Media representation of COVID-19 pandemic: An Australian perspective.

Authors: Mr Modhar Al Miqdadi1 , Dr Stéphane Bouchoucha2 , Dr James Lucas2 , Professor Marilyn Cruickshank1 Affiliations: 1University of Technology Sydney, 2Deakin University Abstract:

Context: During public health emergencies, news media can disseminate recent and urgent government policies, conveying public health messages, increase the level of public acceptance, and improve community health outcomes. Aims: Investigation of Australian media reports during the COVID-19 pandemic between Dec 31st,2019 until May 31st,2020. Data collection: Data were collected from Factiva (news agencies), ProQuest (multiple subjects), and Lexis Advance (legal documents). Reports written in English and published in Australia were included. The search algorithm included - Coronavirus OR "COVID-19" OR "SARS" OR "MERS" OR "Wuhan pneumonia" in the headline.

Data analysis: Data were analyzed using an analysis strategy devised for the study: (i) discourse analysis, to examine the relationship between language and ideology; (ii) content analysis of the frequency of statements about catastrophe or disaster and seriousness of the diseases; (iii) interpretative framework, to illustrate the process of how social movements functioned as catalysts for policy change; (iv) temporal analysis to investigate the association between volume of news media reports, number of new cases, and public health policies. Preliminary findings: The number of media reports varied over the period under study ranging from 1 to 739 per week. Ongoing analysis will detail links between the number, and content of reports, with significant public policy announcements; themes and dominant representations; turning points in the media narratives, and what public health policies were most frequently reported.

Translation outcomes: The project will generate new knowledge about the impact of news media responding to future pandemics by advancing our understanding of media reports during COVID-19 pandemic. Expected outcomes include stronger public health and media collaborations to influence community acceptance of public health policy, and new evidence-base to guide policy.

Conclusion: This project investigated the impact on the acceptance and translation of public policy by reports of the Australian news media during COVID-19 pandemic.