.

Chapter 5 gives an overview of the findings, looking particularly at the presentation of findings

Chapter 6 discusses the findings of the study

Chapter 7 concludes the study and outlines recommendations for possible studies on agenda setting, framing and churnalism.

## 1.9 Conclusion

This chapter presented the background information, research aim, research problem, research questions, objectives and the context of the study. The chapter further defines the justification of the study and its significance. The next chapter, will give an overview of online media landscape in South Africa, *Media 24* and *Times Media* groups, *News 24* and *Times Live* websites and their influence in South Africa.

## Chapter 2: Introduction to the South African online media landscape

### 2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the background information, research aim, research problem, research questions, objectives and the context of the study. It further defined the justification of the study and its significance. This chapter focuses on the online media environment in South Africa. It particularly considers the position of the two media outlets under study in order to lay out the context or background as to why they were chosen for the present study. It is important to discuss the online media environment to gauge where *News 24* and *Times Live* are in terms of their position or influence and to see if they broadly represent the diversity of the online news platforms in South Africa or not.

### 2.2 Contextualising online media in South Africa (reach and audiences)

The South African media landscape is marked by evidence of a huge movement towards the new media platforms (Newsclip, 2017). According to Muller (2010), South Africa saw an increase in the number of new websites especially online news sites. *News 24*is the most popular news site in South Africa having maintained this position for many years now (Muller, 2010). *IOL*, which is the online platform for the Independent Media group and *Times Live* are viewed as close competitors for *News 24* (Muller, 2010). In addition, the *Mail* and *Guardian* online, which is South Africa's oldest news website, is regarded as one of the sites with top quality investigative journalism and in-depth opinion pieces. Similar to the *Mail* and *Guardian* is another influential and more analytical news site called the *Daily Maverick.* "It provides readers with opinions and analysis rather than general breaking news which typically come from sources like (now defunct) *SAPA*, *AFP* or *Reuters*" (Muller, 2010: para. 11). It has established a grant–funded investigative journalism unit 'Scorpio' to do more analytical stories (Otter and Grant, 2017: 37). Other news websites that have seen some growth include; the *Eye Witness News (EWN)* which broadcasts breaking news and traffic updates, *Sowetan Live*, and the Afrikaans readers catering *Nuus 24* and *Beeld*.

### 2.3 *Media 24*

*Media 24* is one of the largest media organisations in South Africa. There are six daily newspapers and four weekly newspapers under *Media 24* (Otter and Grant, 2017: 32). It owns one of the highly circulating newspapers, the *Daily Sun* which has a readership of nearly 8 million and a circulation of over 500 000 (*Media Club South Africa*). Other *Media 24* daily newspapers have a circulation of 800 000. Its major daily and weekly newspapers include: *the Witness, City Press, Beeld, Die Burger, Volksblad, Rapport, Sondag, Son, Daily Sun, Sunday Sun and Soccer Laduma*. It also publishes a wide range of community newspapers.

*24. com* was introduced on the digital space in 2006 following the merger of two sister organisations, *M–Web* Studios and *Media 24* Digital. The online platform has different sections including: careers, shopping, classifieds, property, health, blogs and photo albums among others (*Media Club South Africa*).

Nevertheless, *Media 24* boasts of a successful news wire that provides syndicated content to other media. *News24Wire* was launched on 1 April 2015, to fill a gap left by the *South African Press Association (SAPA)*. Coverage in specialist content areas is provided by staff in *News24'*s broader editorial team that includes: finance and economics from *Fin24,* sport from *Sport24*, health from *Health24*, food from *food24,* isiZulu news from *izindaba24*, parenting issues from *parent24*, entertainment from *Channel24*, technology from *Fin24* Tech and news about Africa from the teams in Nigeria and Kenya. The site also includes some motoring and travel news from the *Wheels 24* and *Traveller 24* teams (Otter and Grant 2017: 32). *News 24 Wire* has grown to be the biggest news wire service available to publishers (*News24wire, 2017*).

### 2.4 *News24.com*

*News24.com* is *Media 24's* most popular news site. The *Media 24's* portfolio reaches 25 million readers and accounts for more than 35% of all print and digital news media revenue (Print and Digital Media SA, 2013: 29). In the meanwhile, *News 24*, South Africa's top news site, reaches more than 6 million people in South Africa monthly across many devices (Space station). About 56% of its audience are male, while 44% are female and people aged between 25 and 34 years constitute 30% of *News24* audience, while the 35 to 49 year age group make up 29% of *News 24* audience.

## 2.5 *Times Live*

*Times Group* now renamed *Tiso Blackstar* media is another top media player (Print and Digital Media SA, 2013: 29). In 2017, *Times Media Group* shut down its print edition of the Times daily newspaper, after exactly a decade of existence as part of its restructuring process. (Finlay, 2017: 1–2). *Times Media Live* is the digital division of the *Times Media* that represents the digital brands of the Media business, including *Times Live, Business day Live, Sport Live, Sowetan Live, Herald Live, Dispatch Live, Books Live and Sunday World (Times media)*.

*Times Live* is an award winning news website that covers breaking news, sport, entertainment and opinion. It also publishes some daily and weekly content provided in its newspapers like the *Times* and *Sunday Times (Times media*).

## 2.6 The influence of *News 24* and *Times Live*

According to the Effective measure statistics released in January 2017, *News24* and *Times Live* websites were top South African websites in terms of traffic. Effective Measure is the official traffic measurement partner of the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) South Africa, which provides "accurate traffic and demographics statistics for South Africa's top websites" (*effective measure, 2017*).

The influence of news websites is determined by Effective Measure, the official traffic measurement partner of the IAB South Africa, which provides "accurate traffic and demographics statistics for South Africa's top websites" (*effective measure*, 2017). IAB is a trade body for digital media which conducts research, develops industry standards and provides support for online advertising industry. According to the Effective Measure statistics released in January 2017, *News24* and *Times Live* websites were top South African websites in terms of traffic (Effective Measure).

In addition, the Effective Measure statistics released in February 2018, show that *News24* attracted 7, 3 million South African Internet browsers and over 22, 6 million page views, while *Times Live* ranked third with 3, 9 million browsers and about 20, 6 million page views (*The Media Online*). These statistics have been very consistent and both websites have remained on top since February 2016. There are possibilities that many people, even beyond South Africa, have access to these websites. Nonetheless, their status as the top websites means they have the power to shape and influence readers' views on what is important and what is not news wise.

The two online platforms in a way 'represent broadly the diversity of the online news platforms in South Africa because of their size and number of visitors'. This is supported by Deacon et al (1999: 120), hence their selection for analysis.

## 2.7 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the online media environment in South Africa – looking particularly at the position of the two media outlets under discussion in order to give context or background as to why they were chosen for the present study. It is important to note that from the statistics presented above, *News 24* and *Times Live* are quite influential media outlets because of their large audience reach. It is therefore possible that they actually represent the broad diversity of the online news platforms in South Africa. The next chapter, discusses the theories employed for the study which include: agenda setting, framing, the churnalism approach and news values approach. It also defines key terms of the study, and gives an overview of the previous literature on coverage of Ebola by other countries, the role of sources in building the media agenda in health reporting, South Africa's position in relation to other African countries and its coverage of African disasters.

## Chapter 3

### 3.1.1 Literature review and theoretical framework

### 3.1.2 Introduction

Chapter 3 reviews existing studies in order to put this study into context and position it within the already available literature. It also discusses the theoretical frameworks applicable to this study. The theories include: agenda setting, framing to see how Ebola is framed by *News 24* and *Times Live*, churnalism and news values approaches.

The literature reviewed in this chapter relates to the topic's focus on the coverage of the 2014-2015 Ebola outbreak in West Africa. Some of this study's related areas covered in the available literature include the definition of Ebola, the agenda setting role of the media, the coverage of epidemics by media, coverage of Ebola in other contexts, South Africa media's coverage of other African countries and churnalism in science and health journalism among other things. A review of these areas, as covered in the available literature, helped in unpacking the topic under discussion and reveal insights on the gaps in the literature under review.

### 3.2 Definition of key terms

### 3.2.1 What is an epidemic?

According to the WHO, an epidemic is "the occurrence in a community or region of cases of an illness, specific health–related behaviour, or other health–related events clearly in excess of normal expectancy". The CDC (2012) concurs that an epidemic refers to an increase, often sudden, in the number of cases of a disease above what is normally expected. Some examples of epidemics include; avian influenza, Zika, Yellow Fever, Small pox, Ebola Virus Disease, Cholera, Meningitis, Influenza among others (WHO). In most cases, the community and the period in which the cases occur are precisely specified. "Finally, the number of cases indicating the presence of an epidemic depends on the type and size of the population exposed, time and place of occurrence" (WHO).

### 3.2.2 What is Ebola?

According to the WHO (2017), the Ebola Virus Disease also known as Ebola haemorrhagic fever, is a deadly illness whose average fatality rate is around 50%. However, the fatality rates from previous outbreaks have ranged from 25 to 90%. Ebola can be transmitted from both human beings and animals through close contact with blood, secretions, organs, or other bodily fluids of infected people. In addition, "Burial ceremonies that involve direct contact with the body of the deceased can also contribute in the transmission of Ebola" (WHO, 2017). Finally, infections in Africa have been documented as having spread from the handling of infected wild animals including; chimpanzees, gorillas, fruit bats, monkeys, forest antelope and porcupines found dead or ill in the rainforest (CDC; WHO, 2017).

The disease has severe health and societal effects and very difficult to treat. Ogbonna (2016: 1) draws on the reportage in *The Punch* newspaper (2014:26) to describe how Peter Piot, the man who is known to have given Ebola its name in 1976, exclaimed the following about Ebola: "This isn't just an epidemic. This is (a) human catastrophe". On the human health level, Ebola is known to cause severe 'metabolic havoc', expressed like other viruses at times as fevers, rash, sore throat, impaired kidney and liver function, diarrhoea, vomiting, headaches, both internal and external bleeding, muscle pains and joint pains (WHO 2017; Schieffelin et al. 2014; Singh et al. 2017). Finally, although there is no approved treatment yet, keeping patients hydrated, treating symptoms and giving early supportive care, helps to minimise the huge impact of the epidemic (WHO, 2017). However, according to the WHO (2017), there are currently a few "blood, immunological and drug therapies" that are being developed to fight Ebola.

The Ebola virus disease was, nevertheless, detected for the first time in 1976 in two outbreaks that occurred in South Sudan and the DRC respectively (WHO, 2017). The most recent 2014-2016outbreak that occurred in West Africa was the largest Ebola outbreak since 1976. Thousands of people died in West Africa and many were affected. The virus started in Guinea and spread into Sierra Leone and Liberia and then to other countries from the Euro-American block (WHO, 2017).

### 3.3 Reporting of Ebola in other countries e.g. Nigeria, Ghana, USA, UK (Africa versus Western media)

According to Yusuf, Yahaya and Qabil (2015: 2), the media coverage of the Ebola epidemic, which documented how the disease killed people in masses, spread rapidly and difficult to contain owing to the unavailability of drugs, contributed to unnecessary fear. Citing *The Lancet*

*Journal*, Yusuf and Yahaya (2015: 2) concur that although the coverage of Ebola by the media, especially that of some Western media outlets, was beneficial, it was sometimes "narrow and unbalanced". Moyo (2015:20) draws on Quinn Mulholland (2014) in expressing the view that the US media in particular failed in its reportage on Ebola as the coverage "caused stigma and fear to the American public". Moyo (2015:20) notes further that, "The article criticises how some Americans failed to understand the disease but instead distanced themselves from members of their society who originated from African countries affected by the disease".

However, the *Independent newspaper* article by Loulla-Mae Eleftheriou-Smith (2014), which quotes the former UN secretary, Kofi Annan, and Yusuf, Yahaya and Qabil (2005: 3), argue that the international community only became interested when the epidemic reached the USA and Europe. Yusuf, Yahaya and Qabil (2015: 3) further assert that the headlines changed once the epidemic reached the shores of the US – showing the biased and unbalanced nature of coverage. A critical observation here is that, "The sudden change of headlines from "No Cure for Ebola", "No vaccination against it", "One of the world's most deadly diseases" when the virus was only in Africa, to "Experimental drug likely saved Ebola patients" after it crossed many tight borders to America, clearly indicates biased and unbalanced coverage" (Yusuf, Yahaya and Qabil, Yahaya, 2015: 3).

The detection of the disease in the West resulted in further discrimination of people of African origin. Some print media were responsible for the misinformation that spread during the period of the epidemic. The misinformation included narratives about protests and attacks on health care workers fighting Ebola in the African region and these resulted in the unfair treatment of Africans in the Diaspora, hatred and abuse, with Africans being severely screened or refused entry into some countries (Yusuf, Yahaya and Qabil, 2015: 2). According to Steinhauer (2014), some parents pulled their children out of a Mississippi Middle School after discovering that the principal of that school had travelled to Zambia, a country which was not even affected by Ebola. Many schools were even shut down in Dallas for a thorough clean up after school authorities discovered that parents of some of the children had been in the same flight with Amber Joy Vinson, one of the nurses who had been infected with Ebola after treating the Liberian patient, Thomas Duncan (Steinhauer, 2014). Worse still, the US Senate also called for commercial air traffic ban between the US and some African countries (Steinhauer, 2014).

The African media focus on Ebola was problematic. Yusuf, Yahaya and Qabil (2015: 2) argue

that most African media reports focused on the shocking situations resulting from Ebola than on the efforts put in place by the African countries to fight the epidemic. A study by Moyo (2005: 14), which considers comments made by the Media Initiative CEO, Eric Chinje, notes that the African media allegedly simply copied the trends set by western media in its reportage on Ebola. This observation suggests that the African media failed to perform their role as the mirror of the society (Chinje, 2014 cited in Moyo, 2015: 14).

It should be noted that there were some positive aspects from the nature of coverage by African local media. Some African media coverage helped other countries to fight the disease promptly (Yusuf, Yahaya and Qabil, 2015: 3). The mainstream media ran programmes by professional medical and public health experts to unpack the true causes, symptoms, mode of spread and prevention and control measures thereby successfully contributing to successes recorded in less or non-hit countries in the region such as Nigeria, Senegal, Ghana and Mali (Yusuf, Yahaya and Qabil , 2015:3). Therefore, African media, in some countries in West Africa, played a significant role in spreading the information about the causes and source of the disease as well as how to contain it.

The observations by Moyo (2015); Yusuf, Yahaya and Qabil (2015) elicit various questions regarding the coverage of the Ebola crisis by the South African media in general and specifically *News 24* and *Times Live*. The analysis is important in the present study as it clearly shows what was prominently covered, the different angles taken and the values used in determining what was selected and what was left out by the media when reporting on Ebola. These elements related to the media coverage are tied to the main theoretical framework of agenda setting. In addition, the emphasis on a certain news angle, as noted by Adekunle and Adnan (2016: 362 - 380), describes both the media functions towards health development and defines the interest that the media prioritise (between economic gain and social responsibility of the media) during health challenges. Hence, "Nurturing the problem of where the media interest lies during health challenges remain a question that has its answer hidden in the contents of media health messages" (Adekunle and Adnan, 2016: 364).

A discussion on the media coverage of Ebola is important in this study as there is a demonstrable link between frequent coverage or the reinforcement of an issue and the change in public's behaviour or perception of the issue as important. Several studies on how the media covered epidemics such as HIV/AIDS, Polio and H1N1 have demonstrated this link between coverage and societal identification of the covered issue as very important [Agbana and Usman

(2014) in Johnson, Layefa and Taiwo (2016); Yan, Tang, Gabriele and Wu (2016); Nisbet (2006) as cited in Duru (2016: 12]. As a result, this researcher analyses online clippings to ascertain the veracity of this link. An existing study by Yan, Tang, Gabriele and Wu (2016), which considered the media's power in helping to minimise the spread of epidemics, concluded that media reports can maximise this effect by focusing on transforming people's behaviour in an epidemic through updating them regularly on how the epidemic is progressing. Thus, it was very important, in this study, to determine how the media covered the Ebola crisis by paying particular attention to the issues they pushed, the kind of information they shared and the perceptions that grew amongst the audience about Ebola based on the information circulating in the media space.

### 3.4 Sources and their role in building the media agenda in health reporting

Health and medical reporting is largely technical in nature and difficult to pursue. Yet, sources play a huge role in the way the media report on issues and decide on what to put on the agenda. As such, a link has been found between agenda setting and health reporting, which points to the fact that health reporters rely heavily on sources to produce content. A study by Tanner (2004: 350) on agenda building, source selection and health news at local television stations, notes that more than half of the respondents confirmed that they received their ideas for their health reports directly from a health source who personally contacted them. A further 60% of the respondents noted that they constantly looked for health experts to explain technical information and agreed that these sources often 'affected' the health content that would make it on air (Tanner 2004: 350).In the same vein, Berkowitz (1989) as cited in Tanner (2004) argues that journalists rely on routine news events, such as press conferences, experts and officials for their news sources. This reliance suggests that officials and executives dominate the agenda-building process and sometimes attempt to manipulate the media so as to influence a variety of debates, audiences and agendas (Miller, Williams, Kitzinger and Beharrell, 1988: 129). The findings confirm the agenda setting theory in that journalists do not necessarily set the agenda, but instead the news agenda is built by the sources used to shape the information reaching the masses (Tanner, 2004: 353).

The above-noted conclusion is quite important for this study. This is because this study examined the kind of sources used in the reporting, issues raised and other elements to determine if they had a bearing in the coverage of Ebola during the period under study.

### 3.5 South Africa's position in relation to other African countries and its media's coverage of African disasters

There have been several debates by critics such as Vegter (2015) and Dlakavu (2013) on South Africa's position in relation to other countries and how the country's media covers disasters and issues in Africa. In particular, discussions have largely been on how the South African media seems disconnected from what is happening in the rest of Africa and especially when it comes to disasters. Dlakavu (2013) notes that, "It is also reflected in our media where stories happening in Europe and in North America hold greater value and attract greater coverage than what is happening on the rest of the continent. Is this because of a superior attitude that African history, thought and current affairs is inferior to us because we shouldn't be thinking like Africans?" (Dlakavu, 2013: para. 7).

An expert opinion by Tawana Kupe, published in the South African daily newspaper, *The New Age*, raised similar sentiments through the media expert's consideration of South Africa's coverage of African issues as problematic. In the column as cited in (Media Monitoring Africa, 2012), Kupe states that South African media "promotes an idea of SA as a country totally different and separate from the rest of Africa". A media monitoring organisation, Media Monitoring Africa also expressed its criticism on how South African media fare during the coverage of disasters and cited two examples, a plane crash in Nigeria that claimed more than 150 people and an earthquake measuring 4 on the Richter scale that hit Swaziland, where in both instances the media were more interested in covering the event if the disasters involved South Africans (Media Monitoring Africa, 2012).Media Monitoring Africa (2012) notes that despite the magnitude of the Nigerian and Swaziland disasters, the South African media quickly pointed out that there were no South Africans reportedly involved in the crash, and as for the earthquake, the media did not speak to people in Swaziland about the earthquake, but spoke to a number of South African residents who were least affected by the earthquake (Media Monitoring Africa, 2012).

Therefore, the observations made by the Media Monitoring Africa (2012) and Dlakavu (2013), raise questions on how the media in South Africa fared in covering the story of the Ebola outbreak. The major question is: Are the above sentiments an indication of how South African media covered the Ebola epidemic?

### 3.6 Theoretical framework

#### 3.6.1 Agenda setting

The agenda setting theory is the main theoretical framework used in this study. This framework was introduced by Walter Lippmann who argued that the media is the window through which people view the world or become aware of the issues and "influence the public's perceptions of what are the most important issues of the day" (Duru, 2016: 14; Riaz 2008; Fortunato, 2005:54; Kunczik, 1988: 190). This viewpoint is supported by Ghanem (1997), who argues that agenda setting deals with the selection of issues by news media and the impact this has on the public agenda. This theoretical framework has since been extended to framing (how the issues are presented) too. Nonetheless, agenda-setting research initially questioned mass media effects based on audience exposure to an issue through selection, emphasis on certain topics deemed important and of interest to the audience, and the amount of coverage an issue received (Burton, 2002: 280; Lang and Langa as cited in McCombs and Protess, 1991:18; McCombs and Merrit, 2004: 41).

In addition, McCombs and Merrit (2004: 41); McCombs (2011); Ansolabehere, Behr and Iyengar (1993: 145) observe that newspapers provide 'a host of cues on the importance to attach to an issue'. Examples of cues include the placing of a story on the front page of a newspaper as the lead story, other front page display, stories accompanied by photographs, large headlines and length, while television considers placement as the opening story on the newscast, the amount of time dedicated to the story and promotional emphasis on it. Hence, as noted by McCombs and Merrit (2004: 42), "… the news media set the agenda for the public's attention to a small group of issues. Because of this unavoidable influence on the public mind, the values journalists apply in their decision-making process become crucial". Furthermore, the decision to put any issue on the media agenda or to highlight it as important as is the result of the many interactions between journalists and their supervisors.

The agenda setting theory is quite appropriate for the study of this nature, which examines the frequency of coverage, types of sources used and origination of content and the prominent issues that the two news media outlets highlighted the most around Ebola during the 2014-2015 outbreak in West Africa. Citing Kunczik (1998: 191) draws on McCombs and Gilbert (1986) in the identification of the characteristics of agenda setting. These are:

1. "The quantity of reporting (major cue of what is important is how frequently it is reported). In this case, most featured themes and key topics will be identified.

2. Editorial structuring and or media-specific presentation (prominence with which an item is displayed in the news) such as headlines, pictures, layout or on TV, stills, graphics, film and other things.

3. Degree of conflict presented in the news report (in this case a news value becomes a major cue for the audience).

4. Effects over time, which differ. e.g. between newspapers and television – Stone and McCombs (1981) considered a span of four months ideal for building up an agenda (Kunczik, 1988: 191)".

Referring to McCombs' (1997) assertion, Duru (2016: 21) argues that although the news media does not consciously set the agenda, the issues and the manner of presentation they choose have an unplanned effect on the audience's opinion. The media indeed has the power to influence or change the public's behaviour by reinforcing certain messages and views of opinion leaders in politics and economics (Ansolabehere, Behre and Iyengar, 1993: 193). Citing an analysis by Kepplinger and Roth (1978), Ansolabehere, Behr and Iyengar (1993: 193) contend that "West German media reporting of the 1973/74 "oil crisis" showed how a distorted image of reality created by the mass media can change public behaviour like a self-fulfilling prophecy. People responded with hoarding-purchases to the first wave of negative reporting about the oil supply situation".

The context within which the agenda is set should be underscored. Kunczik (1988: 193) notes that, "Self-evidently the chance of the media setting an agenda also depends on the given societal situation for example during an election campaign time or between campaigns; economic crisis or phase of growth, on the medium itself for example credibility or size of audience and most particularly on the recipients for example whether many recipients already have a certain issue on their personal agendas too". In this case, the Ebola outbreak presented a perfect opportunity for media to set the agenda as this was a big health crisis and a topical issue due to its devastating impact.

There is an element of selection and prioritisation in agenda setting. Burton, (2002: 183) states that, "The editors choose the news and choose an agenda of items that become our view of what is important in the world that day or that week. Editors decide what their lead items are. In broadcasting, they have meetings to decide what their running order of items will be. Items are selected out and selected in". This study also focuses on identifying the issues that have been selected and highlighted and those that were excluded. As a result, it is imperative to study

the news values used to assess or determine which issues were selected and which sources were used in the different stories on Ebola.

The media's agenda setting role has also been noted in health reporting. As a result, its inclusion in this study assists in determining how much of this trend exists in South African media, more specifically on *News 24* and *Times Live* platforms. According to Tanner (2004), the media along with health sources in the community play a major role in determining what stories are included. Hence, this study's focus on the types of sources used makes the agenda setting theory pertinent as well.

The reality that the media sets the stage for public discourse through agenda setting and keeping stories in the spotlight suggests that the media should therefore be more proactive and more careful in the way they report on issues (Daniel and Alawari, 2016: 46). It is this call for media agency that makes this theory relevant to the present study.

### 3.7 Framing

Framing is perceived as an extension or evolution of the agenda setting theoretical framework. Fortunato (2005:55) postulates that although transfer of issue salience from the media agenda to the public agenda based on the amount of exposure alone was the original claim for agenda-setting, the theoretical framework has evolved to the extent of examining the way an issue is presented. This second-level of agenda setting research is called framing and it considers the way in which an issue is framed or message is presented and how this can shape public perception regarding the importance of that issue (Fortunato, 2005: 55 -56).

This is a theory closely linked to agenda-setting theory and can potentially be used in the study albeit in a very limited manner. Framing is concerned with how events or issues are organised and made sense of by the media, media professionals and their audiences (Reese, 2003: 7). The underlying definition is that, "To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation and or treatment recommendation" (Reese, 2003: 10). In addition, Fortunato (2005) concurs that the framing focuses on selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration which might lead audiences to have different reactions – making it a potentially good theory for this study.

One of the objectives of this study is to see which issues, angles or themes were highlighted with regard to Ebola and which ones were not. This objective can be achieved through the use

of framing as an analytical framework. According to Reese (2003:12), the significance of frames lies in their 'durability, their persistent and routine use over time and they provide identifiable patterns or structures'. Therefore, the study identifies the frames or themes used by the selected two news outlets on order to evaluate if they were used persistently and to identify the recurring patterns.

An analysis of these trends or patterns leads to the creation of a bigger picture or greater depth of an issue (Reese, 2003: 13). Framing will help in making sense of pertinent events and processes. It will further assist in highlighting the angles taken by the two outlets – thereby helping in answering some of the research questions posed above.

### 3.8 News values approach

According to Hartley (1995: 75), events do not get into the news simply by happening, 'no matter how frantically', but they should be known and accepted coming from a known and trusted source – and preferably a representative or legitimate source. In addition, a certain criterion is used to make something to be considered as newsworthy and journalists often use a set of news values to determine this. According to Galtang and Ruge (1973), news values at the end of the day are 'nothing but the more or less intuitive assumptions of journalists about what interests their given public'. In this case, the news values approach became the best to use since this research is concerned with determining the issues that were prominently selected and those that were excluded. News values, therefore, are of great significance, especially when used in combination with the agenda- setting and framing theories as they all have an element of selection and what ultimately is perceived and included on the news agenda.

This study also examines the sources used and the origins of these stories to determine how much of the content was original and that which was taken off the wires. As indicated above, sources play a pivotal role in what is seen or considered as newsworthy. For an event to be recognised as newsworthy, it has to come from a known and trusted source and 'preferably a representative source' (Hartley, 1995: 75). Hence, this study analyses the sources used and the origin of the different stories.

Van Dijk (1988:111) argues that one central question that comes up in many discussions of news production is the initial perception and evaluation of happenings as news events. It is usually assumed that these processes are controlled by the news values of a journalist. If an event matches the news values criteria, then it attracts more attention and has a higher chance of being selected by the journalist as a potential news event. It is, therefore, critical to evaluate

the news values that were employed by the two outlets to see whether Ebola fit into any one or more of the values.

News values range from frequency, timeliness, threshold, unambiguity, meaningfulness (cultural proximity and relevance), consonance, unexpectedness, continuity, composition, reference to elite nations, and reference to elite people, personalisation, and negativity (Allan, 2005). This study analysed five news values, threshold, meaningfulness (cultural proximity and relevance), unexpectedness or unpredictability or rarity of an event or its newness, negativity, and prominence. These are analysed to determine the importance of the Ebola outbreak and understand why it became important for the outlets to focus on these.

Other factors are of significance in the setting of the public agenda. According to Ansolabehere, Behr and Iyengar (1993: 145), several forerunner factors determine the media's ability to shape the public priorities. The three scholars note further that, "These factors include the remoteness or immediacy of the issue, the demographic characteristics of the people who receive the news, and the differences in the way the news is presented. Some research indicates that the more remote an issue is from the direct personal experience of the typical viewer, the stronger the agenda-setting effect of news coverage of the issue or event is likely to be" (Ansolabehere, Behr and Iyengar, 1993:145).

It is therefore, clear that an analysis of news values makes it easier to understand or to note the stage at which, and the reasons why, the Ebola outbreak became an issue for media to warrant full attention. According to Brossad; Shih and Wijaya (2008), journalists emphasise different narrative considerations at different stages of the issue development cycle, especially when it comes to the coverage of public health epidemics. Furthermore, news values provide an important basis for decisions on selection, attention, understanding and representation if information. Thus, the reality that the study is concerned with analysing the issues which were selected and given more attention makes this framework significant in explaining the angles taken by the two media outlets in their reporting around the Ebola outbreak.

**Description of five news values under study (Hartley 1982: 76– 78)**

1. **Threshold or impact** –According to Hartely (1982: 76), a threshold concerns itself with the size of the event, such that the greater the intensity, the greater chances of it being reported, and this depends with whether it is local or national news. In addition, "Once reported, there is further threshold of drama: the bigger the story, the more added drama is needed to keep it going" (Hartely, 1982: 76). A good example is the coverage

of war or murder.

2. **Meaningfulness (proximity and relevance) –** The more the event is happening closer to where the news gatherers are, the better chances of it being selected as a news idea as this is relevant to both the news gatherer and everyone within the region (Hartely, 1982: 77).
3. **Unexpectedness –** Hartley (1982: 77 – 78) defines it as: **"**The unpredictability, or rarity, of an event. The newness of unexpected events usually [...] discovered in thoroughly familiar, expected contexts".
4. **Negativity –**This is a different dynamic. Unlike good news, bad news is unexpected, and so when it happens, it becomes big news. The examples could include death, war and disease outbreaks.
5. **Prominence –** Well known people or elites or countries make news. According to (Hartley, 1982: 78), stories about wars, elections or disasters involving countries such as the USA or Russia, are more likely to be reported on than a civil war in Chad for example. It is intriguing that the elite individuals' actions are perceived as "more consequential than the daily activities of the ordinary people". Therefore, whatever the elite do, be it giving their own opinions, weddings or any other habits, is always on the spotlight (Hartley, 1982: 78).

### 3.9 Churnalism approach

Lewis et al. (2008: 1) argue that public relations has a big role in determining or influencing journalism content. Journalists often rely on news wires, press releases, press conferences, interest groups or any other public relations activities as their sources of information (Robbins, 2011). The trend has been mainly identified in the USA, UK and even South Africa especially when reporting on HIV/AIDS.

The idea behind churnalism is that no extra effort is put by journalists to further investigate and gather more information to that taken from public relations material or to corroborate it with other sources other than the ones who supplied the material (Lewis et al., 2008). Copying and pasting of press releases has become common and sometimes stories are not checked for authenticity. The situation has been worsened by the rise in of online media outlets since the demand for quick and timely copy is important (Moore, 2011:2; Davies, 2009: 64, 73; Robbins, 2011). Robbins (2011: para. 8) argues, churnalism presents two big challenges in that it "undermines editorial integrity. It's really not a lot different to running unmarked advertorial:

both practices allow a potentially biased third party to have their unchallenged message disguised as a piece of objective journalism, and published under a supposedly neutral(ish) banner".

This approach is therefore important in attempts to understand the news production processes, such as the selection of sources of information, angles or themes and content selection in general among other things, and determine their impact on health reporting.

It should be underscored that churnalism has been observed in health reporting. Hence, its inclusion in this study in order to measure the extent to which this trend exists in South African media in relation to the coverage of the 2014-2015 Ebola outbreak. However, this study limits itself to an analysis of the sources used or quoted, and the origins of the content – looking at whether this has been taken off the wires or whether it's original copy. An analysis of press release content is not considered in this study to avoid difficulties regarding the data search for the different press releases used in the writing of the news.

### 3.9.1 Conclusion

This chapter explored other existing texts in order to put this study into context and position it within the pool of information already available. It also highlighted the theoretical frameworks applicable to this study which include: agenda setting, framing to see how Ebola is framed by *News 24* and *Times Live*, churnalism and news values approaches.

The topic focuses on tracking the coverage of the 2014–2015 Ebola outbreak in West Africa paying attention to what the two media outlets considered prominent, important, frequently covered, sources used, angles taken and nature of coverage. A few areas related to the topic are covered in the literature review and these include the definition of Ebola, the agenda setting role of the media, the coverage of epidemics by media, coverage of Ebola in other contexts, South Africa media's coverage of other African countries and churnalism in science and health journalism among other things. These areas help unpack and elaborate the topic under discussion and give insights on the gaps in the literature under review. The next chapter explores the methodology used looking particularly at the two approaches used, quantitative and qualitative content analysis, sample selection, data collection, data analysis, validity and reliability and limitations of the study that may inhibit the researcher from getting the most desired results.

## Chapter 4

### 4.1 Research Methodology

### 4.2 Introduction

The previous chapter explored other existing texts or literature in order to put this study into context and position it within the pool of information already available. It also highlighted the theoretical frameworks applicable to this study which include: agenda setting, framing to see how Ebola is framed by *News 24* and *Times Live,* churnalism and news values approaches. Chapter 4explores the methodology used in this study, looking particularly at the two approaches used, quantitative and qualitative content analysis, sample selection, population, sampling methods, sample size, data collection instruments, the actual data collection, challenges encountered, data analysis, validity and reliability and limitations of the study that may inhibit the researcher from getting the most desired results.

### 4.3 Research design and approach

The study uses both elements of quantitative and qualitative content analysis. Betrund and Hughes (2005:174) argue that content analysis can either be quantitative or qualitative (or both). Both methods were used in order to improve the quality of the study (Mouton, 1996: 39). Nonetheless, content analysis is perceived as important for analysing and "mapping key characteristics of large bodies of text that systematically charts long-term changes and trends in media coverage" (Stempel, Weaver and Wilhoit, 2003: 220).

Stokes (2003:58) contends that content analysis is a flexible and credible method which generates reliable and replicable facts. This explains why content analysis has been widely used in communication and cultural studies (Deacon, Pickering, Golding, Murdock, 1999). In addition, it is used to quantify salient and manifest features of a large number of texts or give indications of 'relative prominences and absences of key characteristics in media texts', while the statistics are used to make broader inferences about the processes and politics of representation as well as interpreting texts (Deacon et al. 1999).

Cottle et al. (1988:95) and Stokes (2003:56), argue that content analysis is also quantitative in nature as it identifies and counts the occurrence of specified characteristics in texts. As a result, it becomes easy to interpret the messages, images, language, and the representations of those texts and their wider social significance. This study specifically used quantitative content analysis in an attempt to determine the frequency and extent of coverage of Ebola, the number

and types of sources used and other factors. A data coding sheet was developed to show the different categories for both quantitative and qualitative content analysis.

The reality that, quantitative content analysis can only "support, qualify or refute initial questions" (Deacon et al., 1999: 117) and does not critically analyse texts in order to develop ideas or insights, points to the need for the use of qualitative content analysis. Qualitative content analysis complements quantitative content analysis in that it is more interpretive and not numerical. In addition, the whole idea for qualitative content analysis is to get or 'pin down the meaning' and interpret its implications (Betrand and Hughes 2005; Cottle et al. 1988).It moves from the very basic and simple features or statistics to unpacking key meanings of selected text (Jankowski and Jensen, 2002). It is a method that can be used to gather information on the standards, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of a certain target group, hence it is best suited for this study.

Data can be analysed using qualitative analysis through the extraction of themes and main ideas from the text. According to Gerbener (1969), qualitative content analysis is a method best suited to produce 'a big picture', which means"...delineating trends, patterns and absences over large aggregates of texts, it is well suited to dealing with the 'massness' of the mass media" or large volumes of text (Gerbner 1969; Cottle et al. 1988:123). Content analysis is therefore significant for analysing and 'mapping key characteristics of large bodies of text that systematically charts long term changes and trends in media coverage' (Stempel, Weaver and Wilhoit, 2003: 220).

In this case, articles published on the*News24* and *Times Live* websites were analysed in order to identify trends and patterns as well as extract the main or prominent themes. These trends and themes included; medical problems, fragility of health systems, discrimination and stigma, sensationalism, blame, public awareness campaigns, cultural beliefs, response to Ebola, governance, the anti-west narrative, Africa the dark continent, securitisation, fear and panic, treatment, health promotion, containment of Ebola, the social-economic and political effects of Ebola, transmission, containment, research, death and information. These themes were enumerated and underlying meanings were discussed. It should be noted, however that, in some cases, some themes were combined, altered, or removed during the analysis.

Content analysis is best suited for this study as the research question focuses on the issue of content production and journalistic practices (including news selection practices) and news sources. This should be the case according to Cottle et.al (1988). Another advantage of using

content analysis is that, it enables the researcher to conduct primary research and come up with own facts and figures to use in their argument (Stokes, 2003:56). The study is comparative in nature (considering how Ebola evolved during different periods) and as such, content analysis enables the researcher to compare media content at different points in time to make an argument about the historical change (Stokes, 2003:57). In this case, the study compares how the media covered Ebola during the early days of its outbreak, which is the first two months of it being declared from March and April and then when several cases were reported from July to November 2014 to see if there were any changes to the way the two were outlets reported.

The methodology used in this study is best if the researcher wants to establish "how much of a given phenomenon there is in a chosen set of texts" (Stokes, 2003: 57). In this study, the researcher focused at how much of the stories are based or taken from the wires or foreign copy. This is done to establish the level of extra effort that was put in by the two media houses to create original content than relying on wire or foreign copy.

The researcher acknowledges the main flaw of content analysis, but will strive to overcome it. "The main weakness of content analysis is that it can be laborious: coding hundreds of column inches of newspapers or hours of television programmes is very time consuming." (Stokes 2003: 59). Nevertheless, a careful selection of articles for analysis was done to avoid including data that may not necessarily be what the study needs.

### 4.4 Sample selection

The study tracks the coverage of the Ebola outbreak for six months during the period 23 March 2014 to 31 August 2014.The WHO in Guinea declared the outbreak for the first time on 23 March 2014. The initial months up to November 2014 were critical and this remained the peak of the virus. This study however focuses on the first six months until August 2014. On August 8, the WHO declared Ebola a public health emergency of international concern (WHO, 2014).

A six month period of analysis is enough of a period because if time is limited, chances of having distorted results are high. Deacon et al., (1999: 120) notes further that, "Obviously the more limited the time period is, the more susceptible it is to distortion by one-off or unforeseen events". Thus, the bottom line is, the bigger the sample the better and less distortion (Deacon et al., 1999: 120).

Below is a timeline of key moments about how the Ebola virus evolved since the declaration of the outbreak by the WHO on 23 March 2014 to November 2014. The period witnessed

various new infection, especially of international staff from countries such as France and Spain and a Liberian man who dies in a US hospital from Ebola. During this period, more countries, including the UK, US and Australia, pledged support or intervention for the Ebola outbreak. In addition, a top US health official from the CDC warned that Ebola could become the next AIDS (Keneally, 2014). This study, however, only focuses on the period 23 March to 31 August 2014 and does not go up to November.

The timeline is important to include as it laid a proper ground for an analysis of the way *News 24* and *Times Live* covered the outbreak during the period. It shows the significant events that marked the progression of the Ebola outbreak. It also guided and helped the researcher to pay particular attention to the issues, angles, themes, frequency of coverage because the notable events or turning points for the Ebola outbreak are definitely critical to this study.

### 4.4.1 Timeline of the Ebola outbreak or key moments in the first year of the outbreak include:

The various moments include:

- 23 March 2014 - The EVD outbreak in West Africa was first reported in a WHO communiqué on 23 March 2014 (NICD).
- 31 March / 1 April - Emergency humanitarian organisation, Doctors Without Borders (MSF) warned Ebola's spread was 'unprecedented' and some cases were confirmed in Liberia and Guinea (ABC; AU and Hofman 2017: 7).
- 23 May 2014– The first case of Ebola in Sierra Leone is confirmed at Kenema Hospital (Au and Hofman 2017: 175).
- 26 May 2014 – Sierra Leone confirmed its first deaths from the virus following the death and unsafe burial of a traditional healer in Kailahun District , which resulted in numerous transmission chains that alone gave rise to an estimated 365 deaths (ABC; Au and Hofman 2017: 175).
- 17 June 2014 – Liberia reported Ebola cases in Monrovia, the capital city (ABC).
- Mid-July 2014 – The Kenema Ebola Treatment Centre in Sierra Leone reported as severely overcrowded, with about 60 patients, 25% of them being health care workers (including the head nurse of the Lassa Unit) (Au &Hofman 2017: 175).

- 29 July 2014- Dr Sheik Khan, who led the Ebola fight in Sierra Leone died from Ebola (the first healthcare worker to die from Ebola).
- During this period, MSF once again declared Ebola out of control, Liberia closed schools and some borders were closed too.
- 2 & 5 August 2014 – Ebola went international with the first United States missionary doctor Kent Brantly, infected with Ebola in Liberia being flown to Atlanta for treatment. Another US missionary, a second victim of Ebola was flown from Liberia to Atlanta for treatment.
- A British medical worker also infected with Ebola while in Sierra Leone.
- 8 August 2014 – The WHO declared Ebola an international public health emergency of concern (WHO, *Time*, *The Guardian*)
- 21 August - Two US missionaries treated in Atlanta were released from the hospital, having recovered from the virus.
- September 2014 - More infections and deaths were reported in September. A lot happened during this period, with the WHO warning of more deaths and more infections (ABC). The US also announced a plan to intervene in the outbreak by sending 3,000 military personnel to Africa to build clinics and train healthcare workers with the WHO also confirming that the death toll had doubled in August up to 2,461 deaths out of 4,985 infected patients.
- October to November – this period saw a lot of new infections especially that of international staff from France, Spain and a Liberian man who died in a US hospital from Ebola. More countries like the UK, US and Australia pledge support or intervention in attempts to contain the Ebola outbreak. A top US health official from the CDC also warned that Ebola could become the next AIDS.

### 4.5 Data collection

Document collection was used to gather data. The collected texts were analysed to determine the frequency of coverage, nature of coverage, values considered in selecting content, sources used and origination of content on Ebola coverage, slant or angle, prominent themes, origins of content and other things available on the two websites. All the stories from the different sections of *News 24* website including South Africa, health, world, opinion, health and Africa,

were downloaded or accessed on the website for analysis. For *Times Live*, the study looked at the Africa, World, South Africa and Sci-tech sections of the website for analysis. The unit of analysis consisted of these news articles that were collected or visited on the website. Ebola, EVD, Ebola epidemic, Ebola haemorrhagic fever, were the key words used to search for articles on the two websites www.news24.com and www.timeslive.co.za

Finally, the focus here, was particularly on news items, headlines, the introduction of the story, language, sources or origin of the stories and angles used in attempt to determine how Ebola was framed.

The text was analysed to see the frequency of coverage, nature of coverage, values considered in selecting content, sources used and origination of content on Ebola coverage, slant or angle, prominent themes, origins of content among other things by the two websites.

The researcher developed or processed articles using a code sheet on excel to categorise finer details that included the publication date, the media outlet, type of story, the headline, the origin of the item, frequency of coverage, recurring or prominent angles or themes on Ebola, the origin of stories (looking at whether they were written by the reporters from both online news outlets or were generated from the wires or foreign media outlets and comments to see how much engagement the stories received from the audience. Other categories which were considered included: who wrote the article, who spoke, referred to, cited or quoted, number and types of sources used, the slant or angle of the story, nature of coverage (whether the article was a news item, opinion piece, a feature, comment or falls under the health, business or political categories among others).

The whole idea for the development of the code or the table was to highlight the theories being invoked by the researcher, and hence relate to the basic flags or indications of agenda setting, framing, news values and churnalism as stated above. The study focuses on the first 6 months of the Ebola outbreak from 23 March 2014 to 31 August 2014 - a period which was considered to be the peak of the outbreak.

### 4.6 Data Analysis

The different articles were coded and analysed and an interpretation was made in fulfilment of the research objectives, aims and questions. Both quantitative and qualitative content analysis were employed. Frequency tables, pie charts, bar graphs, simple percentage and figures were used as part of the quantitative content analysis. Furthermore, some categories were designed

to answer specific research questions. As for qualitative content analysis, themes were extracted and analysed accordingly to how *News 24* and *Times Live* framed the Ebola epidemic and in the manner they did and why. A data coding sheet with different categories was developed to record patterns, trends and frequencies. In most instances and in line with the requirements of quantitative content analysis, raw data was converted to percentages so as to compare across the sample (Stokes, 2003: 64).

As stated above, certain prominent themes were identified. These included, but were not limited to the following: medical problems, fragility of health systems, cultural beliefs, response to Ebola, governance, anti-west narrative, Africa the dark continent, securitisation, fear and panic, treatment, health promotion, containment , social, economic and political effects of Ebola, transmission, research, death, information among others.

The location of stories was analysed too for example news, features, editorial, opinion, and politics among key sections. With data being presented in tables showing the extent of coverage, distribution or nature of coverage (whether it was a news article, feature, opinion, angle or themes, sources and their frequency and prominence), types and number of sources used and how frequently. In quantitative content analysis, raw data was converted to percentages so as to compare across the sample (Stokes, 2003: 64).

A theory driven approach was used to analyse the themes from a qualitative content analysis approach. The study used theories around agenda setting, news values, churnalism and framing to come up with the indicators of evidence. This means that the elements of the code was taken from the characteristics of the different theories that were relevant to this study or 'derived from the hypotheses' (Boyatzis, 1988:33). The approach is easy, convenient and mostly used in social science research (Boyatzis, 1988: 33). According to Boyatzis, 1988(53), a good code should have five elements that include; a label (name), definition or characteristics or issues of what the theme concerns, indicators on how to flag a theme, a description of any qualification, and exclusions that identify themes and examples (both positive and negative) to eliminate possible confusion when searching for a theme.

### 4.7 The coding scheme

Below is the coding scheme developed by the researcher in order to identify patterns or trends, categorise as well as explore the themes in coverage, frequency of coverage, prominence given to stories. The frequency, nature of coverage, sources used as well as origin of stories to determine whether there was any agenda setting, churnalism as well as determine the framing

of Ebola by *News 24* and *Times Live,* were analysed. For qualitative content analysis, the meanings, indicators or descriptions of how to flag a theme were given as shown below.

### 4.7.1 Quantitative and Qualitative content analysis

| **CATEGORIES FOR ANALYSIS** | **INTERPRETATION** |
|---|---|
| **Media Platform** | 1 = *News 24*; 2 = *Times Live* |
| **Date** | Given in full |
| **Section** | 1 =News; Africa =2; Business / Finance = 3; Sport = 4; South Africa = 5; World =6; Health = 7; Sci–tech = 8; Other = 9 |
| **Nature of coverage / Format** | 1= News report; editorial = 2; opinion = 3; feature =4; photo =5; interview = 6; comment = 7; column = 8; other =9 |
| **Origin of the story** | 1 = Taken off the wires; 2 = taken from other local & other African media outlets; 3 = taken from International media outlets; 4 = own reporter; 5 = Unknown; 6 = Other |
| **Number of sources used** | 1 = none; 2 = 1; 3 = 2 to 3 ; 4 = 4 to 5 =; 5 = 6 or more |
| **Sources used** | 1= victims or survivors of Ebola; 2 = government officials; 3 – local civil society / NGO representatives; 4 = researchers or academics; 5 =funders; 6 = media; 7 = corporations; 8 = healthcare workers; 9 = International bodies; 10 = Others |
| **Themes / angles / topics** | **Description / Meaning / Indicators of how to flag the theme** |
| Medical problems = 1 | **Medical problems**– These are articles that described other health or medical problems faced in the affected countries that look like Ebola. When Ebola started, it was assumed there were other medical problems like flu and it was likened to this and other diseases in some localities. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Fragility of health systems = 2 | **Fragility of health systems**– Articles in this category described how ill equipped or unprepared countries were in dealing with Ebola due to lack of resources or proper health facilities. In some cases, health care workers had to buy essential medical items, like gloves, from their pockets (examples of stories; *News 24*, 31 August 2014, **Ebola decimating health workers in Guinea,** *News 24*, 29 August 2014 **'** Zimbabwe can't conduct Ebola tests – ministry', *News 24*, 26 August 2014, **Scientist who discovered Ebola says outbreak is the perfect storm'.** |
| Discrimination and stigma = 3 | **Discrimination and stigma** – Stories in this category documented how Ebola victims or survivors were discriminated or ostracised by their communities. In some instances, the levels of societal discrimination witnessed some family members of the Ebola victims or survivors being locked up in their houses. |
| Sensationalism = 4 | **Sensationalism** – stories presented in an exaggerated manner meant to 'excite or shock' (Cambridge) |
| Blame = 5 | **Blame**–stories where there is an element of holding certain people, organisations or sectors accountable or responsible for any wrong doing or bad circumstances. |
| Public awareness campaigns, general information and education = 6 | **Public awareness campaigns, general information and education**–These stories focused on raising awareness or educating the public on the symptoms, prevention and management of Ebola in communities or provided updates on Ebola. |
| Cultural beliefs and traditional practices = 7 | **Cultural beliefs and traditional practices**–Articles where cultural beliefs or traditional practices became vehicles for transmitting and spreading Ebola with |

| | |
|---|---|
| | some communities believing that Ebola was unreal and a 'gimmick aimed at carrying out cannibalistic rituals'. (*News 24,* 28 July 2014) '*Hospitalised woman dies of Ebola after taken to traditional healer' or insisting on burial rights for their relatives in the process getting infected'.* |
| Response to Ebola = 8 | **Response to Ebola**–This was a general response to the Ebola crisis or an acknowledgement of Ebola as an emergency. Some of the measures included emergency meetings, talks, opening of Ebola centres, establishment of isolation tents, creation of Ebola response centres, and holding of prayers. |
| Governance = 9 | **Governance** – These were reports around governments' policies and the way governments acted in the fight against Ebola. |
| Anti-west narrative = 10 | **Anti–west narrative** – articles that viewed the West as having a suspicious agenda or interests on Africa |
| Africa the dark continent = 11 | **Africa the dark continent** – Narratives that referred to West Africa or other parts of Africa as poor and hopeless. |
| Securitisation = 12 | **Securitisation** – These articles were on how Ebola's impact and how it was treated as a security threat. An example is when some countries sealed their borders for fear of spreading the virus and used military forces in efforts to contain it. |
| Fear, panic & lack of trust = 13 | **Fear, panic and lack of trust** – The articles in this category perpetuated or promoted fear due to the quick spread of the virus and thus leading to the growth of mistrust amongst community members. Some Ebola |

| | |
|---|---|
| | victims ran away from the hospital and this created fear that many people were going to be infected. The reality that health care workers were also infected promoted fear as ordinary people realised Ebola did not choose who to infect and thus rendered everyone vulnerable. |
| Treatment and research = 14 | **Treatment and research** – The articles in this category documented the efforts put by various bodies to try and find a possible treatment of Ebola especially the untested or untried vaccine from Mapp Pharmaceutical Company. |
| Containment of Ebola = 15 | **Containment of Ebola**– this category comprises articles describing efforts directed at halting the spread of Ebola or its containment. |
| Social, economic and political effects of Ebola = 16 | **Social, economic and political effects of Ebola**– these articles emphasised the overwhelming impact of Ebola on the affected West African countries. These include articles describing how prices of basic commodities such as food and hand sanitisers had gone up, as well as the rise of food shortages, threats to tourism, cancellation of key festivities and the halting of production due to the Ebola outbreak. |
| Transmission = 17 | **Transmission** – These articles described the rate of transmission, signs and ways of spreading the disease, areas affected and the new numbers of people affected by Ebola. |
| Death = 18 | **Death** – these articles were mostly updates on the number of people dying from Ebola |
| Funding = 19 | **Funding**– these were specific articles on monetary pledges made by governments or funding institutions towards the fight against Ebola. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Myth & rumours = 20 | **Myth and rumours**– these articles were based on myths, lies, rumour and misinformation regarding the spread, mode of transmission, preventative measures or treatment of Ebola. These were spread via word of mouth, social media or other forms. |
| Reintegration of survivors = 21 | **Reintegration of survivors**–this category comprises articles about the reintegration of Ebola survivors back into the communities after surviving this vicious virus. The narratives also focused at how the communities welcomed survivors back and the survivor's sharing of the stories of miraculous recovery. |
| Others (falling outside the ones listed above) = 22 | **Others** – falling outside the listed ones – these are stories that did not fit into any one of the categories above. |
| **News Values** | 1 = threshold; 2 = meaningfulness (proximity and relevance); 3 = unexpectedness; 4 =negativity; 5= prominence; 6 =Others falling outside the ones listed |

### 4.8 Validity and Reliability

Heale and Twycross (2005: 66) define validity as the extent to which a research instrument has a consistent result or same result if used in a similar situation repeatedly. Jensen (2002: 266) notes that validity is concerned with truth seeking and can either be internal or external. Internal refers to the consistency of the methods used and is concerned with whether the findings can be applicable to other situations.

Reliability is concerned with 'the consistency of a measure', which means a study can be repeated and similar results produced (Heale and Twycross, 2005: 67; Jensen, 2002: 267). According to Jensen (2002: 266, reliability and validity are key aspects of quality control in research. It may be difficult to give an exact calculation of reliability, but an estimate is possible (Heale and Twycross, 2005:67).

In the case of this study, chances of getting similar results are possible because the study

focused on the use of online material that is easily accessible and is more or less a permanent record. Anyone wishing to do a similar study can easily access the two online platforms under study or enquire from the administrators of the sites to gain access to their content.

### 4.9 Limitations

The researcher acknowledges the main flaw of content analysis but strove to overcome it. "The main weakness of content analysis is that it can be laborious: coding hundreds of column inches of newspapers or hours of television programmes is very time-consuming." (Stokes 2003: 59). In this case the analysis of the online articles was daunting and laborious. Citing Hartmann and Husband (1974), Ogbonna (2016) argues that despite its challenges, content analysis enables researchers to "say something about what is being called event news – that is the version of the world daily laid before the public as a kind of suggested agenda for their thought, discussion and action". In this case, Ebola fits in the category of event news. In addition, a careful selection of articles was done to avoid including everything that may not necessarily be what the study needs and a reasonable time frame of six months was considered for the study.

The study also has its own limitations as largely one form of methodology was used. Quantifying the content did not provide all the answers the researcher was looking for. It provided partially answers especially noted through the provision of general perspectives on how the South African media reported on Ebola. The qualitative content analysis of the content was partially used to discuss the themes or angles or main issues which *News 24* and *Times Live* focused on in their coverage. An analysis of more online outlets would probably have given further insights. However this creates an opportunity for further research that focuses on a wider selection of media in South Africa.

Another limitation is that, the researcher's efforts to get all the stories from *Times Live* website for the period of study was undermined by the fact that the website was undergoing some changes and a new site was being created. The researcher mitigated this by contacting the *Times Live* digital editor who was very helpful by providing all links of stories from March until August 2014 from the archive. A list of all the stories was then shared with the researcher as most of them had been taken down and were slowly being uploaded onto the new website. Kate Henry– the *Times Live* digital news editor gave the researcher instructions on how to retrieve the old content or stories. Researcher was advised to click on the link, replace the www on the URL with the word archive then press enter to see the original articles. Below is an example of such cases: http://www.timeslive.co.za/africa/article667565.ece

http://archive.timeslive.co.za/africa/article667565.ece

This worked immensely as the researcher managed to retrieve the required articles for study. It is, however, not entirely safe to say all articles were found since an immense amount of work was being done on the website. However, with the articles found, there is a good reflection of the general trends on Ebola by *Times Live*.

The other challenge at this stage is that the archive has since been temporarily removed from the *Times Live* website to finalise work on the new website. It is therefore impossible to access the articles now until the new website is finalised probably at the end of March 2018. However at the time of the study, the researcher got all the content she wanted and reviewed them from the website.

### 4.9.1 Conclusion

Chapter 4 discussed the methodology and the sample used for the study. It also focused on the content analysis approach employed and how themes were identified using the same, as well as outlined how data was analysed using statistical means such as frequency tables, figures and simple percentage. The chapter outlines further, the limitations of the study.

The next chapter analyses findings from this study.

## Chapter 5: Presentation of findings

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from this study on the collection of online articles from *Times Live* and *News 24 websites*. Both websites have a wide reach and as such are South Africa's big online media outlets. The online articles that were analysed, using the content analysis approach, were published during the period 23 March 2014 to 31 August 2014 - a period considered as the peak of the Ebola outbreak in West Africa. Pie charts, bar graphs, frequency tables and simple percentages were used to present the findings. These findings are accompanied by a discussion on themes and identified patterns that were arrived at from a prior qualitative and quantitative analysis of content based on the research questions.

### 5.2 Sample selection

The study tracks the coverage of the Ebola outbreak for six months from 23 March 2014 to August 2014 (March is when the outbreak was declared for the first time by the WHO in Guinea on 23 March 2014) but the peak of the virus covered the months up to November 2014. The six month period, was long enough to guarded against the likelihood of attaining distorted results as noted by Deacon et al., (1999: 120).

The findings are meant to answer the following four questions:

1) How prominent and frequent was the Ebola outbreak on the *News 24* and *Times Live*'s agendas between March and August 2014?
2) Which themes, issues, topics or angles on Ebola did *News 24* and *Times Live* highlight
3) What was the nature or pattern of coverage?

a) To what extent did the two outlets drive coverage (looking at how much content was self–generated versus wire–sourced?)

4. Who were the sources of the information used in Ebola stories?

Below is a presentation of findings and discussion on the study. The researcher carried out a quantitative content analysis using frequency tables, pie charts, bar graphs, simple percentages and figures. Quantitative content analysis converts data to percentages in an effort to make comparisons across the sample (Stokes, 2003: 64). A data coding sheet where patterns, trends and frequencies are recorded was used for the analysis of the results. For qualitative content analysis, various themes or frames were enumerated using the code sheet and these are

discussed below. Some of the analysed categories include; the location of stories to determine how editorial content was distributed for news, features, editorial, opinion, and politics among key sections, and the types and number of sources used. Other considerations included: whether the stories were taken off wires, from other media outlets, written by the outlets' own journalists or other sources; if stories were written off from a press statement, press conference, fact sheets, reports or taken off websites: as well as the nature of news values that may have been considered in the writing and publication of the stories.

### 5.3 Total Ebola coverage by *News 24* and *Times Live* from 23 March to 31 August 2014

**Table 1: Total Ebola coverage by *News 24* and *Times Live***

| MEDIA OUTLET | TOTAL 6 MONTH COVERAGE |
|---|---|
| *Times Live* | 86 |
| *News 24* | 393 |
| Total coverage | 479 |

The results show that a total of 479 articles were produced on Ebola by both *News24 and Times Live* between March 2014 and August 2014. The *News 24* coverage was*393*stories, while *Times Live* generated 86 stories.

### 5.4 Frequency of coverage per month by *Times Live* and *News 24*

**Table 2: *Times Live* Frequency of coverage per month (6 months period)**

| MONTH | TOTAL COVERAGE PER MONTH |
|---|---|
| March | 4 |
| April | 9 |
| May | 1 |
| June | 8 |
| July | 26 |
| August | 37 |
| Total coverage | 86 |

**Table 3: *News 24* frequency of coverage per month (6 month period)**

| MONTH | TOTAL COVERAGE PER MONTH |
|---|---|
| March | 15 |
| April | 25 |
| May | 4 |
| June | 17 |
| July | 60 |
| August | 272 |
| Total | 393 |

Tables 2 and 3 show the frequency of coverage of the Ebola outbreak by *Times Live* and *News24*per month from March until August 2014.

The findings from Tables 2 and 3 show that the coverage of the Ebola epidemic by both *Times Live* and *News 24* started on a low note in March when the outbreak was first reported. There were only four articles in March on the *Times Live* and 15 on *News 24* websites.

In May the coverage went down drastically with only one story by *Times Live* and only four on *News 24*. However, coverage only began to pick up on both platforms in July and August as the epidemic began to rapidly spread and as the 'outbreak exploded' (WHO, 2016).

A number of key events happened between July and August that probably triggered the increase in coverage. The findings show that, health care workers began to be infected with Ebola from mid–July with the prominent doctor, who was at the forefront of the Ebola fight in Sierra Leone, Dr. Sheik Khan, dying from Ebola on 29 July 2014. He was the first health care worker to die from Ebola *(News 24,* 30 July 2014*)*. In July 2014 another senior Liberian doctor, Samuel Brisbane, also died from Ebola *(News 24*).

This period also saw Liberia closing borders and schools and restricting public gatherings such as marches and demonstrations as a way to minimise the spread of the epidemic. Later on in August, Ebola went international with the first US missionary doctor Kent Brantly being infected. Other few international health care workers were also infected during this period. Significantly, on 8 August 2014, the WHO declared Ebola an international public health emergency of concern (WHO, *Time, The Guardian*), which made it a fairly big issue.

### 5.4.1 Nature of coverage or distribution of *Times Live* and *News 24*'s editorial content

**Figure 1: Distribution of *Times Live's* Ebola editorial content (Nature of coverage)**

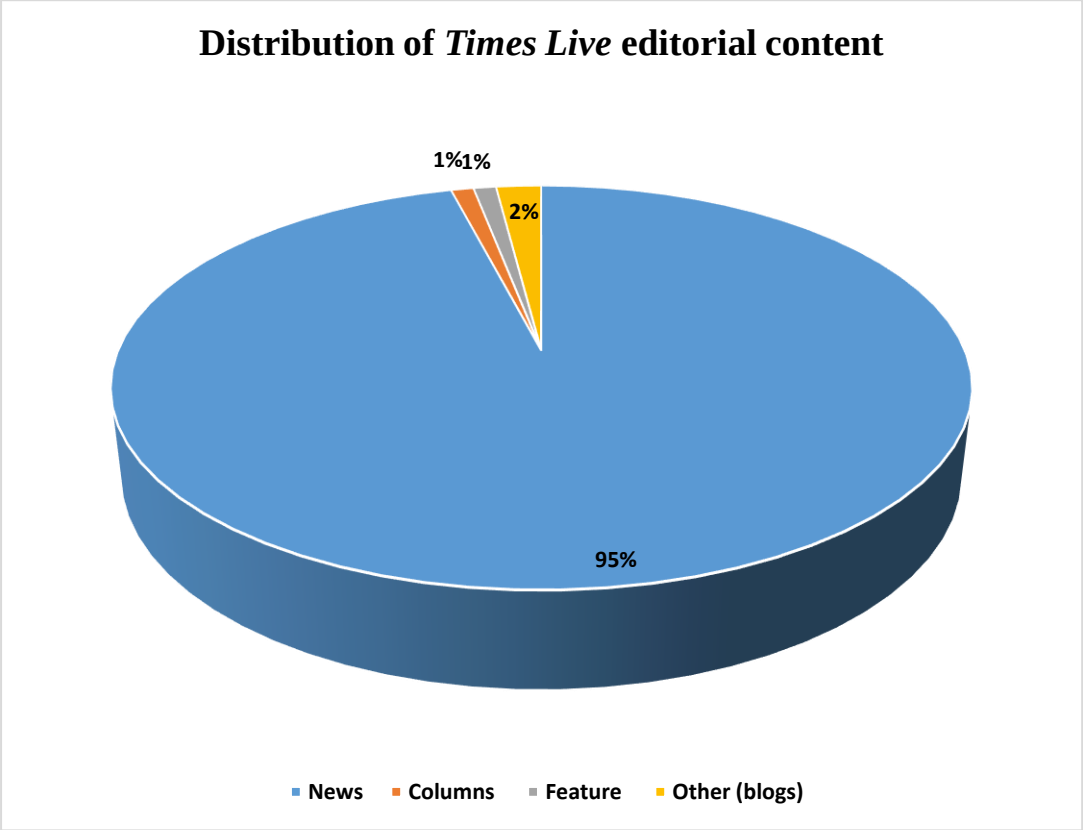
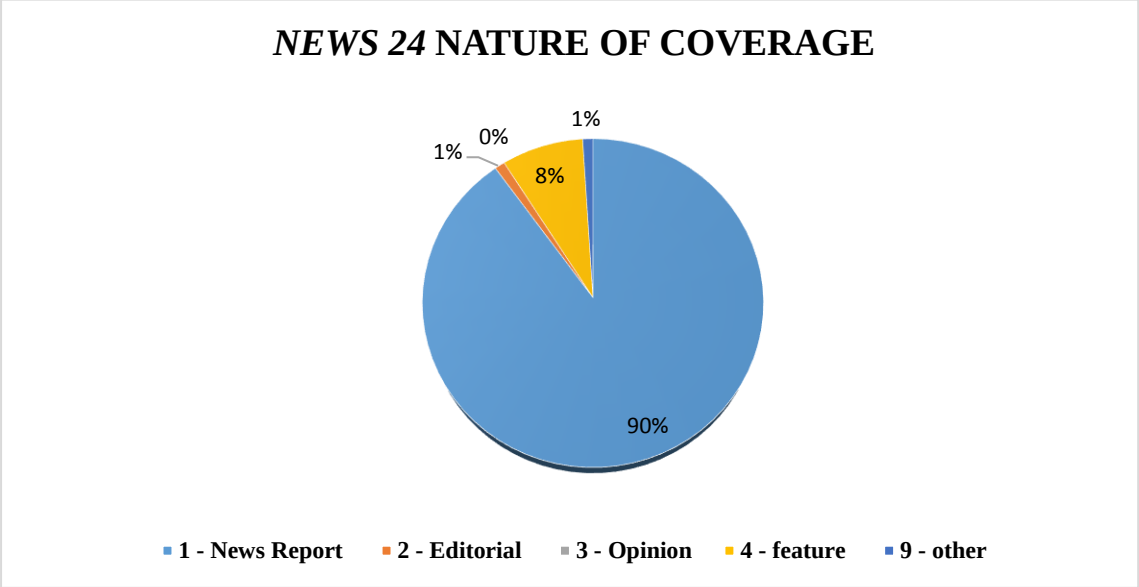



Figure 1 shows how the *Times Live* editorial content was distributed. The *Times Live* data in Figure 1 reveals that 82 articles out of 86 (95%) articles produced, were presented as purely news articles, while 2 (2%) were categorised as other. In this case, these were blog posts by a Doctors Without Borders (MSF) doctor, Stefan Kruger, who shared how the war against Ebola was progressing, while two other articles were a column and a feature and thus both constituted a percentage each.

**Figure 2: Distribution of *News 24* Ebola editorial content (nature of coverage)**




*News 24* data in Figure 2 reveals that 90% (352) of the produced stories were presented as purely news articles, while 8% (32) were categorised as feature stories. One percent (1) of the articles constituted an opinion piece, while the other 1% percent constituted other stories.

The fact that there was a huge number of news articles by both the *Times Live* and *News 24* media outlets may indicate that Ebola was breaking news and a running story that was followed up closely. The stories showed no depth of coverage or deeper analysis probably because of the nature of the epidemic, there was no time to comprehensively analyse it, develop longer features or craft more analytical stories. The rate at which people were being infected and dying was worrying. *News 24* constantly updated its website sometimes twice or three times a day with the same or different Ebola stories and thus showing its commitment to raising awareness about the epidemic.

The results above may indicate that like HIV reporting in South Africa, Ebola reporting was "event based and tended to be on the hard news conventions" (Finlay, 2010: 8). This was demonstrated clearly earlier where coverage picked up only when Ebola reached the shores of the USA and other countries outside of Africa.

### 5.4.2 Section or placement of Ebola stories by *Times Live* and *News 24*

**Table 4 – *Times Live* placement of stories**

| Section | Total number of stories |
|---|---|
| 2 – Africa | 46 |
| 3 – Business / Finance | 1 |
| 4 – Sport | 1 |
| 5 – South Africa | 6 |
| 6 – World | 4 |
| 9 – Other | 24 |
| 10 – Politics | 4 |
| Total | 86 |

**Table 5–*News 24* placement of stories**

| Section | Total number of stories |
|---|---|
| 2 – Africa | 269 |
| 3 – Business / Finance | 9 |
| 4 – Sport | 3 |
| 5 – South Africa | 21 |
| 6 – World | 27 |
| 7 – Health | 61 |
| 9 – Other | 3 |
| **Total** | **393** |

Tables 4 and 5 show the sections of the website where Ebola stories were placed by both *News 24* and *Times Live*. The above findings show that the sections with most Ebola content for *Times Live* were, Africa with 46 stories, other, 24, South Africa, 6 and World, 4 stories. Other refers to stories whose section was not identified and hence not allocated to any specific section.

*News 24*'s sections had the most Ebola stories with those on Africa numbering 269, Health, 61, World, 27 and South Africa, 21.It is important to note that the placement of a story plays a critical role in setting an agenda. According to McCombs and Merrit (2004: 41); McCombs (2011); Ansolabehere, Behr and Iyengar (1993: 145), newspapers provide 'a host of cues on

the importance to attach to an issue' and these include the first page placing of a story in a newspaper as a lead story, other front page display, stories accompanied by photographs, large headlines, and length, while television considers placement as the opening story on the newscast, length of the amount of time dedicated to a story and promotional emphasis on it. In this case since it is online, another cue would be the section where an article is placed.

### 5.4.3 Origin of *Times Live* and *News 24* stories

**Figure 3: Origin of *Times Live* stories**

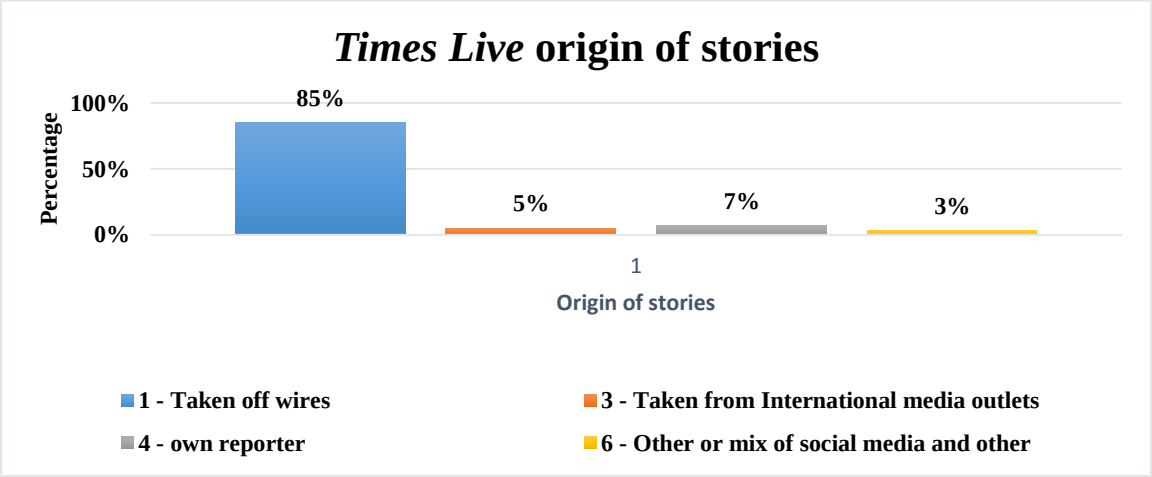
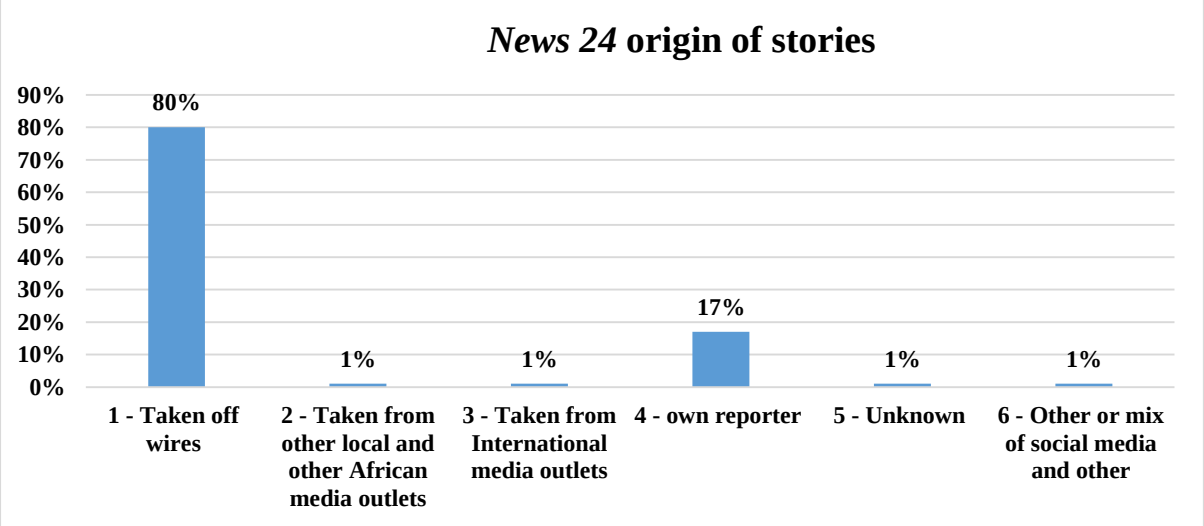



**Figure 4: Origin of *News 24* stories**



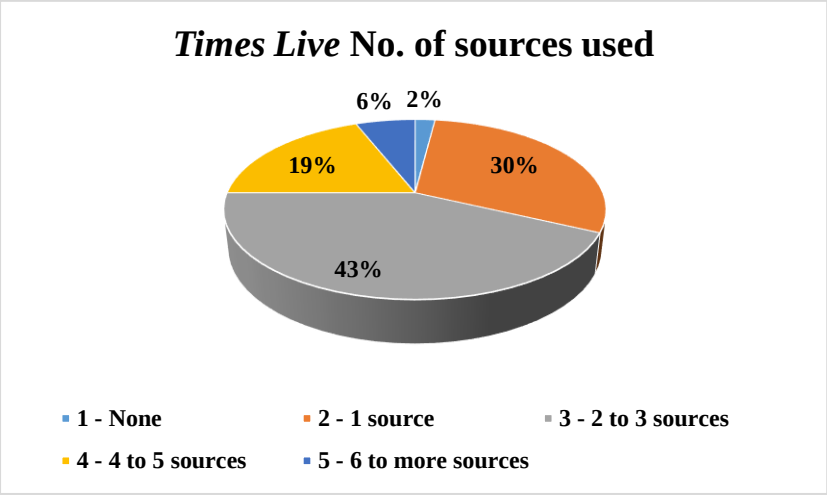

Findings from Figures 3 and 4 show that both *Times Live* and *News 24* got bulk of their stories from the different news wires and simply republished them on their websites. Analysis shows that out of the 86 *Times Live* articles, 85% (73) were taken off from the news wires with the

bulk originating from the now defunct South African Press Agency (*SAPA*), followed by Agence France-Presse (*AFP), Reuters, Associated Press* and Deutsche Presse-Agentur *(DPA).* Only 7% (6) of the articles were written by *Times Live* reporters, while 5% (4) and 3% (3) were respectively taken off from other international media outlets and categorised as other.

Out of the 393 articles by *News 24*, 80% (314) were taken off from news wires. *AFP* was the major contributor of the *News 24* articles, while 17% (66) stories were written by *News 24* reporters. About 1% (5) stories, were taken from other international media outlets, which are not wires, while 1% (3) were taken from other local or African media outlets, the other 1% (3) 'source of origin is unknown and 1% (2) is categorised as other.

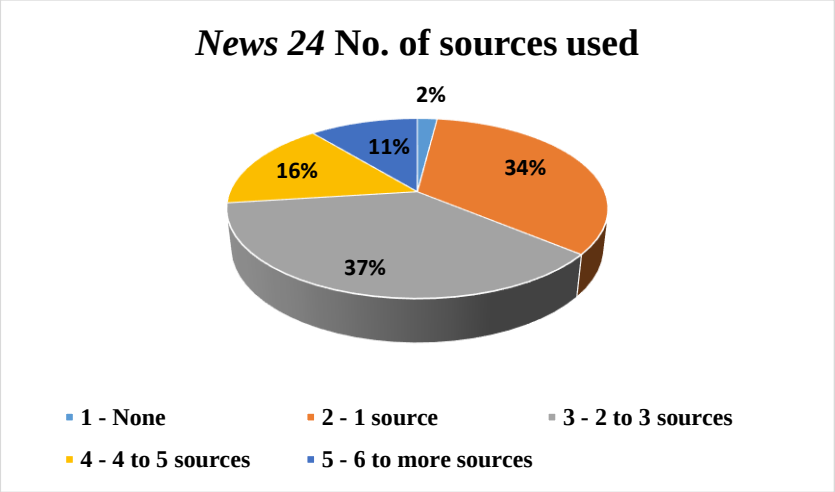
### 5.4.4 Number of sources used by *Times Live* and *News 24*

**Figure 5: *Times Live* number of sources used, referred to or quoted**




Findings on figure 5 show that at least 2 to 3 sources of information, were used in 43% of the total number of articles, followed by at least one source being used in 30% of the total number of articles. In 19% of the total number of articles, 4 to 5 sources, were used, while 6 or ore sources, were used in 6% of the total stories and no source was used in 2% of all the *Times Live* stories.

**Figure 6: *News 24* number of sources used, referred to or quoted**




Findings from Figures 5 and 6, show that at least 2 or 3 sources were used by both *Times Live* and *News 24*. At least 2 or 3 sources were used in 43% (37) of the *Times Live* stories, while 2 or 3 sources, were used in 37% (146) of the *News 24* stories. However, given the complexity surrounding the Ebola virus, it would be great to have varied sources who give a good analysis of the issue than relying on merely two or three sources. It is worrying that a fairly big percentage of stories by both the *Times Live* and *News 24* used a single source only for their stories. About 30% (26) of the *Times Live* stories and 34% (134) of the *News 24* articles, were single sourced. The reason is not as clear, but given that these were the six initial months of the outbreak, it is likely that the reporters were still trying to figure out who the best sources for this complex epidemic were or were actually finding it hard to get the best possible sources for this complex story. About 5 or 6 sources were used in 6% (5) and 11% (44) of the *Times Live* and *News 24* stories respectively. 2% (2) of the *Times Live* and *News24*2% (8) stories had no sources used at all. According to Rosenberry (2009), "the greater the number of sources used by the journalist, the more likely the story will reflect the issue accurately". It is also key that journalists should try as much as possible to avoid single stories as this helps stem or root out "common failings in health news" (Furlan, 2017).

### 5.4.5 Types of sources used for Ebola stories by *Times Live* and *News 24*

**Figure 7: *Times Live* sources used, quoted or attributed to for Ebola stories**

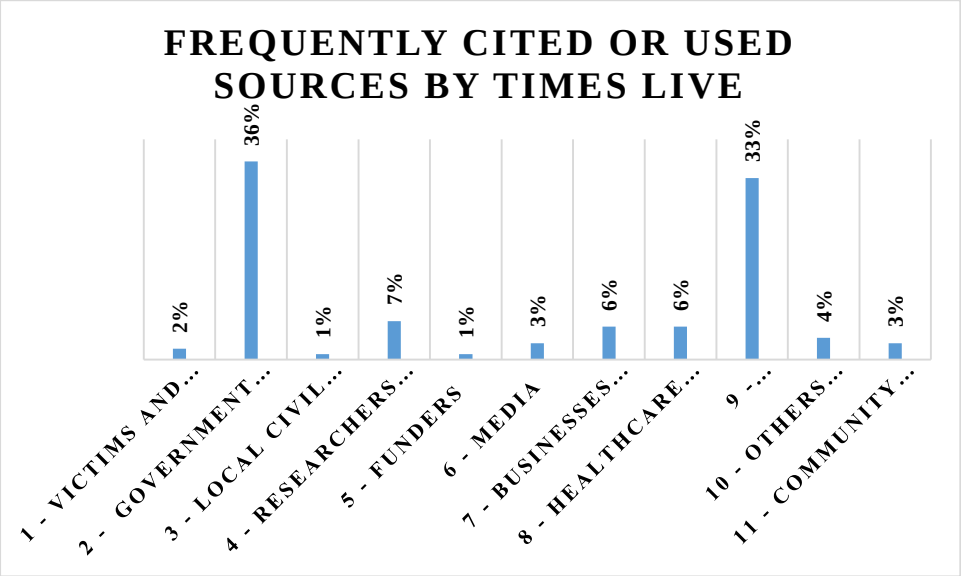
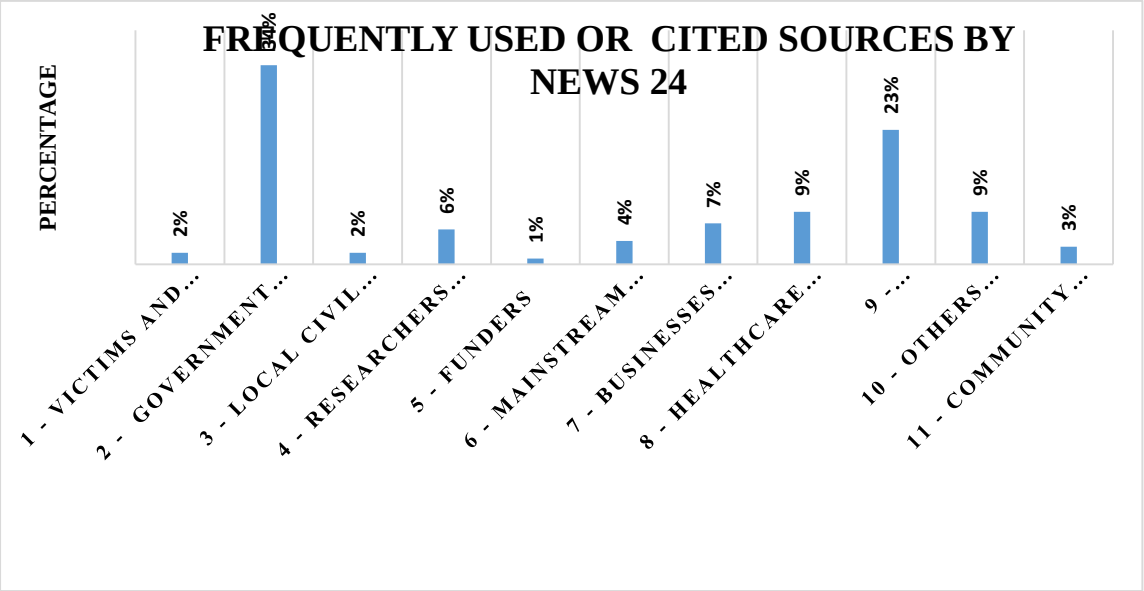



**Figure 8: *News 24* sources used, cited, quoted or attributed to for Ebola stories**




Figures 7 and 8 show that both the *Times Live* and *News 24* used different types of sources with multiple sources sometimes being used in a single story. The researcher counted the number of times certain sources were used in total to avoid confusion in order to ascertain the prominent sources used, quoted or attributed to. As reflected in figures 7 and 8, above, the mostly used

sources were government officials such as presidents, ministers and those only identified as government officials without being named from those countries affected by Ebola including; Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea. Leaders from other countries, ministries of health officials, medical officers, foreign or international relations ministers, unnamed government spokespeople, health commissioners, presidential aides, information and communication ministers, police officials and foreign secretaries, were representative of government officials and these were widely quoted.

Government sources constituted 36% (57) of the sources used by the *Times Live*, while 34% (241) made up the government sources used by *News 24*. International bodies or International Non- Governmental Organisations, such as the WHO, Doctors Without Borders (MSF), CDC, Samaritan's Purse, Plan International and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) and other UN bodies, were second highest in terms of sources extensively used by both media outlets as sources of information. International bodies as sources represent, 23% (167) of the total sources used by the *News 24*, while they represent 33% (52) of the total number of sources used by *Times Live*.

Other sources are represented as follows on the *Times Live*; researchers and academics 7% (11), Business and corporations 6% (9) and healthcare workers 6% (10), others (unknown, unidentified, social media and those falling outside the categories listed) 4% (6), Community members 3% (4), local civil society groups or local Non- Governmental Organisations 1% (1) and funders 1% (2).

The breakdown of the rest of the sources used by the *News 24* is as follows: Healthcare workers 9% (63), Others (unknown, unidentified, social media and those falling outside the categories listed) 9% (61), Business and Corporations 7% (48), Researchers and academics 6% (46), Mainstream media 4% (32), Community members 3% (21), Victims and Survivors of Ebola 2% (14) and Funders 1% (7).

### 5.4.6 Main themes/angles, topics or frames covered by *Times Live* and *News 24*

**Figure 9: *Times Live*'s main themes**

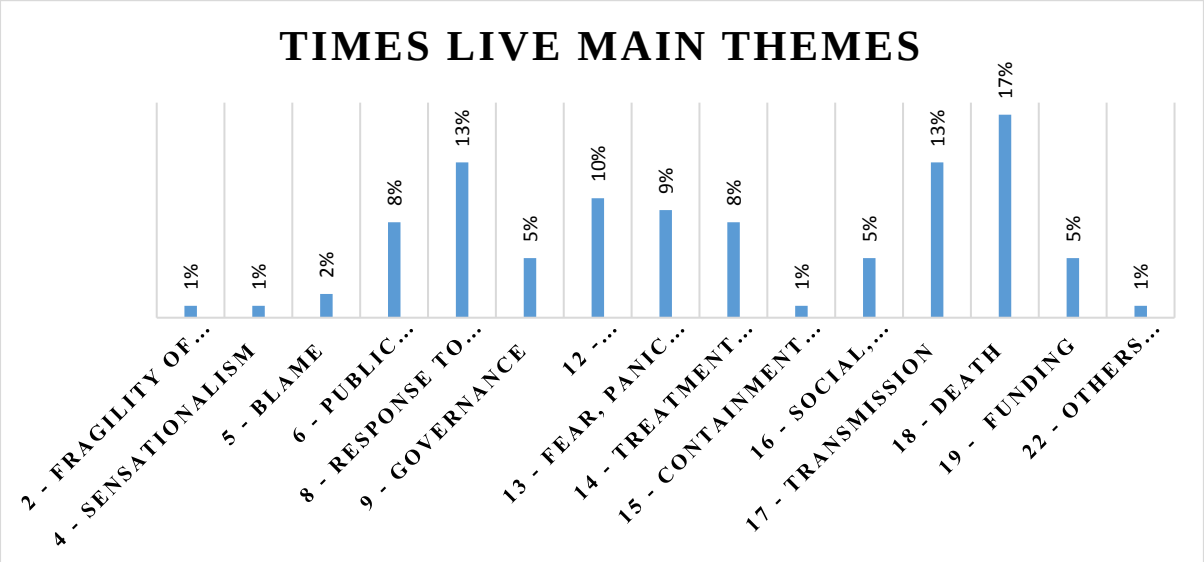
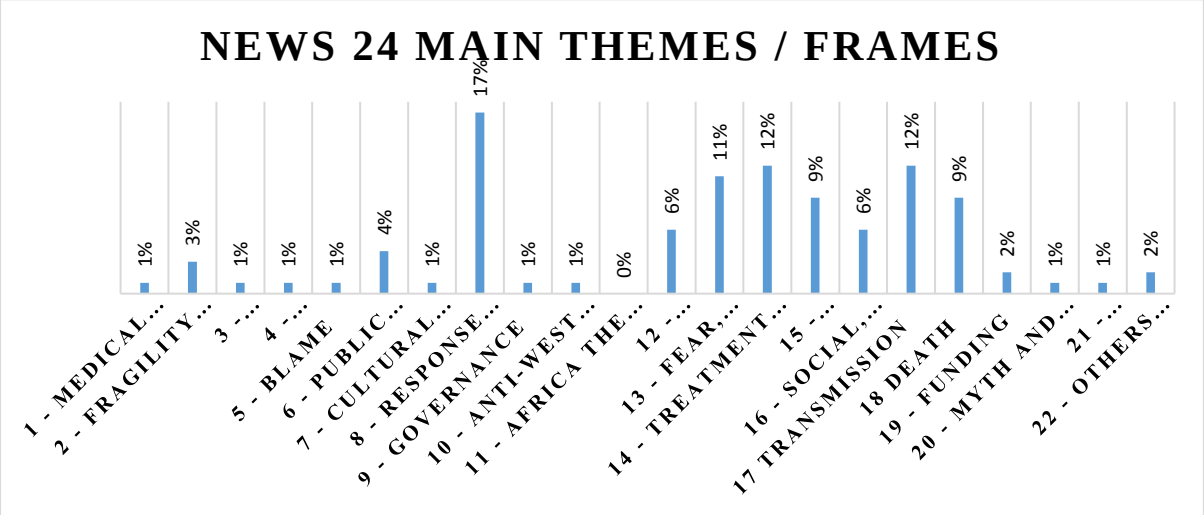



**Figure 10: *News 24* main themes**




The coding of news articles on Ebola resulted in the identification of 21 themes for this study. However, not all stories fitted in all the various themes, nonetheless, the researcher managed to come up with the 21 themes by thoroughly reading the text and highlighting quotes that clearly support a theme. The results presented on Figures 5 and 6 show the top 11 themes covered or emphasised by both *Times Live* and *News 24* over the six month period for the study include: **death, transmission and response, securitisation, (fear, panic and lack of trust), (treatment and research), (public awareness campaigns, information sharing and**

**education), governance, (social, economic and political effects of Ebola), funding, containment of Ebola and fragility of health systems**. The ones in brackets were categorised as one theme.

It should be acknowledged that almost all the stories had more than one theme. However, for the purposes of fair results, the researcher only highlights the main theme or the most visible or obvious theme or frame in each story. Thus, the top themes or frames on the *Times Live* were **death and transmission**, while the ***News 24*** emphasised **response to Ebola and transmission**.

The themes that were left out or least included by the *Times Live* were; medical problems, discrimination and stigma, cultural and religious beliefs, Africa the dark continent, anti-west narrative, myth and rumours. *News 24* did not put emphasis on survivors' reintegration, Africa a dark continent, anti-west narrative, medical problems, governance, sensationalism, discrimination and stigma.

As already stated in previous chapters, the Ebola outbreak in 2014 was described as 'unprecedented' due to the quick spread to continents beyond the African borders, and the huge number of both deaths and confirmed cases (WHO, 2015). As a result, there was panic as many people struggled to understand the nature of the epidemic, how it was spreading and why it was spreading so fast. People were dying in multitudes and thus, the above-noted events may have compelled the *Times Live* and *News 24*to concentrate on the theme of death and transmission.

### 5.4.7 Possible news values considered by *Times Live* and *News 24*

**Figure 11 – Possible News Values considered by *Times Live***

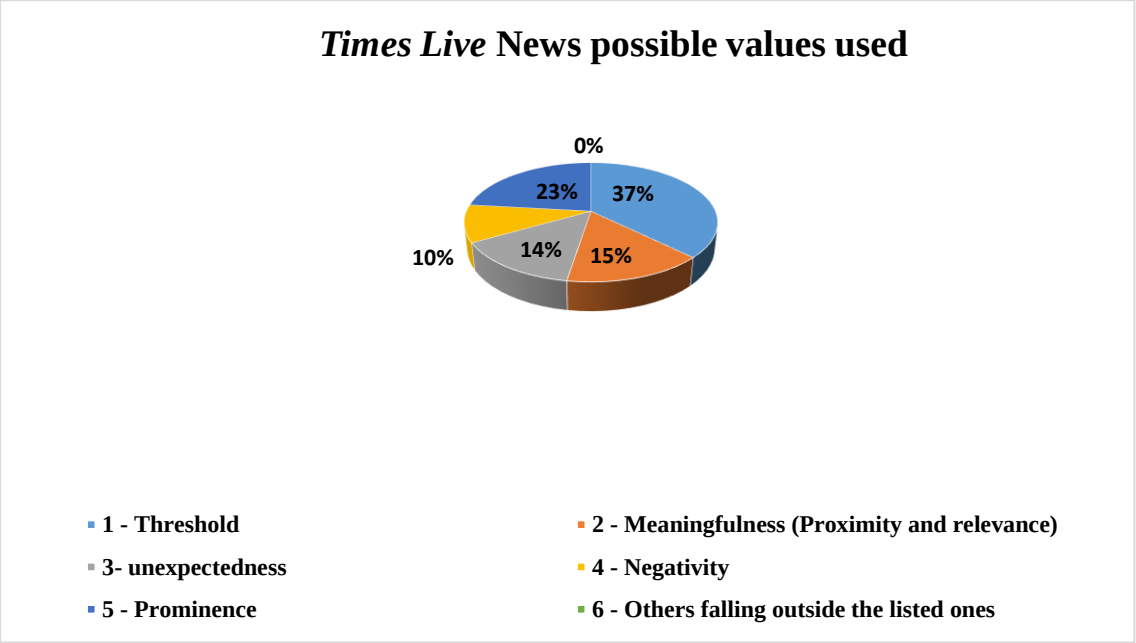



Figure 11 show the possible news values that could have been considered or used by the *Times Live* to select their stories. It should be noted that the researcher used her own judgement to enumerate the outlets' possible news values by reading the stories in detail. For the *Times Live*, the threshold news value, stood at 37% (32) of the stories, while prominence followed closely with 23% (20), meaningfulness (proximity and relevance) 15% (13), and unexpectedness at 14% (12) of the articles. The least considered news value was negativity which constituted 10% (9) of the stories.

**Figure 12 – Possible News Values considered by *News 24***

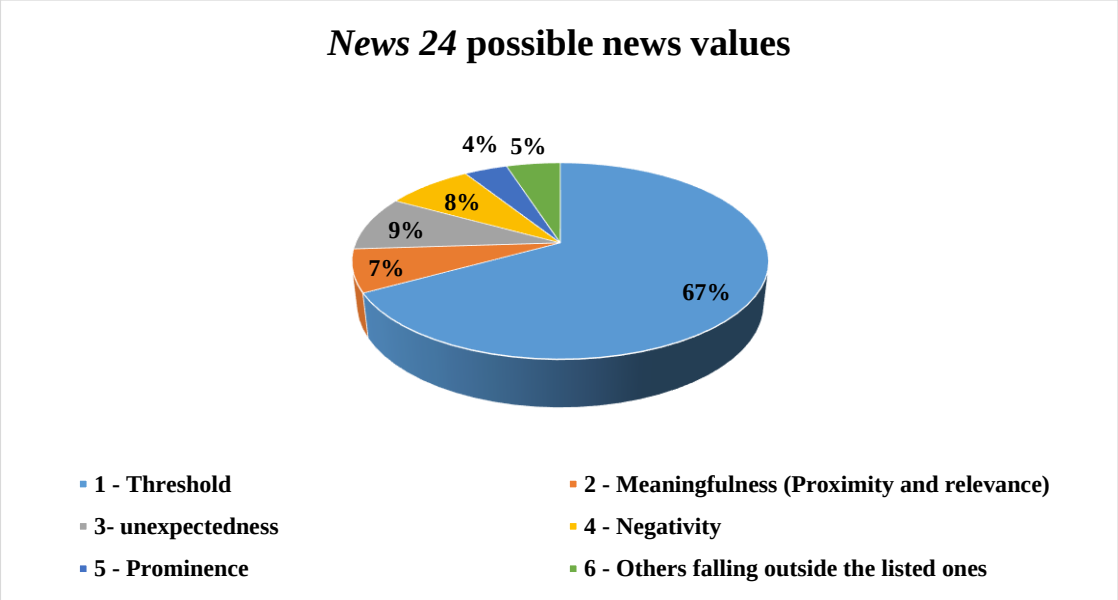



Figure 12 show the possible news values that could have been considered or used by *News 24* to select their stories. For *News 24*, 67% (262) of their stories were selected on the basis of them being impactful, while stories with an element of unexpectedness stood at 9% (36), negativity 8% (31) and meaningfulness 7% (27). The news value least considered by *News 24* was prominence with only 4% (17).

The observation from the results above shows that threshold or impact is the main news value used by both *News 24* and *Times Live*.

### 5.4.8 Conclusion

This chapter showcased the findings of this study based on the retrieval of online articles from *Times Live* and *News 24 websites*. The online articles analysed range from 23 March 2014 to 31 August 2014 – a period seen as the peak of the Ebola outbreak in West Africa. The findings are based on the content analysis done on the articles. Pie charts, bar graphs, frequency tables as well as simple percentage, were used to present the findings. The next and final chapter discusses in detail the findings of the study that have been presented in the previous chapter.

## Chapter 6: Discussion of findings and Conclusion

### 6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter showcased the findings of this study based on the retrieval of online articles from *Times Live* and *News 24 websites*. The findings are based on the content analysis done on the articles. This chapter discusses in detail the findings of the study looking at how all the previous studies and theories link to what has been discovered in the study.

### 6.2 Quantitative Content Analysis

### 6.2.1 Prominence, frequency and how Ebola was on the agenda of T*imes Live and News 24*

Table 1, 2 and 3 best answer the first question on the frequency of coverage of Ebola issues by the *Times Live* and *News 24*. As table 1 shows, a total of 479 articles were produced from 23 March to 31 August 2014, which indicates that the two outlets made an effort to keep Ebola on the radar. The results may also show that the two media outlets devoted time and other resources to raise awareness about the outbreak and its implications. The finding corroborates or affirms McCombs and Gilbert's (1986) assertion as cited in Kunczik (1988: 191) that the frequency of the coverage and the quantity of reporting of an issue is a major cue of what is important. Of course some months had more stories on Ebola than others, but overall, the coverage was fair and consistent. The findings confirm Cottle et al. (1988: 95); Stokes (2003: 56)'s argument that through quantitative content analysis, one is able to identify and count the occurrence of specified characteristics in texts. Because of this, it becomes easy to interpret the messages, language, images and representations of those texts and their wider social significance as the researcher has successfully done as demonstrated above.

The findings in tables 2 and 3 also affirm the agenda setting theory's tenets which state that the media builds an agenda over time. According to Stone and McCombs (1988: 191) as cited in (Kunczik, 1988: 191), four months are an adequate time frame to build up an agenda. This has ideally been demonstrated by analysing the coverage for at least six months. The results show sustained and dominant coverage of Ebola despite the already mentioned dips. The two media outlets were quite successful in building the agenda through the issues, topics, and sustained coverage of Ebola that produced 479 articles.

It is important to note that the placement of a story also plays a critical role in setting an agenda. McCombs and Merrit (2004: 41); McCombs (2011); Ansolabehere, Behr and Iyengar (1993:

145) underscore the way in which a newspaper provides various cues, such as the story's placing on the front page, stories that have photographs and large headlines with , another hint being the section where an article is placed in the case of online news sites.

The impact of placement, especially with regards to the online can potentially be measured through the Really Simple Syndication (RSS) or the Rich Site Summary feed system. According to the eNCA website, RSS feeds allow people to subscribe to a website's news feed without constantly and manually checking the website for new content. Therefore, as stories are added on the sites, subscribers are first to be alerted to new content. "Instead, your RSS feed reader software constantly monitors the site and informs you of any stories we add to the site" (eNCA). Softwaregarden.com (2004) also notes that constantly checking each website for new stories or content can be tiring, hence the use of RSS feeds which are presented in an orderly and better manner.

*News 24* also provides its subscribers to its feeds with fresh content through the RSS feeds system. Through this system, *News 24* has also managed to monitor the most popular or top sections of its website where subscribers mostly visit.

The most popular sections for the *News 24*'s RSS feeds include: Top stories, South Africa, Africa and World (*News 24*, 20 December 2008). In line with the findings of this study on sections or placement, the most popular sections that carried most of the Ebola articles on *News 24, were:* Africa with 269 stories, followed by Health with 61, World with 27 and South Africa with 21 stories. For maximum impact and to set the agenda well, *News 24* placed Ebola stories under the most popular sections like Africa. It may not have been an obvious decision, but the results of the study suggest that it is. There is a high probability that many people who subscribe to the *News 24* feed system potentially accessed the Ebola stories as they were concentrated on the popular sections listed above.

It is interesting to note that the Health section of the *News 24* website was second highest in terms of carrying Ebola content after the Africa section. This may indicate that *News 24* dedicated this section to updating audiences on this critical issue and it follows that since it was a health issue, many people would assume it was carried on this section. The researcher also would like to assume that probably the health section was accessed more by the RSS feeds subscribers, hence the many stories.

It is therefore possible that the Ebola outbreak stories enabled or drove traffic to the least visited sections as demonstrated above, thereby setting the agenda for many *News 24* subscribers.

It is unfortunate that the researcher could not establish the popular or top RSS feeds for the *Times Live*. The feeds were not listed on their website. However, their general RSS feeds include; Home, News, Politics, Sport, Tshisa Live, Life style and Ideas (*Times Live*).

As Kunczik (1988: 193) further notes, the medium's credibility counts for an issue to be on the agenda. *News 24* and *Times Live,* are quite influential in South Africa as they are currently the two top news websites. The Effective Measure statistics released in February 2018, show that *News24* attracted 7, 3 million South African Internet browsers and over 22, 6 million page views, while *Times Live* ranked third with 3, 9 million browsers and about 20, 6 million page views (*The Media Online*). These statistics have remained consistent and the websites have remained on top since February 2016. The above statistics show how much inclination South Africans have towards *News 24* and *Times Live.* This may mean South Africans truly believe or see the two media outlets as credible, hence consistently follow the news they provide. The same can therefore be said for the Ebola outbreak, the results of this study may indicate that they equally followed the news closely.

"In highlighting the important issues of the day, the media, employ such devices as the frequent reportage of certain news stories for example, placement and space allotted to such stories and the airtime, space and frequency of commentaries or editorials accompanying or following quickly on the heels of the stories" Folarin (2002) as cited in Nwanne (2014: 3). The researcher can therefore safely conclude that with the frequency of coverage of Ebola issues by both *News 24* and *Times Live* from June 2014 onwards, they managed to create awareness on what was important. Evidence has shown that by keeping health issues especially epidemics on the spotlight in the media, people are able to minimise risks and make informed decisions about their health (Dudo, Dahlstrom and Brossard, 2017) as cited in Duru (2016). With limited media attention, there is reduced response to fight diseases since policy makers may not see the urgency or importance of addressing them. In South Africa, Ebola was topical and as demonstrated by *News 24* and *Times Live*, the country did not register confirmed cases, but only suspected cases, which proved untrue and was declared Ebola–free.

The researcher may not however conclusively see a link between the frequency of coverage and the effects (which is non–transmission of Ebola) in South Africa as this is not as apparent, but the fact that the Minister of Health, Dr. Aaron Motsoaledi and many other bodies always kept South Africans aware of the situation probably is an indication that the media played a critical role.

This observation is true to how *News 24* and *Times live* discharged their role of keeping their audience updated on the Ebola situation in the country. Sometimes *News 24* posted nearly three or four times on their website updating readers as reflected in the coding sheet developed.

According to Yusuf, Yahaya and Qabil (2015: 3), there were some positive aspects from the nature of coverage of Ebola by some African local media as coverage helped other countries to fight the disease promptly. The mainstream media ran programmes by professional medical and public health experts to unpack the true causes, symptoms, mode of spread and prevention and control measures thereby successfully contributing to successes recorded in less or non-hit countries in the region such as Nigeria, Senegal, Ghana and Mali (Yusuf, Yahaya and Qabil , 2015:3). The same can be said for South Africa in this case as *News 24* and *Times Live* kept the readers updated on a daily basis on how Ebola was spreading and updated Ebola death figures as reflected also in the coding sheet. We can conclude that although there is no immediate link tied to the constant updates from the two media outlets and the effects of the messages on the audience, *News 24* and *Times Live* played a significant role in spreading the information about the causes and source of the disease as well as how to contain it.

As noted by Kunczik (1988: 193), the chance of the media setting an agenda depends on the "...given societal situation for example during an election campaign period or between campaigns: economic crisis or phase of growth, on the medium itself for example credibility or size of audience and most particularly on the recipients for example whether many recipients already have a certain issue on their personal agendas too". In this case, the Ebola outbreak presented a perfect opportunity for media to set the agenda as this was a big health crisis and was a topical issue due to its devastating impact. It made sense to put Ebola on the agenda as this epidemic was spreading fast and people were concerned it was likely to spread to South Africa or Southern African countries. It was not surprising then that coverage increased dramatically in July and August when the virus broke boundaries into Europe and the USA.

Like Yusuf, Yahaya and Qabil (2005:3) note, South African media in particular *News 24* and *Times Live*, joined the bandwagon of reporting on Ebola extensively around July and August as the outbreak began to spread to Europe and the USA. Even the headlines changed to those that showed there was growing fear in the county that Ebola could potentially spread to South Africa, thereby confirming Chinje (2014)'s assertions as cited in Moyo (2015: 14) that African media allegedly simply copied the trends set by western media in its reportage on Ebola. This observation suggests that the African media including *News 24* and *Times Live* failed to

perform their role fully as the mirror of the society (Chinje, 2014 cited in Moyo, 2015:14).

It is worth noting that stories written exclusively on South Africa's reaction to the epidemic and also exclusively written by *News 24* and *Times Live* journalists also started picking up around the same time as in the Western countries in August. The first stories by *News 24* and *Times Live*, were in April and there was nothing until August when the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) confirmed there were no cases of Ebola in South Africa. The month of August witnessed a series of stories on South Africa, such as the announcement that the country would host a Southern African Development Community (SADC) meeting on Ebola. Other stories that made headlines in South Africa, were reports of a stranded ship off Richards Bay allegedly carrying people infected with Ebola and when a South African man, working as a health and safety officer in a mining concern in Liberia was admitted in South Africa after showing Ebola like symptoms (*News 24 and Times Live*).

Several debates address how South Africa cover disasters and issues in Africa including (Vegter, 2015; Dlakavu, 2013). In particular discussions have focused on how the media in South Africa seem disconnected from what is happening in the rest of Africa. Dlakavu (2013) points out that about the disconnection: "It is also reflected in our media where stories happening in Europe and North America hold greater value and attract greater coverage than what is happening in the rest of the continent". In addition, Kupe, a media expert, noted in a column in the *New Age* that South African media promotes the idea that the country is totally different and separate from other African countries.

South African media is seen as sometimes 'selfish' to an extent because if nothing has a direct effect or impact on South Africa, then it is not worthwhile to report on. A media monitoring organisation, Media Monitoring Africa also expressed its criticism of how South African media fares when it comes to covering disasters citing two examples where in both instances the media were more interested in covering the event if the disasters involved South Africans (Media Monitoring Africa, 2012). The two incidents referred to were: the plane crash in Nigeria that claimed more than 150 people and an earthquake that hit Swaziland measuring 4 on the Richter scale.

However, in the case of the plane crash and according to Media Monitoring Africa (2012), despite the magnitude of the disaster, the South African media quickly pointed out the absence of any South African victims in the crash, and focused on the fact that no South Africans were reportedly involved in the crash. In the case of the earthquake that affected a few parts of South

Africa and greater parts of Swaziland, the media did not speak to people in Swaziland about it, but spoke to a number of South African residents who were least affected (Media Monitoring Africa, 2012).

Mainstream media will also tend to apply the "does it affect us" approach for international coverage. This thinking also reaches into stories like 11 September 2001 terrorist attack where two planes flew into the World Trade Centre twin towers in New York. The story became topical in South Africa when it was discovered there were two South Africans among the almost 3,000 victims of the attack. This was a huge story with possible global implications. *Times Live* carried the story under the headline 'Two from SA will be honoured' (*Times Live*, 11 September 2011).

The above observations made by Kupe, the Media Monitoring Africa (2012) and Dlakavu (2013), are especially true when analysing the results from this study. Ebola became more topical when there was a realisation South Africa was at risk like other African countries. It is sad that big institutions like *News 24* and *Times Live*, were also caught up in such schemes. It took a while for *News 24* and *Times Live* to put out a lot of stories on Ebola. They were very few stories in the first three months of the outbreak.

### 6.2.2 Sources and their role in building the media agenda in Ebola reporting

According to Duru (2016:53), sources play a huge role in news framing. Citing Mason (2007: 109), Duru (2016: 53) contends that journalists depend largely on representatives of key institutions or organisations such as government officials, corporate spokespeople, academics, experts and authorities to discuss certain topics. As a result, it is the viewpoints of the 'elite sources' that are presented as news by the media and this becomes the reality for the audiences (Duru, 2016: 54). The study findings in figure 9 and 10 show that *News 24* and *Times Live* used institutional sources mostly in their stories. The prominent or top sources used were government officials who include presidents of both the affected and unaffected countries, ministers, presidential aides, police officials, foreign secretaries and unnamed government officials. Furlan (2017) asserts that "It seems reliance and trust in officials and experts may be greater in cases of emerging risks". This could have been the case with Ebola reporting.

The findings show that 34% (241) of the sources used by the *News 24*, were government sources, while the *Times Live* sources amounted to 36% (57). Other prominent sources used were International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) or international bodies such as

the WHO, MSF, CDC, Samaritan's Purse, Plan International, UNICEF, UNOCHA and other UN bodies. These sources constituted 23% (167) of the *News 24's* total sources and 33% (52) of the *Times Live's* total number of sources. Healthcare workers, business and corporations, researchers and academics, were also used as key or major sources.

This pattern confirms the view by Berkowitz (1989) as cited in Tanner (2004) that journalists heavily rely a lot on experts, officials and executives to determine the media agenda. Sometimes it is believed that these sources even attempt to manipulate the media so as to influence a variety of debates, audiences and agendas (Beharrell, Kitzinger, Miller and Williams, 1988: 129). The findings indeed confirm that the agenda on Ebola issues was set to a large extent by the expert sources because they are the ones mostly quoted or referred to in nearly three-quarters of all articles on the *News 24 and Times Live* outlets. This was even reflected in the headings and in most instances where the first paragraphs even mentioned certain sources by name and what they had stated. Here are some of the examples:

**Here are some of the examples:**

1. **'*DA politicising Ebola – Motsoaledi'*** *(News 24,* 14 August 2014)
2. **'*Liberia's Sirleaf warns of Ebola epidemic'*** (*News 24*, 1 July 2014)
3. **'*No Ebola in SA – NICD*'** (*News 24*, 1 August 2014)
4. **'*Obama: Too early to send experimental Ebola drug to Africa'*** *(News 24,* 7 August)
5. **'*West Africa Ebola outbreak totally out of control: Doctors Without Borders*'** (*Times Live*, 21 June 2014)
6. **'*Ebola vaccine may be ready by 2015: UN'*** (*Times Live,* 9 August 2014)

Thus, big organisations including the WHO, CDC and MSF had some form of influence over the media agenda. This finding is in tandem with Michna's (2016: ii) finding that the WHO and CDC put some pressure over how the media reported on Ebola.

However, there is a possibility that *News 24* and *Times Live* saw the value in what these elite sources said and hence simply transferred it to the audiences using their news platforms. The pattern also affirms Tuchman's (1972); Fico (1984) assertions as cited in (Wallington, Blake, Taylor-Clark and Viswanath, 2010: 2); (Michna, 2016: 19) that the dependence of journalists on elite sources or government sources is based on the journalists' perception of these sources

as more knowledgeable, effective, possessing more accurate information and credible. Hence, as Duru (2016: 122) states: "News sources determine who shapes representation of realities and what the authoritative version of reality is making them critical in how audiences across media systems perceive unpredictable events such as the Ebola outbreak" .

Although it is expected that journalists make extra effort to research and reach out to as many sources as possible, elite sources are also handy for the journalists as they have enough resources to enable them to get all the information they need instantly (Hess and Waller, 2016: 97). The elite sources belong to powerful institutions that have strong communication networks and public relations machinery that allows them "to schedule events or give hand-outs whenever necessary" (Hess and Waller, 2016: 97). This is true for sources like the WHO, MSF and the UN among others who were used by *News 24* and *Times Live*. These sources were on the forefront of providing fresh and new information because most of them were stationed in Ebola–affected countries – something the researcher cannot foresee being done by smaller organisations that usually lack the capacity to have people on the ground. This observation is confirmed by Michna (2016: 50) in the statement that journalists relied more on institutions like the CDC and the WHO probably because they had a few easily accessible people for interviews in the affected areas.

Nonetheless, those people falling outside the major categories as the above are hardly or minimally used. This stands as another dynamic to agenda setting or building. The results from the analysis, show that victims and survivors of Ebola, community members and local civil society groups from affected countries, were among the groups of least used sources by both *News 24* and *Times Live*. In addition, *News 24* results show that only 2% (14) of the total sources, were victims and survivors of Ebola, while local civil society groups or NGOs constituted 2% and community members 3% (21).

Victims and survivors constituted 2% (3) of the total number of sources used by *Times Live*, while local civil society groups or NGOs constituted 1% (1) and community members were only 3% (4).

The findings of this study therefore affirm Croteau and Hoynes' (2014: 127) argument that those who are not in positions of authority have no place on the news agenda as the reliance on official sources for news means these sources will continue to have "routine access to media coverage while outsiders or critics find it difficult". It is expected that those institutions and people on the ground, the local NGOs, community members and those directly affected by

Ebola such as victims and survivors, can tell a better story about the experiences on the ground and how the epidemic is impacting them than policy makers. However, the voices these institutions and people on the ground were hardly heard, thus showing a lack of something more humane than the mere presentation of statistics of deaths and transmissions that characterised most of the reportage.

There is a lot of evidence that indicates that health and medical reporting is largely technical in nature, hence difficult to pursue. As such, a link has been found between agenda setting and health reporting. To this effect, journalists heavily rely on specific sources for their stories. A study by Tanner (2004: 350) on agenda building, source selection and health news at local TV stations, shows that 60% of the interviewed journalists pointed out that they constantly looked for health experts to explain technical information. The journalists also agreed that these sources often shaped or influenced the health content that would be aired (Tanner, 2004: 350).

However the blame cannot entirely fall on the *News 24* and *Times Live* as most of their stories were taken off the news wires. It therefore means that probably the news wires themselves as sources of information, set the agenda that was then extended to *News 24* and *Times Live*. This is referred to as inter–media agenda, where elite media organisations set or drive the agenda for local media organisations (Duru, 2016: 25).

### 6.2.3 Churnalism in Ebola coverage by *News 24* and *Times Live* (Origin of stories)

Previous research in South Africa, the UK and the USA suggests that due to the intricacy and technical nature of health and science reporting, together with other challenges of news production, churnalism, has taken root in these beats. Churnalism is a form of journalism in which press releases, wire stories and other forms of pre–packaged material are used to create articles in newspapers and other news media in order to meet increasing pressures of time and cost without undertaking further research or checking" (Robbins, 2011).

This trend has resulted in very few or no stories that are exclusively produced by journalists from their own initiative with no effort being put to further develop stories or to get as many varied facets of an issue as possible. In most cases, the journalists have become reactive than proactive (Van Dijk, 2009: 116; Lewis et al., 2008: 1). It is clear from the findings of this study that some form of churnalism exists in the coverage of Ebola by *News 24* and *Times Live*. Findings on origin of *News 24* and *Times Live* stories that are presented in figures 3 and 4, are worrying and shocking. Both outlets are to an extent 'guilty' of churning stories from news wires. It is noteworthy to highlight that 80% (314) of the *News 24* stories wires, while 85%

(73) of the *Times Live* stories were taken from the wires. Only 7% (6) of the *Times Live* articles were generated by their own journalists, while those from *News 24*stood at 17% (66). It is however interesting that *Times Live* at least made an effort to source the content from a local South African news agency, as the bulk of their wire stories were from *SAPA*.

Media Initiative CEO, Eric Chinje, Moyo (2005: 14) observes discrepancies in the manner in which African media reported on the Ebola outbreak. The media allegedly just 'copied and pasted 'the trends set by western media on how the rest of the world tell the news. This habit hinders the media from performing their role as the mirror of the society as noted by Chinje (2014) as cited in Moyo (2015: 14). This is true to some extent where both the *News 24* and *Times Live* simply used wire copy and did very little to compose their own original stories or do proper analysis as demonstrated by a huge number of straight news stories rather than feature or opinion pieces as shown in figures 1 and 2 on nature of coverage. The reasons are not as apparent, but there could be linked to the issue of resources and the massive changes in newsrooms across South Africa. Finlay (2017: 28) notes that South African newsrooms and those around the world are transforming and undergoing significant changes due to financial and other pressures. Newsrooms are therefore retrenching and shrinking at the same time. Given this scenario, it is likely that *News 24* and *Times Live*, are equally affected by these changes and as such are compelled to use readily available resources such as wire copy or the internet that is at their disposal rather than sending journalists to cover stories outside of South Africa.

This is also supported by Curtin (1999) as cited in Wallington, Blake, Taylor–Clark and Viswanath (2010: 3), who asserts that the "daily newsgathering realities and tight deadlines make journalists heavily dependent of resources for reporting.

The study is not as conclusive however on how much of the press releases copy was used. This is because it is difficult to measure without access to the original press release, but in their reports, they mentioned the basis of the articles, which include press statements, press conferences, meetings, studies and other public relations machinery. It is therefore not clear how much effort the journalists from *News 24* and *Times Live* put to seek their own research-based independent coverage.

## 6.3 Qualitative content analysis

### 6.3.1 Framing

Framing is perceived as an extension or evolution of the agenda setting theory. Citing Iyengar, Peters, and Kinder (1982), Wallington, Blake, Taylor–Clark and Viswanath (2010), argue that the "transfer of an issue salience, was too limiting", hence the introduction of framing to highlight the influence of news media in shaping how people should think about certain issues. Fortunato (2005: 55 – 56) and Reese (2007) as cited in Wallington, Blake, Taylor–Clark and Viswanath (2010: 2) argue that framing looks at how the issue or message is presented or defined and how it can shape public perception of the importance of an issue. It is important also to note Reese et al.'s (2001) argument that frames are persistent over time, organised principles and socially shared. According to Wallington, Blake, Taylor–Clark and Viswanath (2010: 2), Reese's definition is important in examining the angles and priorities given by journalists when reporting on health issues. In this case, it was important to consider the angles or main themes that were persistently covered and priorities given to certain topics on Ebola by *News 24* and *Times Live*. The angles are also linked to the reporters and editors' shared values when prioritising what is newsworthy and key to report on Wallington, Blake, Taylor–Clark and Viswanath (2010: 2).

In this case, Ebola was viewed through the main themes, including death, transmission, fear, panic, lack of trust and the response to the outbreak, which were mostly emphasised by the two outlets. The results also affirm Reese (2003: 12)'s argument that the significance of frames lies in their 'durability, their persistent and routine use over time and they provide identifiable patterns or structures'. The identified main themes identified were continuously highlighted by *News 24* and *Times Live* and were durable for a long time. According to Raychuk (2018: 3), a frame encourages certain interpretations and may discourage others because there is focus on the "words, images, phrases and presentation style" that communicators use when passing or sending messages to the audience.

### 6.3.2 Framing of Ebola by *News 24* and *Times Live*

**(Themes, issues, topics or angles prominently covered by *News 24* and *Times Live*)**

The study used both elements of quantitative and qualitative content analysis for "mapping key characteristics of large bodies of text that systematically charts long term changes and trends

in media coverage" (Stempel, Weaver and Wilhoit, 2003: 220).

Through the coding of the news articles on Ebola, 21 themes were identified. According to the results presented in Figures 5 and 6, the top themes covered or emphasised by *News 24* included: Response to Ebola (17%), transmission (12%), treatment and research (12%), fear, panic and lack of trust (11%) and death (9%). The *Times Live* emphasised, death (17%) transmission (13%), response to Ebola (13%), securitisation (10%) and fear, panic and lack of trust (9%). The common themes emphasised by both outlets were response to Ebola, transmission, death, fear, panic and lack of trust. The findings presented in figures 5 and 6 agree with the characteristics of the agenda setting theory which states that the news media sets the agenda for the public's attention to a small group of issues (McCombs and Merrit, 2004: 42).

Although *News 24* and *Times Live* put their attention on Ebola by continuously and frequently reporting on it, only a few themes were emphasised, thereby confirming McCombs and Merrit (2004:41)'s observations that the news media set the agenda for the public's attention to a small group of issues. By selecting, emphasising, excluding and elaborating on a few themes, *News 24* and *Times Live* may have led audiences to have different reactions to the news on Ebola. It may have been negative or positive, but this was difficult to prove.

These few themes were; response to Ebola outbreak, transmission, death, fear, panic and lack of trust. It is not clear why they focused their attention on these themes, however, Mello (2014) postulates that: "If media coverage lacks important information (e.g. mortality data; comparisons to more familiar epidemics; routes of transmission) or dramatizes the issue, the public will struggle to properly evaluate and respond to the risk of an Ebola outbreak" (Mello, 2014). This probably explains the repeated articles on deaths, transmission, fear, panic and response to Ebola.

In addition, the rapid spreading of Ebola outside of Africa and killing those who were seen as the champions in the fight against the disease, forced many to heed and get concerned about their own health as demonstrated in the many articles from *News 24* and *Times Live*. There arose an increase in the number of stories on how fast the epidemic was spreading on these outlets. The South African Department of Health and the NICD's also responded to people's concerns by announcing measures to control Ebola, which included issuing a travel ban for South Africans to Ebola-ridden countries in West Africa, making and sharing statements with the public to assure them that South Africa was in control and safe from Ebola.

The fact that through content analysis, salient and manifest themes were first quantified from a large number of texts helped in making the above broader inferences as well as interpreting the texts. This is in line with Deacon et al.'s assertion (1999).

### 6.3.3 Main Frames identified in Ebola stories

#### A). Death

As already noted, death was one of the top frames identified on both the *News 24* and *Times Live* platforms. In most articles, Ebola was seen or described as a death sentence. It is quite alarming that the researcher's analysis of the phrases or words used to describe the epidemic, show that a sizeable 17% of the *Times Live* articles and 9% of articles by *News 24*, were on death. The results clearly show how much the media associated Ebola with death. This in a way created a lot of fear, panic and mistrust in communities. A good example is evident in the statement below from one of *Times Live* stories published on its online platform of 31 July 2014:

"Fifty–seven more deaths from the Ebola epidemic spreading alarm in West Africa have pushed the overall fatality toll from the outbreak to 729, the World Health Organization said Thursday".

**Some of the alarming headlines included:**

1. **'*Ebola: a timeline of a ruthless killer*** (*News 24*, 1 August 2014)
2. '***Ebola has killed 1 200 people so far'*** (*News 24*, 19 August 2014)
3. '***Death toll from W Africa Ebola outbreak hits 603'*** (*News 24*, 15 July 2014)
4. **'*Ebola crisis in W Africa deepens, + 500 dead'*** (*News 24*, 14 July 2014)
5. **'*Ebola deaths surge in Sierra Leone, Liberia'*** (*News 24*, 11 July 2014)
6. **'*Ebola death toll over a thousand, another 1,800 infected'*** (*Times Live*, 12 August 2014) **'*Ebola is a ruthless killer*'** (*Times Live*, 2 July 2014)
7. **'*Ebola deaths surge in Sierra Leone and Liberia:* WHO'** (*Times Live*, 11 July 2014)

All these headings had the effect of creating fear in people. According to Yusuf, Yahaya and Qabil (2015), the nature of coverage of the Ebola epidemic by the media contributed to unnecessary fear because of how it killed people in huge numbers, nature of its spreading and the unavailability of drugs. This has been demonstrated by the current study. The word

'ruthless' used by both *News 24* and *Times Live* indicates or emphasises the brutality of Ebola. The above screaming headlines with those huge figures of people dying from Ebola did not even make it better. All these headings had the effect of creating fear in people.

According to Michna (2016: 18), simplifying the situation and using jargon, may be dangerous and may mislead the public "about the potential risk of an outbreak, resulting in excessive panic if not handled expertly". Making reference to a study on Ebola outbreak in Zaire in 1995, Michna (2016: 18) argues that the outbreak was framed as frightening because Ebola was still new to everyone. As a result, local newspapers increased the number of "scary stories". This could be one of the reasons why *News 24* and *Times Live* had lots of stories on death and fear.

On the other hand, it was prudent to keep sharing the death statistics and transmission statistics as Mello (2014) contends. According to Mello (2014), agenda setting has shown that issues prioritised in the media agenda are likely to be given priority by the public. With more and prominent coverage, the public is likely to consider it as a pressing issue. "If media coverage lacks important information (e.g. mortality data; comparisons to more familiar epidemics; routes of transmission) or dramatizes the issue, the public will struggle to properly evaluate and respond to the risk of an Ebola outbreak" (Mello, 2014).

b). **Transmission**

The transmission of Ebola was another key theme for the *News 24* and *Times Live. News 24* had12% (48) of its stories based on transmission, while *Times Live* had 13% (11). From the results, it is evident that transmission was also one of the themes that were quite high on the agenda of both outlets. It could be because the rate of infection was high since it was the first few months of the outbreak and people had not found any best possible means to halt the spread of Ebola. People were in panic mode and the media did not help but made the situation worse using screaming and scary headlines about new transmissions and the enormous deaths.

Some examples of headlines and text that emphasised the frame of transmission and perpetuated fear included;

1. ***'An Ebola outbreak that began in Guinea has turned into a cross–border crisis that could spread to more countries, the World Health Organisation said yesterday, calling for drastic action to halt the deadly epidemic'*** (*Times Live,* 27 June 2014)
2. '***Scramble to combat Ebola virus' (Times Live,*** 27 June 2014)

3. ***'Top Ebola doctor gets infected'*** – (*Times Live*, 24 July 2014)
4. ***The lead doctor in the fight against the deadly Ebola virus in Sierra Leone has himself caught the disease, President Ernest Bai Koroma's office said.***
5. ***'S Leone's chief Ebola doctor contracts the virus'*** (*News 24*, 23 July 2014)
6. '***Ebola causing havoc in West Africa'*** –(*News 24*, 4 April 2014)
7. **'*Every region of Liberia has now been hit by Ebola, officials said on Friday, as the World Health Organisation warned the fight against the worst–ever outbreak of the killer disease would take months – Last Ebola–free region of Liberia falls to virus*(***News 24*,** 23 August 2014)
8. *'**Another Ebola problem: Finding its natural source'*** – (*News 24*, 17 August 2014) '***A scary problem lurks beyond the frenzied efforts to keep people from spreading Ebola: No one knows exactly where the virus comes from or how to stop it from seeding new outbreaks.' (****News 24*, 17 August 2014)

The infection of a Sierra Leonean doctor, was one of the most serious cases of transmission that shocked many people as they least expected that someone experienced in fighting Ebola could actually get infected. This is when reality began to sink that Ebola was a reality and spared no–one, including the experts. The two media outlets used the frame of transmission to imply that Ebola was unstoppable and no–one was immune to it.

On the *Times Live* article of 24 July 2014, headlined ***'Top Ebola doctor gets infected'***, the doctor was always seen as a national hero in the eyes of Sierra Leone people because he was experienced in fighting Ebola, however in this article the "national hero" was put in inverted commas. This may imply that there were no heroes when it came to Ebola. The following sentence from *Times Live* article of 24 July 2014, cements this view, '***The lead doctor in the fight against the deadly Ebola virus in Sierra Leone has himself caught the disease,' President Ernest Bai Koroma's office said.*** Therefore, the language used in this article is quite ironic as it implies the solutions man could not even heal himself.

This study's findings corroborate Michna's findings that the media portrayed Ebola as 'unstoppable', 'rapid' and very deadly. "The disease's spread was described by phrases such as "astonishing" speed, "astonishment and alarm at the virus," "rapid spread," and spreading

at an "exponential rate." This according to Michna (2016: 39), contributed to rise of fear and instilled a sense of despair.

**c). Fear, panic and lack of trust frame**

The findings presented in figures 9 and 10 are in tandem with those by Yusuf, Yahaya and Qabil's (2015: 2) that state that most media reports in Africa focused on the shocking situations resulting from Ebola. The *News 24 and Times Live* paid much attention on stories focusing on fear, panic and lack of trust. In most instances this did not help people a lot as they needed more information on how the pandemic was spreading and what precautions they could take to safeguard their health. Instead of providing such stories, the media perpetuated fear and cast a doubt on whether South Africa could potentially deal with Ebola in case it reached the country. The findings show that 43 stories out of 393 articles by *News 24* were on fear, panic and lack of trust, while *Times Live* had 8 stories. Hence, Ebola-related deaths caused alarm and panic (Moyo, 2015).

Citing an analysis by Kepplinger and Roth (1978), Ansolabehere, Behr and Iyengar (1993: 193) opine that the West German media reporting of the 1973 / 74 oil crisis showed how a distorted image of reality created by the mass media could change public behaviour. People responded with hoarding of oil due to the negative reporting of the oil supply situation. This is exactly what transpired with Ebola. It may not have happened as much in South Africa, but the way people reacted to the spread of Ebola in the affected countries could easily have been the same reaction in South Africa. There were a few instances however, where people acted in a manner that was worrying owing to the many stories about Ebola that instigated fear and panic on.

Some stern measures were implemented in South Africa and questions were raised on the preparedness of the country in case of an outbreak. It all started with the NICD announcing it was not going to treat any foreigners who contracted Ebola and the Minister of Health, Dr. Aaron Motsoaledi announcing a travel ban for non–South Africans from Ebola infested countries as well as subjecting those South Africans returning from affected countries to rigorous screenings at the ports of entry (*News 24* 1 August 2014; *News 24* 21 August 2014). Fear was also noted in the various questions that were raised and these included; for example, the *News 24* articles of 28 July 2014 and 8 August 2014 respectively with the headlines, '***Could Ebola hit SA?***' and '***How prepared is South Africa for an Ebola outbreak?***' These headlines implied that like other African countries, South Africa was probably not adequately equipped

to deal with an Ebola in case there was an outbreak. These headings only came in July and August and yet the outbreak had started in March. These were initial questions, which the researcher supposes should have been asked around March or April during the first two months of the outbreak by the media.

On several occasions the Minister of Health in South Africa, Dr. Aaron Motsoaledi had to issue press statements to allay fear amongst South African citizens on the possibilities of having Ebola cases in the country. It is ironic that the media perpetuated fear by reporting on suspected Ebola cases in the country and on the one hand trying to contain fear, by assuring citizens there was no Ebola. Some examples of such stories include: '*No Ebola cases in SA – health department'* (*News 24* 29 August 2014) and '*South Africa still Ebola free – Motsoaledi'* (*Times Live* 21 August 2014) and 'South Africa steps up Ebola response' (*News 24*, 14 August 2014)

**d). Response to the Ebola frame**

This was one of the top frames by *News 24 and Times Live* as has already been noted. The study reveals that the response to Ebola was a top frame for *News 24* constituting 17% (65) of its total stories on Ebola and 13% (11) for *Times Live*. The stories under this theme or frame shows a general response to the Ebola crisis or an acknowledgement of Ebola as an emergency. Some of the measures included emergency meetings, talks, the opening of Ebola centres, building of isolation tents, establishment of Ebola response centres, and holding prayers.

It is encouraging to note that, despite the perpetuation of fear and panic by the media through their large quantities of deaths and fearful stories, *News 24* and *Times Live*, eventually woke up to their responsibility of reporting on solutions to the Ebola crisis. The study findings show that multiple solutions or responses were offered to try and curb the spread of Ebola, with South Africa sending a team to West Africa and a R3 million mobile laboratory designed for diagnosis of diseases in remote areas (*Times Live*, 7 August 2014), the health ministers from Western African countries meeting to plan 'drastic action' against the world's deadliest–ever Ebola epidemic (*Times Live*, 3 July 2014) and the WHO unveiling emergency measures to fight Ebola (*Times Live*, 10 April 2014).

### 6.3.4 News values and influence on framing and agenda setting

An element of selection and prioritisation is evident in agenda setting and framing. As Burton (2002:183) notes, "The editors choose the news and choose an agenda of items that become our view of what is important in the world that day or that week. Editors decide what their lead

items are. In broadcasting, they have meetings to decide what their running order of items will be. Items are selected out and selected in". Findings from this study have proven the tenets of framing and agenda setting theories in that certain issues were identified and repeated several times through the consistent inclusion and exclusion of certain themes that were enumerated by employing quantitative analysis as further discussed below and through the use of news values. Through news values, the researcher managed to identify and understand at what stage and why the Ebola outbreak became an issue for *News 24* and *Times Live* to warrant their full attention. According to Brossad; Shih and Wijaya (2008), journalists emphasise different narrative considerations at different stages of the issue development cycle, especially when it comes to the coverage of public health epidemics. In this case, through the various themes and news values, it was clear Ebola became a big issue when it became apparent South Africa so is Southern African region could potentially be affected by Ebola.

Figures 11 and 12 present the possible news values that could have been considered or used by *Times Live* and *News 24*. It should be noted that the researcher used her own judgement to enumerate the possible news values used by the outlets. From the results above, threshold or impact is the main news value used by the *News 24* and *Times Live*. With regards to *News 24*, 67% (262) of their stories were selected on the basis of them being impactful, while stories with an element of unexpectedness stood at 9% (36), negativity 8% (31) and meaningfulness 7% (27). The news value least considered by *News 24* was prominence with only 4% (17). For *Times Live*, threshold stood at 37% (32) articles, while prominence followed closely with 23% (20) articles, meaningfulness (proximity and relevance) 15% (13) articles, unexpectedness 14% (12) articles. The least considered news value was negativity with 10% (9) stories.

### 6.3.5 The results above may indicate the following:

**a). Threshold** – Many stories by both *News 24* and *Times Live* fit in the threshold news value. The descriptions of how 'ruthless or brutal' it is and 'unprecedented outbreak', the social, political and economic impact of it, the symptoms, number of deaths, the rate of transmission, stern containment measures, as well as the securitisation and restriction in terms of movement as demonstrated in the samples of stories analysed, show that the media outlets viewed this as a huge story that needed to be prioritised. Although they did not prioritise the Ebola outbreak during the first two months of the outbreak, it is clear that this was a topic worthy putting on the news agenda.

Therefore, an analysis of news values made it easier to understand or to see the stage at which the Ebola outbreak became an issue for media to warrant full attention and the reasons why. This concurs with Brossad; Shih and Wijaya's (2008) view that journalists emphasise different narrative considerations at different stages of the issue development cycle, especially when it comes to the coverage of public health epidemics.

**b). Meaningfulness** (**Proximity and relevance)** – As noted by Hartley (1982: 76), the more the event is happening closer to where the news gatherers are, the better chances of it being selected as a news idea because it would be relevant to both the news gatherer and everyone within the region. This is true for Ebola in South Africa, for the outbreak was not a big story in South Africa or at least as demonstrated in the findings of *News 24* and *Times Live* between March and May 2014, but the threat of its potentially spread outside of West African borders made *News 24* and *Times Live* to wake up to their responsibility of alerting people of this threat. There was a huge boom in stories produced by both news outlets from June 2014 onwards. It is therefore highly likely that they both used this news value to select the stories they were sharing on Ebola as the countries affected are in Africa. As already noted too, South Africa had to wake up to this reality of potentially being exposed to threats of epidemic outbreaks since it receives an influx of visitors from the then affected region mainly for economic and social reasons (*Health 24*, 2014).

**c). Unexpectedness –** There were always unexpected events and newer insights when it came to Ebola as shown by the study. The rate of infection announced by the WHO, the high number of deaths including the deaths of healthcare workers, closure of borders, schools, traditional beliefs versus conventional methods of treatment, patients running away from the treatment centres, soldiers being ordered to shoot those who were crossing the borders, banning of burial rites, riots, and discussions around drugs, were some of the unexpected events that warranted reporting on. As such, *News 24* and *Times Live* succeeded in highlighting these stories. South Africa had never experienced any Ebola outbreak, so this was a new thing in the country, hence a big story for the day.

**d). Negativity –** This is a different dynamic. Unlike good news, bad news is unexpected, hence when it happens, it becomes big news and examples such news could include death, war, diseases outbreaks (Hartley, 1982: 79). The Ebola outbreak is a very good example of a bad news story. Many people died and many were affected. There were fears that Ebola could impact businesses especially tourism in South Africa. A good example is when many Asian

tourists cancelled their trips to South Africa for fear of contracting Ebola (Nair and Strydom, 2014). Ebola also impacted negatively on ordinary South Africans who were living in West Africa as shown in the example of a certain woman who fled Sierra Leone, for fear of being infected, leaving her husband who had established his business there (Phillips, 2014). Negativity, was therefore a key news value for consideration by the *News 24* and *Times Live* since there were many negative consequences brought about.

**e). Prominence –** Well known people or elites or countries make news. According to Hartley (1982: 78), stories about wars, elections or disasters involving countries such as the USA or Russia, are more likely to be reported on than a civil war in Chad for example. Furthermore, the actions of elite individuals are seen as "more consequential than the daily activities of the ordinary people". Therefore, whatever they do, be it giving their own opinions, weddings or any other habits, is always on the spotlight (Hartley, 1982: 78). Given the above description, Ebola was a good fit for the prominence news value. Key organisations such as the WHO, CDC, UN, Samaritan's Purse and MSF, were at the forefront of the fight against Ebola. These organisations kept people updated on what was happening with regards to Ebola, hence the researcher discovered many headlines stating the opinions or insights by these prominent organisations. This is linked to these elite sources driving the media agenda and updating the media on Ebola. Also of note in South Africa is that whenever the Minister of Health, Aaron Motsoaledi, the National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD) or spokespeople from these institutions said anything, it was big news. It is therefore not surprising that *News 24* and *Times Live* would consider prominence as a way of selecting news. The results of this study therefore confirms significantly assertions by Miller, Williams, Kitzinger and Beharrel (1988: 129) that officials and executives dominate the agenda-building process and sometimes attempt to manipulate the media so as to influence a variety of debates, audiences and agendas. The findings confirm the agenda setting theory significantly in that journalists do not necessarily set the agenda, but instead the news agenda is built by the sources used to shape the information reaching the masses (Tanner, 2004: 353). The sources referred to above indeed set the agenda for *News 24* and *Times Live.*

### 6.3.6 Conclusion

This chapter discussed in detail the findings and interpreted them. The next chapter concludes the study and offers some potential opportunities for future studies.

## 7. Conclusion and Future opportunities for further study

This study explored South Africa's two top online media outlets, *News 24* and *Times Live* coverage of the Ebola outbreak during the period 23 March to 31 August 2014 which marked the outbreak's peak. The study focused on what the outlets considered prominent, the extent of the coverage, nature, frequency and the salience given to certain issues about Ebola.

To demonstrate this, key theories including agenda setting, framing, news values and churnalism were used to help enumerate the trends. The researcher did not investigate why media works in this manner, but it set out to establish how media covered Ebola, hence the choice of the above theories and approaches as well as the use of content analysis as a method to draw the below conclusions. These were rigorously applied.

The study indeed confirmed some of the previous studies already conducted in this area. Just as the Western media, the *News 24* and *Times Live* outlets, only woke up to their responsibility of reporting on Ebola a little too late. *News 24* and *Times Live*, who are two influential online outlets in the country, began to report frequently on the epidemic after the realisation that Ebola was spreading fast from West Africa to the USA and other European countries.

This was only in July, four months into the outbreak. This trend actually confirm assertions by several critics of South African media like Dlakavu (2013); Kupe; Vegter (2015) and Media Monitoring Africa (2012) that it seems South Africa is disconnected from what is happening in the rest of Africa especially when it comes to disasters.

"It is also reflected in our media where stories happening in Europe and in North America hold greater value and attract greater coverage than what is happening on the rest of the continent. Is this because of a superior attitude that African history, thought and current affairs is inferior to us because we shouldn't be thinking like Africans?" (Dlakavu 2013).

Despite a sudden increase in media reports by both outlets, which is characterised by frequent coverage, strategic placement of articles on selling sections of, for instance by *News 24*, it is worrying that more than three-quarters of both the *News 24* and *Times Live* articles, were generated from the news wires while only a few were self-generated articles. This is some form of churnalism, where the challenges of resources or sometimes laziness, leads to a tendency of simply coping and pasting content from the news wires without additional coverage or independent investigation or analysis (Moore, 2011: 2). "The press releases provide text, quotes, images and sometimes even video footage. The story quite literally writes itself" (Moore, 2011: 2)

The trend demonstrated above was also discovered by Berger and Masala (2012: 25), who notes the existence of s severely limited amount of self-generated original news on some South African websites like the *Mail* and *Guardian* and *City Press* in general. This is also in tandem with findings by Media Initiative CEO, Moyo's (2005: 14) finding that there were discrepancies in the manner African media reported on the Ebola outbreak, with the media allegedly simply coping the trends set by western media on how the rest of the world tell the news. This habit hinders the media from performing their role as the mirror of the society Chinje (2014) as cited in (Moyo, 2015: 14).

Findings from this study indicates there is a possibility that the media perpetuated fear through the many reports on fear, death, transmission and the strong words used in reference to Ebola and the huge figures of Ebola–related deaths. However despite this, the press managed to balance this fear with some optimism. There were articles where prominent people like the South African Minister of Health, Aaron Motsoaledi and several spokespeople from the NICD continuously updated and reassured South Africans that the country was Ebola–free and was prepared for any eventualities.

Future and further research can analyse more than two online media outlets in order to see how pervasive some of the trends discovered in this study are evident in South Africa. Another possibility is to compare how coverage differed between print media and online media. It is also possible to even extend the period of study from six months to probably a year to determine if there were any changes as the outbreak progressed. This research can even be expanded to incorporate interviews in order to understand why the two media outlets covered Ebola in this manner, who set the agenda for their coverage, why they relied more on wire copy, reasons for using elite sources, and why they only covered Ebola frequently four months into the outbreak. All these questions remain unanswered.

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**APPENDIX**

**Table 1: Total Ebola coverage by *News 24* and *Times Live***

| **MEDIA OUTLET** | **TOTAL 6 MONTH COVERAGE** |
|---|---|
| *Times Live* | 86 |
| *News 24* | 393 |
| Total coverage | 479 |

**Table 2: *Times Live* Frequency of coverage per month (6 months period)**

| MONTH | TOTAL COVERAGE PER MONTH |
|---|---|
| March | 4 |
| April | 9 |
| May | 1 |
| June | 8 |
| July | 26 |
| August | 37 |
| Total coverage | 86 |

**Table 3: *News 24* frequency of coverage per month (6 month period)**

| MONTH | TOTAL COVERAGE PER MONTH |
|---|---|
| March | 15 |
| April | 25 |
| May | 4 |
| June | 17 |
| July | 60 |
| August | 272 |
| Total | 393 |

**Figure 1: Distribution of *Times Live's* Ebola editorial content *(*Nature of coverage)**

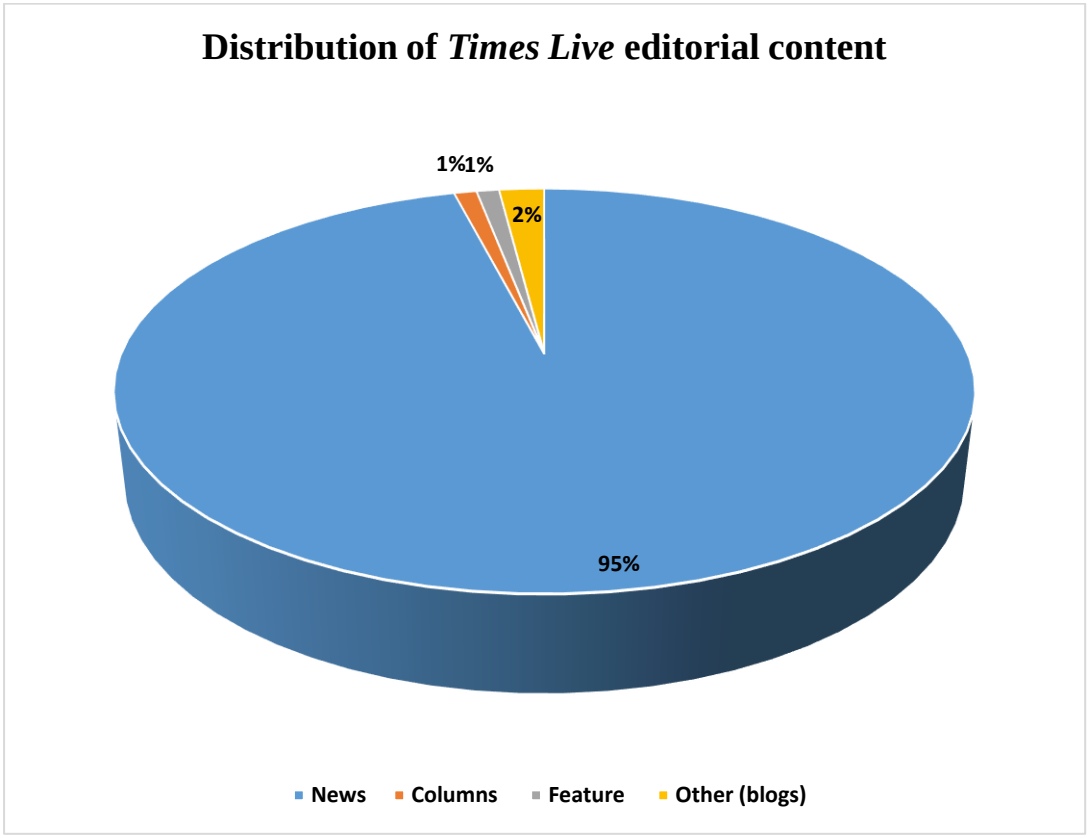



**Figure 2: Distribution of *News 24* Ebola editorial content (nature of coverage)**

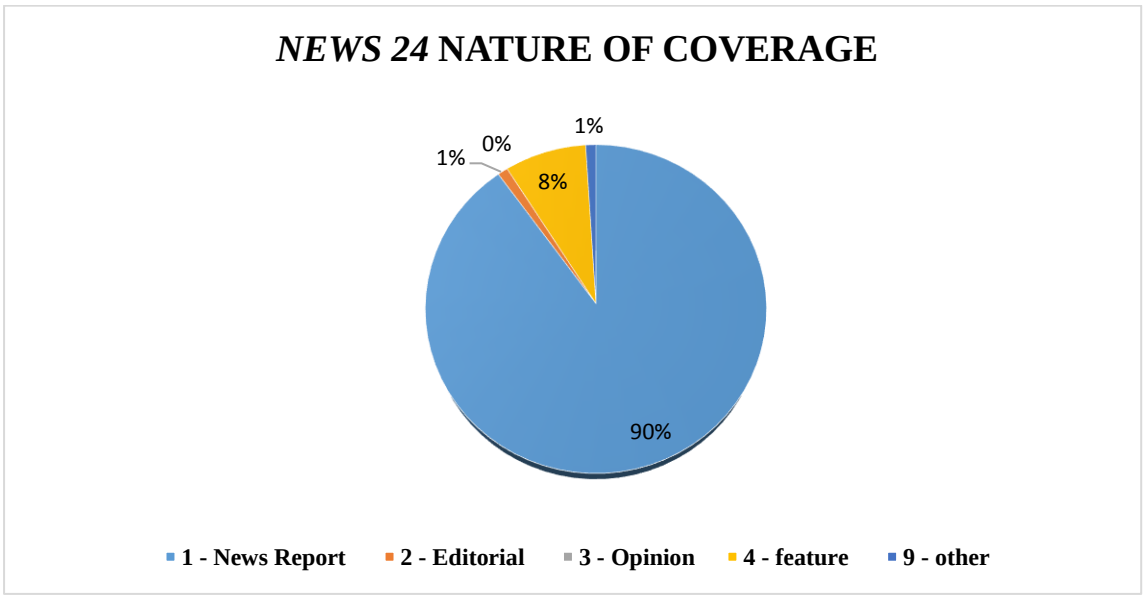


**Table 4 – *Times Live* placement of stories**

| **Section** | **Total number of stories** |
|---|---|
| 2 – Africa | 46 |
| 3 – Business / Finance | 1 |
| 4 – Sport | 1 |
| 5 – South Africa | 6 |
| 6 – World | 4 |
| 9 – Other | 24 |
| 10 – Politics | 4 |
| Total | 86 |

**Table 5**–***News 24*** **placement of stories**

| **Section** | **Total number of stories** |
|---|---|
| 2 – Africa | 269 |
| 3 – Business / Finance | 9 |
| 4 – Sport | 3 |
| 5 – South Africa | 21 |
| 6 – World | 27 |
| 7 – Health | 61 |
| 9 – Other | 3 |
| **Total** | **393** |

**Figure 3: Origin of *Times Live* stories**

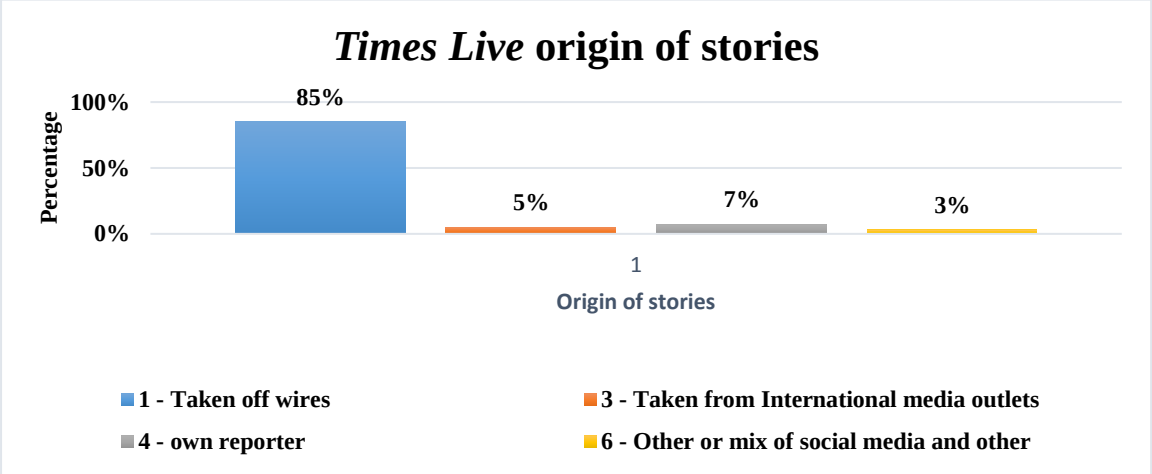



**Figure 4: Origin of *News 24* stories**

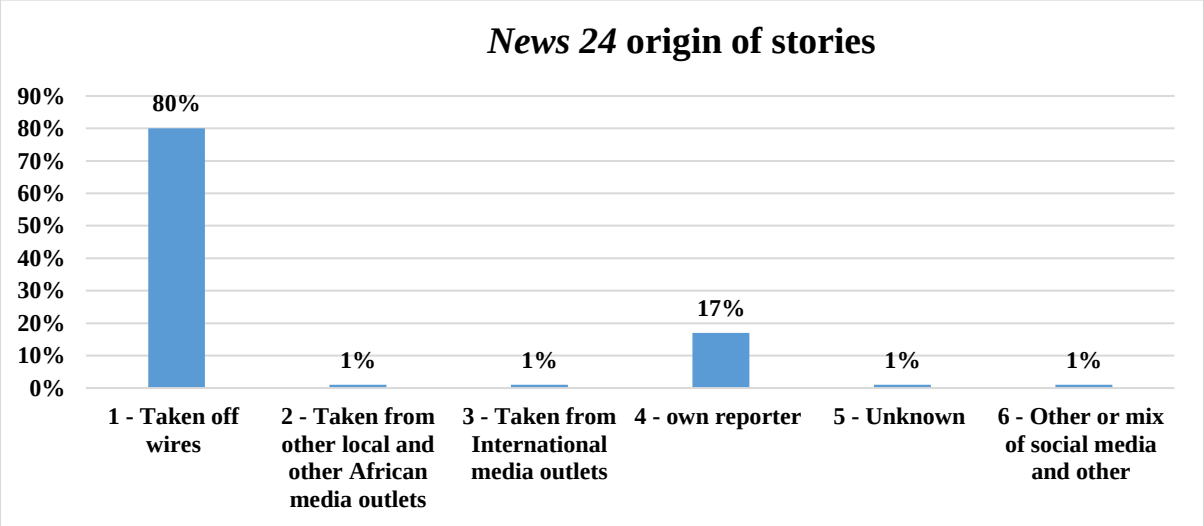


**Figure 5: *Times Live* number of sources used, referred to or quoted**

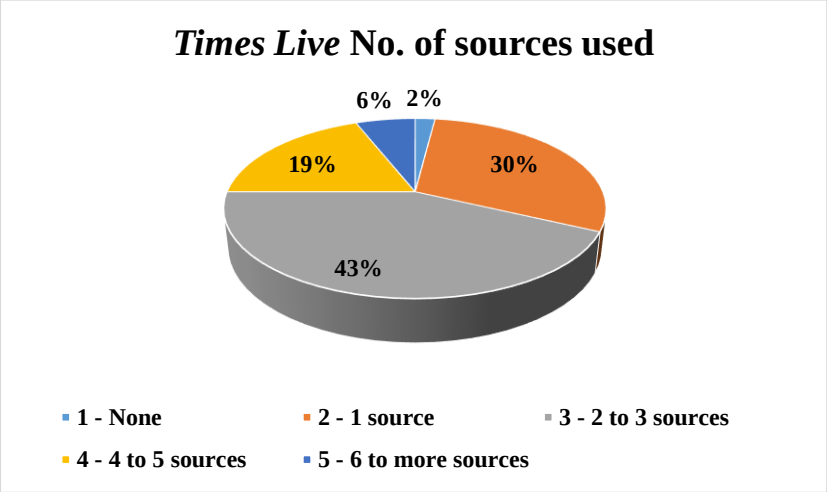



**Figure 6: *News 24* number of sources used, referred to or quoted**

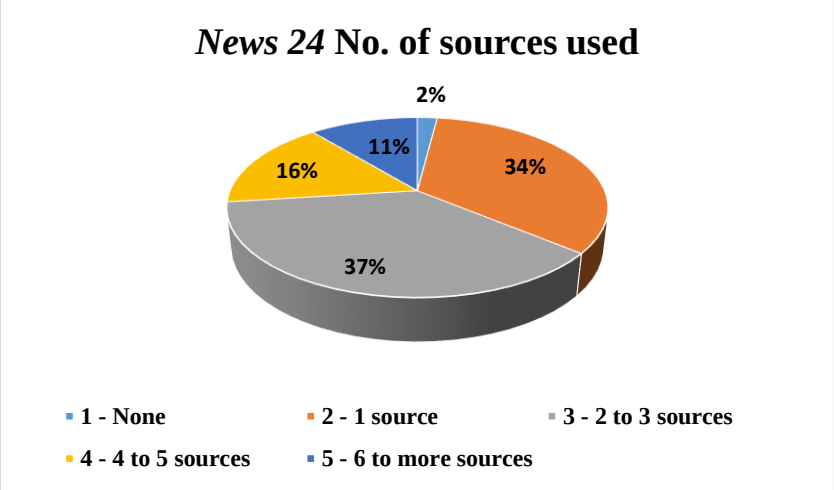


**Figure 7: *Times Live* sources used, quoted or attributed to for Ebola stories**

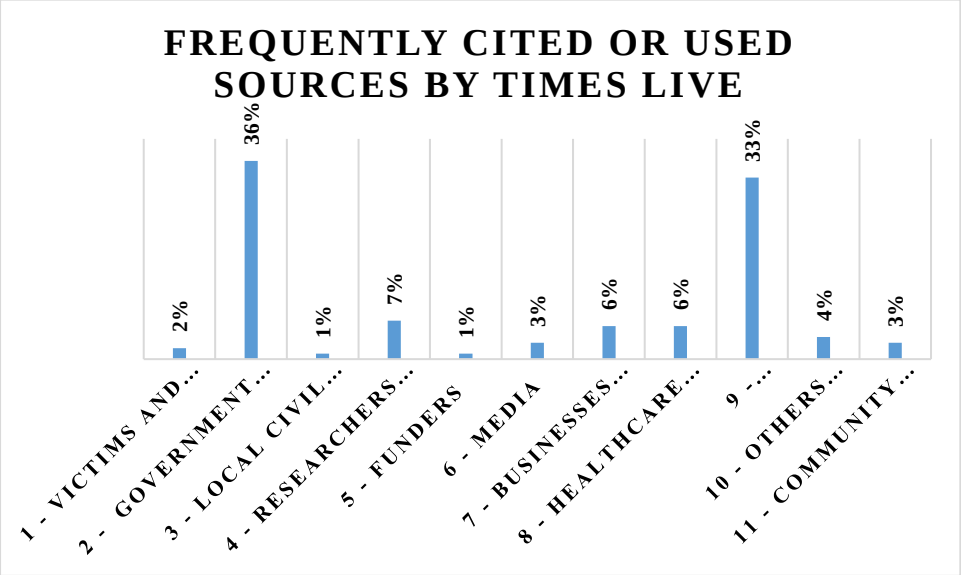



**Figure 8: *News 24* sources used, cited, quoted or attributed to for Ebola stories**

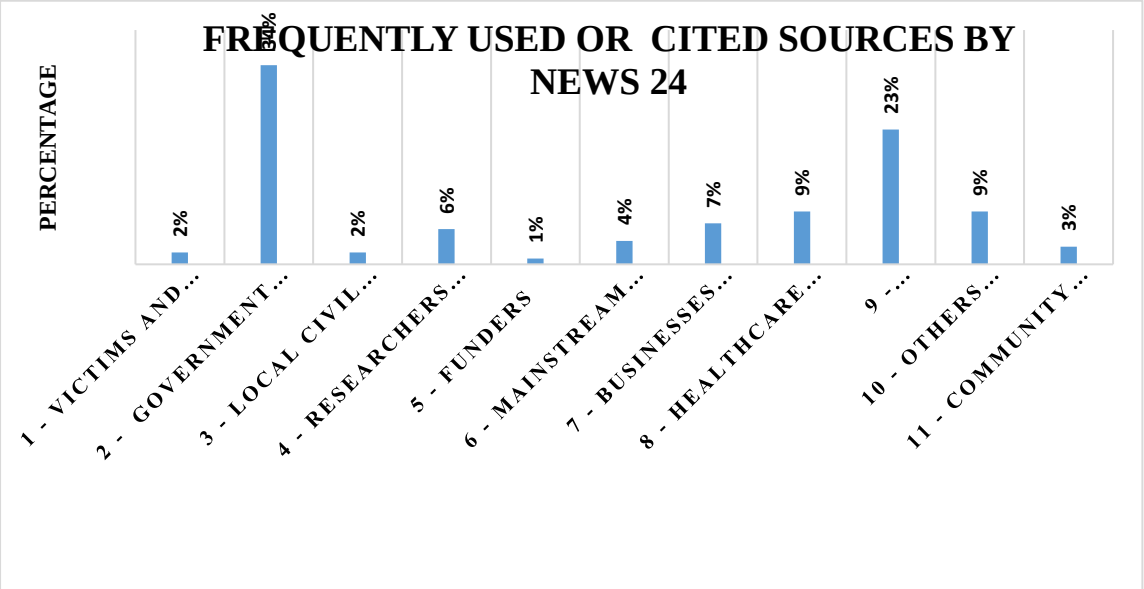


**Figure 9: *Times Live*'s main themes**

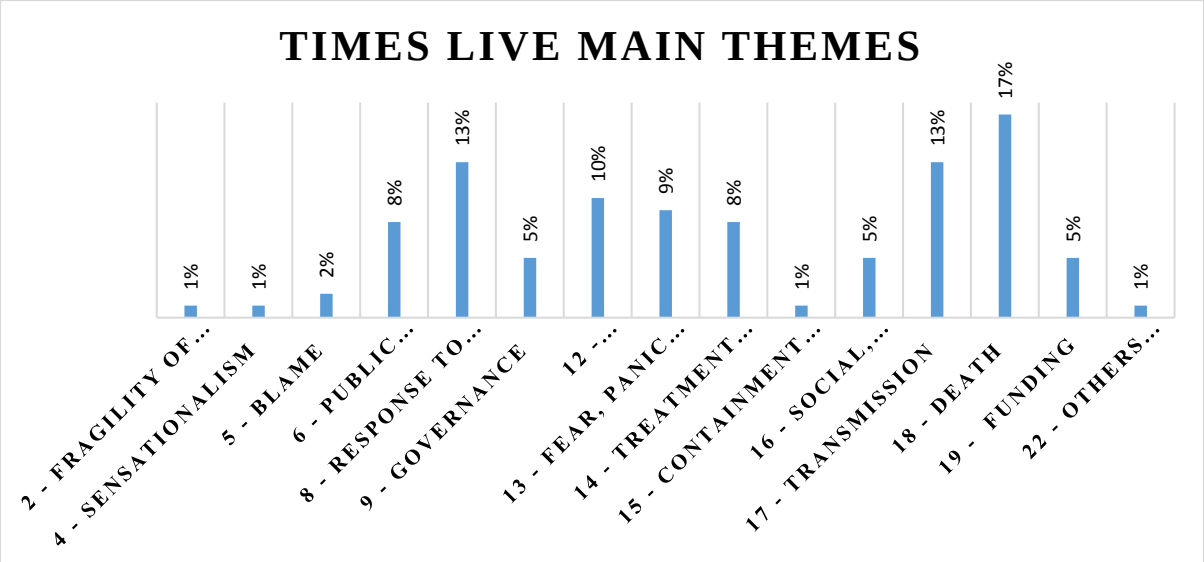



**Figure 10: *News 24* main themes**

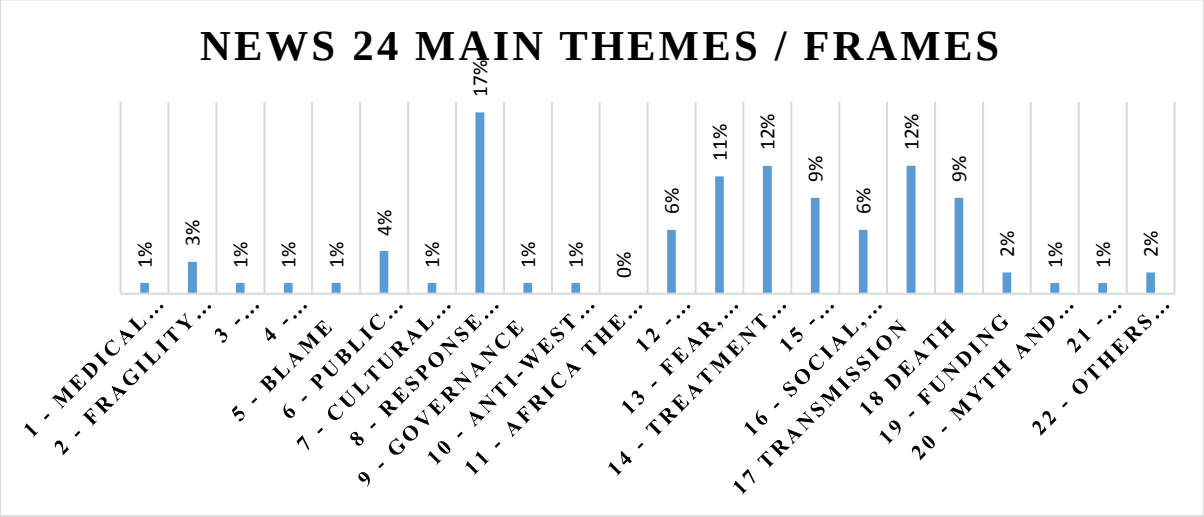


**Figure 11 – Possible News Values considered by *Times Live***

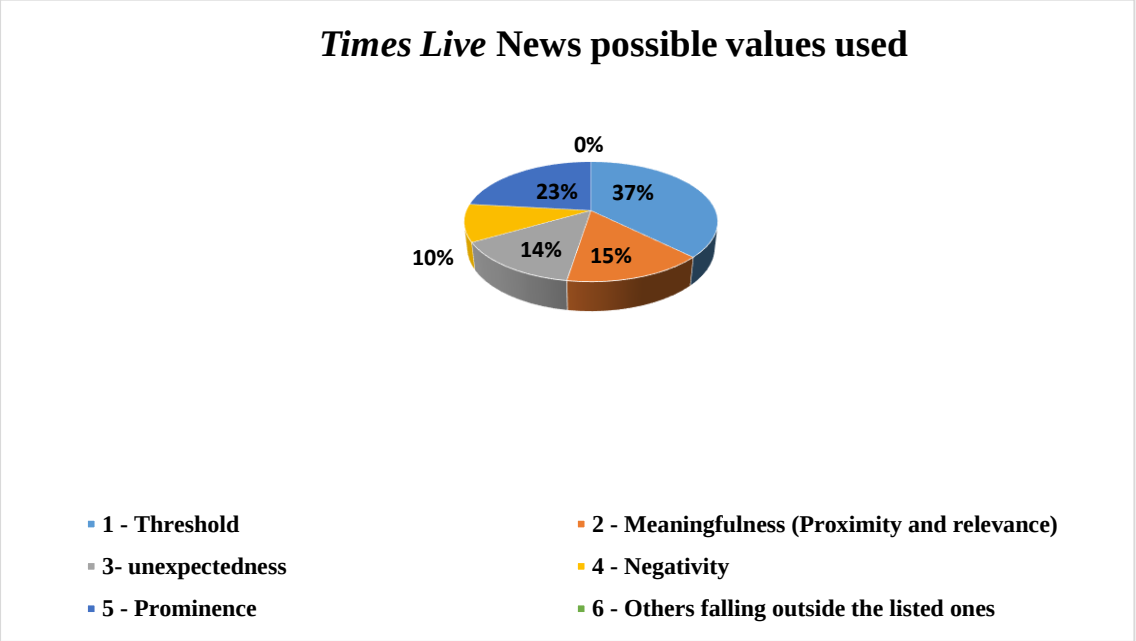



**Figure 12 – Possible News Values considered by *News 24***

