Regional newspapers and their diverse readers: A case study of the *South Coast Herald* and its reception in rural, township and suburban areas

Mlondolozi Cedric Mboyisa

Regional newspapers and their diverse readers: A case study of the *South Coast Herald* and its reception in rural, township and suburban areas

Mlondolozi Cedric Mboyisa

(220112162)

Research protocol reference number:

HSSREC/00002120/2020

Supervisor: Professor Donal McCracken

A thesis submitted to the Centre for Communication, Media and Society

University of KwaZulu-Natal

In fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Social Science

2023

Declaration

I, **Mlondolozi Cedric Mboyisa**, hereby declare that the inquiry titled *"Regional newspapers and their diverse readers: A case study of the South Coast Herald and its reception in rural, township and suburban areas"* is my own work and has never been submitted before. Information acquired from various sources has been accordingly attributed to them in the actual dissertation and the list of references provided at the end of the thesis. The study was conducted under the supervision of **Professor Donal McCracken**.

Mlondolozi Cedric Mboyisa

Signature: Date: 23 October 2023

Professor Donal McCracken

21 October 2023

Signature: Date:

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to Lesedi Lwandle Mboyisa, MaMbili, Zintwana and all my ancestors in my maternal and paternal lineages. Ngithi aboWonzana, Cobothi, Mfini, Yayi, Singatha, Mthiywa, Dlangamandla, Mdlangasi, MaNdovela and many more others. AboMkhulu, oGogo naBantwana bonke. Mboyisa, Mvundla, Shebi! In the words of American philosopher, "Every man is a quotation from all his ancestors." In other words, I am because you are, without you having been, I would have not been. Today, I stand on your shoulders as we march together towards this milestone of magnolious proportions.

About the researcher

Cedric Mboyisa is originally from a rural village known as Gcilima on the South Coast of KwaZulu-Natal. He has been an avid reader of the newspaper, the *South Coast Herald*, since his teenage years when he was still a learner at Phathwa Secondary School, also located in Gcilima. A son of a (now retired) domestic worker, every week, he would save just enough money to get a copy of the newspaper, which also helped him to improve his English literacy. It was during this time that he developed a passion for writing and the field of journalism. After completing his Grade 12 (matric) in 1999, he relocated to Gauteng to pursue a career in media. He entered the world of journalism in May 2004 when he joined Caxton Community Newspapers (comprising titles or community newspapers such as *Alex News*, *North Eastern Tribune*, *Rosebank Killarney Gazette*, *Sandton Chronicle*, *Northcliff Melville Times*, *Fourways Review* and *Midrand Reporter*) in Johannesburg as a cadet reporter assigned to *Alex News*. The following year he moved to *North Eastern Tribune* (also within the Caxton stable) as a fully-fledged reporter and later joining *Rosebank Killarney Gazette* in early 2006 as the paper's news editor. In the same year (2006), he returned to *Alex News* as editor. He was then headhunted by *The Citizen* in November 2006. He worked for the daily national newspaper as a senior journalist, specialising in political reportage before being appointed political editor of the paper in early 2009. He left the publication in October 2010 to join *City Press* as a specialist political writer.

After seven years of journalism, he joined the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa (Cape Town) in November 2011 as the institution's newsroom (committee communication) specialist. He was in charge of a team of nine principal communication officers tasked with providing communication support to all 54 (at the time) parliamentary committees from both Houses – the National Assembly and the National Council of Provinces. After a period of four and half years in the employ of Parliament, he joined the South African Sugar Association (SASA), based in Durban, in May 2016 as the communications and media manager (and was later promoted to group communications and media manager,

the position which he currently occupies). SASA represents the sugar industry in South Africa and operates in the provinces of KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga.

He has a combined total of 19 years in the fields of media/journalism (seven years) and communications (12 years). He holds a BA Honours Degree in Journalism and Media Studies from the University of Witwatersrand. He is a former adjudicator of the annual Caxton Awards, which feature all the group's community newspapers from all over South Africa.

Acknowledgements

The hymn "To God, be the glory, great things He hath done" comes to mind. Oh, I have seen miracles in my life! This sinner is highly favoured by our Heavenly Father, the omnipotent and omniscient God whose unconditional love and protection located me from pre-mortal existence to this day. I am nothing without God. Thank you Lord for your unceasing mercy and grace.

This journey has not been easy at all. Our family experienced extreme difficulties during this time. We, as a family, battled Covid-19 infection and vanquished it. The emissary of death and tragedy struck! It felt like the world was collapsing around us. A state of poignancy and wretchedness set in. It felt like there was no reason to live anymore. It was the support of loved ones, family and close associates which brought me back from the edge of an abyss (of a possible breakdown).

Firstly, my sincere gratitude goes to my beautiful and phenomenal wife, Mmapula Mboyisa, who has always been supportive of me, especially with regards to my academic endeavours. Actually, she believes in my academic capabilities and talent more than I do. It is an absolute blessing to have a soulmate of Mmaps' calibre. I am truly blessed. Secondly, my beautiful daughter, Naledi Mboyisa, with whom I share a birthday, thank you for your support and love. Indeed, you foresaw this and it is now really happening.

Thirdly, I want to thank Mphathi (my boss), Portia Mpofu, External Affairs Division Director at the South African Sugar Association (SASA), for planting the seed in me to pursue my master's degree studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), her alma mater. It was during one of the performance review meetings that she insisted that I should study further. Shortly after that meeting, I initiated the process to further my studies at UKZN. Having worked for 19 years, I can say, without any fear of contradiction or any scintilla of doubt or hesitation, that she is the greatest boss ever. I have grown so much professionally under her

guidance/wing. Also importantly, she has a heart of platinum and is like a mother to all of us in our division at SASA. A prayer warrior and strong woman, Mphathi is the epitome of excellence and a human being of rara avis character.

Fourthly, I am truly thankful to my spiritual advisor, Ndlondlo (Nokulunga Mkhize), for all the amazing and incredible support over the years. She has repeatedly reminded me that my ancestors are ever with me, and that they need me to get this master's degree. She kept pushing me to keep going and never quit, even when I felt like giving up. Indeed, Ndlondlo is another true blessing in my life.

Fifthly, thank you very much to Professor Donal McCracken for continuously believing in me and understanding the challenges that beset my academic journey. It has been an absolute honour to be supervised by an academic of Prof McCracken's stature. What a brilliant mind! My gratitude also goes to Professor Eliza Govender and all the academic staff at the UKZN's Centre for Communication, Media and Society. In addition, thank you to Ayanda Ntuli, in particular, for being so helpful and understanding whenever I needed her assistance regarding my studies, especially during registration times.

Sixthly, thank you to my mother Thandi, my father David and step-father Jakie for their critical respective roles in my life. My parents have been an incredibly important part of my life. I thank them for their love and support. Indeed, my parents a blessing to me. Makukhanye! Ngiyabonga kakhulu.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the following individuals for their assistance, support and words of encouragement during this time (and those who have had a profound and everlasting positive influence on me since childhood until now, in my both personal and professional capacities):

- The late King Victor Thulare III – A close friend whose life was cut short by Covid-19
- The late Dumisane Lubisi – Former *City Press* executive editor
- The late Junior Motsei – A prolific boxing writer
- Dr Luzuko Jacobs – My former parliamentary boss
- Dr Bongi Owusu – My brilliant Cuz who is a role model for our rural village of Gcilima
- Dr Trust Matsilele – A friend, an academic and a former media colleague
- Dr Blessing Makwambeni – A mutual associate through Trust (above)

- Dr Renee Thompson – A fellow communicator
- Musa Zondi – A former journalist and currently Senior Specialist Sub-Editing at Auditor-General of South Africa
- Nelie (Neliswa) Zono – A former parliamentary colleague
- Pearl Maseko – A former parliamentary colleague
- Sureshinee Govender – A former parliamentary colleague
- Nondumiso Apleni – A former parliamentary colleague
- Lee Hlubi – A sugar industry principal
- Thobe Dlamuka – A former SASA colleague
- Nondumiso Mlondo – A fellow communicator and an industry colleague
- Alina Thoane – My mother-in-law, who is more like my other mother
- Tsholo Thoane – My sister-in-law, who is more like a biological sister
- Fundile Ncane – My (paternal) niece
- Angel Nhlumayo – A friend
- Elihle Ntuli – Naledi's (my daughter's) friend
- David Rush – Editor of the *South Coast Herald*
- All study participants/respondents from Murchison, Gamalakhe and Margate
- Andrew Gwacela – A friend
- Agiza Hlongwane – A fellow communicator
- Mbulelo Baloyi – A fellow communicator
- Mhlaba Memela – A fellow communicator
- Anna Majavu – A friend, former media colleague and social activist
- Colleen Haggard – Retired editor of the *South Coast Herald*
- Heather Butler – Retired editor of the *South Coast Sun*
- Ellen Raubenheimer – A retired Caxton editor (Joburg North Office)
- The late Spha "Ndirah" Nyanda – A neighbour and friend from Gcilima who left us suddenly in April 2023
- Phathwa Secondary School – All the great educators (Mem Hlophe, Koba, Nqoko, (Mokoena) Ngubelanga, Dlamini, (Tyani) Khoza, (late) Mpofana, Mbatha, Yalo, Ngubo and male teachers including Nqoko, Ngeleka, Ndovela, Mbana, Ncane, Mbuthuma, Zobolo and others) who taught me
- Gcilima Primary School teachers (during my time)
- KwaMphelelwa Primary School teachers (during my time)
- Gcilima residents – People from my birthplace
- The late Noma Musha – A secondary school classmate

- The late Nonhli Sibiya – A fellow primary school learner
- The late Collins Chabane – Former minister of public service and administration, and former minister in the presidency during the former president Jacob Zuma administration
- The late Sandy Sher – My journalism mentor and former news editor of the *North Eastern Tribune* newspaper in Johannesburg
- Van Zyl Greyling – A childhood friend
- Nosphiwe Ngcungama – A friend and umkhaya
- Nkhensani Kubayi – the current Minister of Human Settlements in South Africa
- Joanmariae Fubbs – one of three vice-chairs of SASA and former chairperson of the parliamentary committee on trade, industry and competition
- Rolf Lütge – former SASA chairperson and current Chairperson of the South African Sugar Millers' Association
- Sindi Mabaso-Koyana – former SASA chairperson and prominent businesswoman in South Africa
- Bawe Mboyisa – My (maternal) aunt
- Mfanelo Mboyisa – My late cousin
- Faith Ndenze – A former parliamentary colleague
- Yoliswa Landu – A former parliamentary colleague
- Phelelani Dlomo – A former parliamentary colleague
- Mava Lukani – A former parliamentary colleague
- Modise Kabeli – A former parliamentary colleague
- Kanyisa Ndyondya – A former parliamentary colleague
- Abel Mputing – A former parliamentary colleague
- Joylene Van Wyk – A fellow communicator
- Letebele Masemola-Jones – A former parliamentary boss
- Khuthala Noah – A former parliamentary colleague
- Trix Trikam – SASA Executive Director
- The late Judith Wilson – Former SASA commercial director
- Sifiso Mhlaba – SASA National Market and International Affairs Executive
- Geran Raganthan – SASA Exports and Logistics Executive
- Seelan Naidoo – SASA Industry Affairs Director
- Sipamandla Mpikeleli – Former SASA rural development manager

- Ingrid Thompson – GIS Specialist at South African Sugarcane Research Institute
- Priya Seetal – SASA Nutrition Manager
- Sam Maphumulo – SASA Sustainability Manager
- Sinethemba Mkhize – A colleague at SASA
- Elijah Mohololа – A former parliamentary colleague and currently Spokesperson for the University of Cape Town
- Steven Tau – A former media colleague at *The Citizen* newspaper
- Toto Nhlapo – A former media colleague at *City Press* newspaper
- Rapule Tabane – A former print media colleague in Johannesburg
- The late Ngwako Modjadji – A former media colleague
- Thabo Boshomane – A friend and former media colleague at Caxton Community Newspapers and *The Citizen* newspaper
- An Wentzel – A former boss at Caxton Community Newspapers, Johannesburg
- Michel Bega – A former media colleague at *The Citizen* newspaper
- Tsepiso Makwetla – A former media colleague
- The late Ayanda Kunene – A former colleague at SASA
- Zero Mqadi – The Mayor of Ugu District Municipality
- Dudu and Hlengiwe Ncane – Childhood friends
- Sihle Mavuso – A friend and former media colleague
- Hlengiwe Nhlabathi-Mokota – A friend, fellow communicator and former journalist
- Patrick Ngcobo – A sugar industry colleague
- Mike Moriarty – An acquaintance who is a Member of the Gauteng Legislature
- Neremiah Mothata – A friend
- Ali Mpofu – A father figure and friend
- Busisiwe MaMchunu Marupula – A former parliamentary colleague
- Zanele Mngadi – A friend and fellow communicator
- Andile Ntingi – A former *City Press* colleague
- The late Lucky Nxumalo – A former *City Press* colleague
- Sam Mkokeli – A former media colleague
- Lucas Ledwaba – A former *City Press* colleague
- Denver de Wee – A former *City Press* colleague
- Razia Adams Kafaar – A former parliamentary colleague

- Thanduxolo Jika – A former Media24 colleague
- Ilana-Loren Mthethwa – A former parliamentary colleague
- Michael Sithole – A former parliamentary colleague
- Leon Sadiki – A former *City Press* colleague
- Dudu June Khuzwayo – A former parliamentary colleague
- Advocate Kevin Malunga – A former deputy public protector of the Republic of South Africa
- Zekhethelo Ndlovu – A fellow communicator
- Bhekisisa Mncube – A fellow communicator
- Given Majola – A friend and media colleague
- Sthembiso Lushaba – Umkhaya and former Gcilima councillor
- Sergeant Zameka Mangweni-Zumana – A former parliamentary colleague
- Sergeant Sibusiso Ncane – A friend and fellow communicator
- Lakela Kaunda – Former COO in the Presidency (under former president Jacob Zuma)
- Jomo Sibiya – Special Advisor to President Cyril Ramaphosa
- Mandisa Constable – My (paternal) niece
- Joyce Constable – My sister
- Lungi Nyawuza – My sister
- Luyanda Tetyana – My friend I met at Wits University
- Oni Mamadia Mdumela – My friend I met at the then Wits Technikon (now University of Johannesburg)
- Funeka kaThunzi – A Grade 12 classmate and friend
- Thulile Mkhwanazi – A friend

Abstract

Employing the Stuart Hall Encoding/Decoding Communication Model as a theoretical framework, the qualitative study looked into the phenomenon of regional (community) newspapers and their diverse readers, using the *South Coast Herald* newspaper as a case study to establish its reception in rural, township and rural areas. Furthermore, the inquiry sought to determine the approach of the newspaper to news coverage or reportage to cater for its diverse readership. The almost century old regional newspaper is located on the South Coast of KwaZulu-Natal. Areas which were the focal point of the inquiry were the rural village of Murchison, the township of Gamalakhe and the suburb of Margate. All study participants are regular readers of the newspaper. Initially, the technique for collection of data was through focus groups, with respondents selected purposively. However, due to the devastating Covid-19 pandemic and strict concomitant lockdown, the researcher had to resort to dispatching the mainly open-ended two questionnaires to both readers and editor of the *South Coast Herald* via e-mail. Similarly, the responses from respondents/participants were received by e-mail. The original research design envisaged that a total of 30 participants would be drawn from these three identified communities in an equitable manner of 10 from each selected place. In the end, however, the inquiry received 25 out of 30 responses. In other words, a response rate of 83.3%. There was a 100% (10/10) response rate from Gamalakhe while Margate stood at 90% (9/10) and six out of 10 (60%) of Murchison's participants returned responses.

One of the main findings shows that the overwhelming majority (67.78%) of participants feel that the *South Coast Herald* is blatantly biased in favour of the white readers, and to an extent, towards the Indian readership as well. Furthermore, while the newspaper insists its approach to news is premised on the concept of hyper-local news, another finding reveals that respondents aver that the *South Coast Herald* lacks diverse content. The majority of the participants feel that the newspaper is systematically focusing on suburban news while neglecting stories or content from rural and township areas. The inquiry proffers reflections which hopefully might serve as a catalyst to address the newspaper's identified challenges. Furthermore, these proposals could be useful in eliminating factors which could be construed as being currently inimical to ensuring the *South Coast Herald* becomes a truly transformed newspaper.

Keywords: *Community newspapers, South Coast Herald, diverse hyper local content, encoding/decoding model, audience reception theory, thematic analysis*

Table of contents

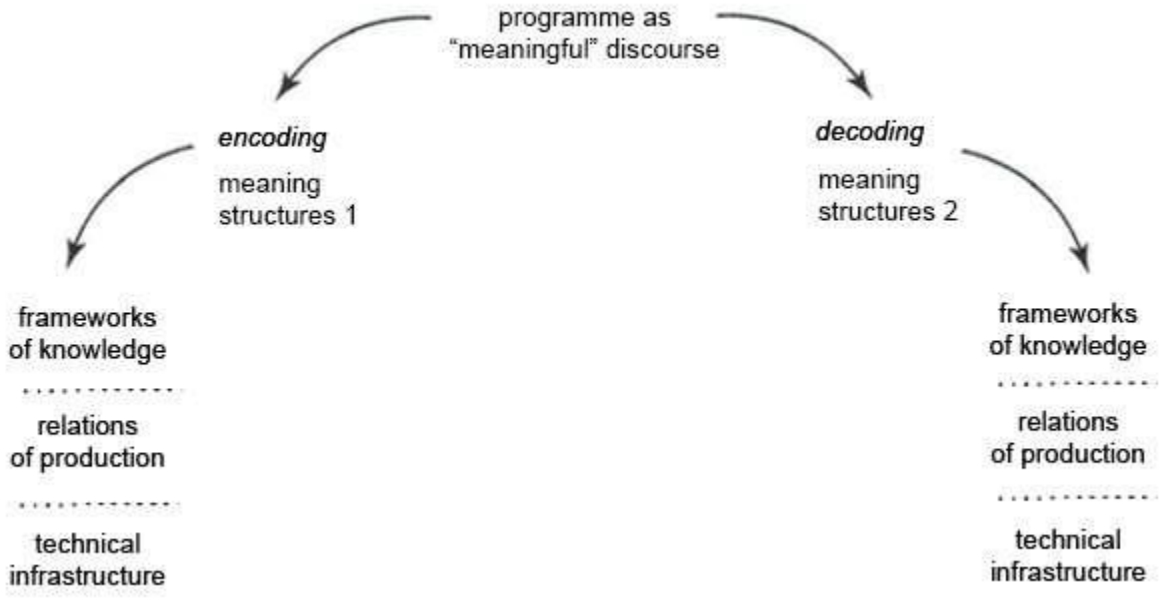
Chapter 1: Introduction

> ***"****There are five characteristics that describe community media, including community newspapers, and they are: localism, diverse participation, storytelling, deliberation and empowerment. It must also be noted that community media are usually created where residents are, at a specific geographical place, and the duty of community media is to explore local issues. It also helps to differentiate and define places where people live and how people relate to others. Culture and local values are part of the issues that community media are likely to reflect on. Diverse participation is therefore necessary and it is when community media involves the broader community. The inclusion of diverse voices within the community must therefore be insisted on in order to emphasise community participation. Community newspapers are also to represent a range of demographics of citizens in their content, including social, economic, ethnic, age, cultural and political" (Metula and Osunkunle, 2019, 935)*

1.1 Problem statement and significance of the study

South Africa is a diverse country with people from different walks of life. It is a nation teeming with citizens of various backgrounds, cultures, languages, traditions, religions, races, tribes, classes and so forth. It is a heterogeneous society. Since the advent of democracy in 1994, the principle of embracing diversity has gained traction from almost sectors of society. In relation to community media, Swanepoel (2012, 152) posits that, "Geographically defined community newspapers have an important task to reflect the diversity of the community as a whole". The watershed Institute for the Advancement of Journalism (2005) workshop, which is detailed and expounded on in Chapter 2 (Literature Review), proved critical in assisting to come up a widely accepted comprehensive definition of community media and the concomitant attributes thereof. Flowing from this, of particular significance, is the requirement for the community media to espouse and promote diversity when it comes to its content. It is against this backdrop that this case study investigated if the regional community newspaper in question does actually sufficiently cater for its diverse readers in terms of news coverage and reportage. The title of the inquiry is **Regional newspapers and their diverse: A case study of the *South Coast Herald* and its reception in rural, township and suburban areas**. Swanepoel (*ibid*., 204) points out that, "Very little research has been done about community

newspapers in general, and in South Africa in particular". The study employed the Stuart Hall (1980) Encoding/Decoding Communication Model in gauging the reception of the newspaper in the rural village of Murchison, the suburb of Margate and the township of Gamalakhe on the South Coast of KwaZulu-Natal.



Hall's encoding/decoding model reproduced from (Hall, 1999, 510)

The investigation employed a qualitative approach and purposive sampling in trying to understand and unpack the phenomenon which is the subject of the inquiry. Initially, focus groups were intended to be used as a data collection technique. However, due to the devastating Covid-19 pandemic and related strict/hard lockdown, the study resorted to using open-ended questionnaires for both the readers and the editor of the newspaper. The reader-questionnaire was sent and received via e-mail from the participants in the identified areas of Murchison, Gamalakhe and Margate. Similarly, the editor-questionnaire was dispatched and received via/by e-mail.

The following explains the aim of the study, objectives of the study and research questions:

Aim of the study

- To use the newspaper as a case study to investigate the relationship between the publication and its diverse readers;

Objectives of the study

- To establish the paper's approach to news or events;
- To determine the readers' reception of the paper;

Research questions

- How does the newspaper approach the coverage of news or events?
- How does the newspaper cater for the multiplicity of its readers?
- How is the newspaper received by its diverse readers?

1.2 The newspaper – *South Coast Herald*

This English-language regional community newspaper, operating on the South Coast of KwaZulu-Natal or in the Ugu region, is owned by Caxton, one of the country's biggest media companies and a powerhouse in the community print media sector. The company, Caxton, is involved in publishing a number of regional community newspapers, *The Citizen* daily newspaper and a number of major magazines, as well as commercial printing, packaging, stationery manufacture and book printing (Caxton, 2023). The *South Coast Herald* is published on a weekly basis – every Thursday and sold for R3. According to Caxton (2023, online), the regional newspaper has won numerous Caxton awards for the "best sold newspaper category and is therefore regarded as one of the top local newspapers in the country, South Africa, and is distributed on the coastline between Mtwalume in the north, Port Edward in the south and inland to Harding and Kokstad". It has a diverse readership found in suburban, rural and township areas of the South Coast. The history of the newspaper, which has been in existence for at least 80 years, reveals that it was established in/around 1935 and was called the *South Coast Reveille* (Caxton, 2023). The current editor of the newspaper is David Rush, formerly an award-winning sport editor of the paper and a veteran local journalist who has been with the *South Coast Herald* since the days he was a junior reporter, with his predecessor (Colleen Haggard) having

retired four years ago. Rush (2021) states that the average print run per issue of the *South Coast Herald* is around 10 000, which is dependent on the time of year, with this number increasing during peak season times. In terms of the average readership of the newspaper, Rush (*ibid*.) points out that it is "somewhere between 20 000 and 25 000 a week and going on a ratio of 2.5 readers per one sold paper".

1.3 Inquiry focal areas (Margate, Murchison and Gamalakhe)

Margate is a seaside and multiracial town, which is often regarded as one of the South Africa's preferred holiday destinations, especially during the festive season or school holidays. The town is mainly made up of Ward 6, which has a total population of 9 697 of which 55% is female and 45% male, with the racial breakdown of African 67%, White 28%, Indian and Coloured at 2% each (Stats SA, 2016). Young people dominate the population stakes while the elderly population is also strongly represented. Ages 1-36 years are in the majority (Stats SA, 2016). It has bonded houses on municipal land. Residents include the middle class and the rich (both black and white population) whose mode of transportation is mainly their own cars. There are two multiracial schools (a primary and high school) and a public library. There is a private hospital (owned by Netcare) and number of doctors' practices in the area. It boasts two shopping malls and a small airport which recently received a cash injection of R10 million to be utilised for upgrades and renovations. It has a number of supermarkets, restaurants and other businesses. It provides a number of job opportunities for local people from surrounding the surrounding township of Gamalakhe and rural areas including Murchison, Gcilima, Nkothaneni, KwaNzimakwe and others.

Conversely, Murchison is a rural place which is under traditional authority whose residents are a mix of the poor, the working class (low-income earners) and the emerging middle class. The population is entirely black (mainly Africans, very few Indians and immigrants from Pakistan). This area is made up of wards 22 and 23. Stats SA (2016) indicates that the total population is 15 317 with females dominating in terms of numbers in both wards, with gender splits of 55%-45% and 52%-48% respectively. In addition, Stats SA (2016) reveals that both wards have two similar dominant population groups: 1-14 years and 14-36 years. Houses are not bonded as they are built on traditional land. While some residents have their own cars, the majority still use taxis and buses. There are still gravel roads in this part of the world and there are no streetlights. It is one of those KwaZulu-Natal villages which experienced political violence in the early 1990s. Several locals are employed by Idwala Carbonates and NPC factories whose operations

are based in the area. There is a public hospital, nine schools (three high schools and six primary schools) and several tuckshops.

Gamalakhe is the only township on the South Coast. It mainly comprises Ward 5 whose total population is 9 082, with the male and female split being 45% and 55% respectively (Stats SA, 2016). The population is entirely black and there are 1 261 households. There exists the dominance of the population group between 0 and 40 years, and this population group is composed of youths who are economically active and children of school-going age (Stats SA, 2016). Most residents are middle income earners living mostly in bonded houses. The township is well developed with a total of eight schools (four secondary schools and four primary schools), a TVET college, library, youth centre and a football stadium. The township's clinic has been recently upgraded to a fully-fledged public hospital and there are several private doctors' rooms. On the economic front, various businesses operate from the township including Pep, Boxer, Shoprite Checkers, Cashbuild, KFC and Total Petrol Station.

1.4 Chapter outline/overview

1.4.1 Chapter 2 (Literature Review)

This chapter seeks to review available literature pertaining to community media, with a particular focus on print/newspapers as that relates to the topic of the dissertation. The chapter will traverse the literature in the public domain, putting the South African context under the microscope, with the regional/community press being the nucleus of the scrutiny. The chapter will look at the broader function/role of the media in general before interrogating the concept of community media and implications thereof for society. It will unpack the contested terrain regarding what constitutes a proper and appropriate meaning of community media. It will also seek to establish if there is consensus as to what are the universal or acceptable characteristics or features of community media. The consequent primary mandate of the community press will also be subjected to a closer examination.

1.4.2 Chapter 3 (Theoretical Framework)

The theoretical framework section will look at applying an appropriate theory applicable to the research questions which have been posed of this study. Therefore, the chapter will endeavour to gain insight and understanding of how the reader interacts with the text or messages transmitted/disseminated by the

newspaper being investigated. This will help establish several important issues with regards to how readers perceive or decode news articles or information contained by the *South Coast Herald* in relation to their specific needs as the publication caters for a diverse audience/readership. In terms of their interpretation, is there symmetry or asymmetry or even more permutations? This chapter suggests that the point of departure in answering these questions lies in the **reception theory**, also referred to as **audience reception theory**, especially as advanced by the late renowned academic Stuart Hall. The dissertation will also revisit Hall's ground-breaking Encoding/Decoding Communication Model, which he first introduced in September 1973 in his paper titled "Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse". This was at the Council of Europe Colloquy on "Training In The Critical Reading of Televisual Language". Furthermore, the section will take the matter further and analyse the views of other theorists and academics who have made critical contributions to the evolution of reception studies.

1.4.3 Chapter 4 (Methodology)

In this chapter, the research methodology – a qualitative approach, sampling and data collection techniques – utilised in the inquiry to solve the research questions will be explained, looked into and discussed in detail. The investigation employs **purposive sampling**, which has become synonymous with a qualitative research approach, especially when it comes to selecting participants for a specific phenomenon. The researcher is *au courant* with dynamics of the place and its residents/locals thereof, making it more appropriate to employ purposive sampling in pursuance of the answer(s) to the research questions. Furthermore, the resultant limitations related to the methodology and concomitant approaches/techniques will also be addressed.

1.4.4 Chapter 5 (Data Analysis)

This chapter seeks to make sense of the data collected through a clearly delineated process which has been explained in the preceding chapter. The consequent data will now be scrutinised and interpreted to find meaning(s) to readers' responses to the questionnaire. The questionnaire comprised 16 questions. In addition, responses to 19 questions from the editor of the regional newspaper, the *South Coast Herald*, will be subjected to an examination. This chapter will be crucial in shedding light on the Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding Communication Model in practice and in terms of assisting with finding answers pertaining to readings or the decoding process associated with the readers in making meanings of the

messages contained in the newspaper. Similarly, the editor's responses will be useful in understanding the encoding process as the producer of texts/messages transmitted to readers/audience. In seeking to achieve a thorough analysis and understanding of the phenomenon in question, thematic analysis will be utilised to establish or determine meaning(s) of the predominantly qualitative data, gathered through mainly open-ended questionnaires dispatched to the editor of the newspaper, and readers of the publication from rural, township and suburban areas on the South Coast of KwaZulu-Natal.

1.4.5 Chapter 6 (Findings)

This chapter focuses on the last stage of the Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach to conducting thematic analysis on qualitative data which is crucial in understanding and unpacking the phenomenon that is the subject of this inquiry. The section will proffer a detailed write-up and interpretation of the final main themes emanating from a systematic thematic analysis process. These themes, and the interpretation thereof, will assist in answering the research questions of the academic investigation. The main objective of the inquiry is to establish the approach of this regional newspaper, the *South Coast Herald*, to news and its reception by its diverse readers in the rural village of Murchison, the township of Gamalakhe and the suburb of Margate on the South Coast of KwaZulu-Natal. The following consequent research questions apply:

- How does the newspaper approach the coverage of news or events?
- How does the newspaper cater for the multiplicity of its readers?
- How is the newspaper received by its diverse readers?

Due to the data collection of the inquiry taking place at the height of the devastating and deadly Covid-19 pandemic, which necessitated a hard lockdown, predominantly open-ended questionnaires were sent via e-mail to study participants (readers or decoders) and the newspaper's editor (encoder) respectively. A total of 25 responses (out of 30) or 83% were completed and received (via e-mail) from participants. The editor furnished the researcher with his answers (via e-mail) as well.

1.4.6 Chapter 7 (Conclusion and Reflections)

In this chapter, the researcher provides a summary of the key findings of the inquiry, and explains in detail whether or not the research questions have been answered through the data (collected from participants/respondents through open-ended questions) and the subsequent data analysis, which gives rises or produces the findings of the study. Furthermore, the section deals with limitation(s) associated with the inquiry, identifies gaps or scholarly lacuna which may necessitate further probing or exploring. Finally, emanating from the researcher's reflections, recommendations or suggestions are proffered which could remedy the identified shortcomings – these proposals address key findings of the study and are (suggestions) directed at the newspaper, for its own benefit. It must be pointed out these suggestions/proposals do not in any way constitute a panpharmacon, but amount to a systematic endeavour with a potential to put the newspaper on a trajectory to adequately cater for the needs of its diverse readership.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to review available literature pertaining to community media, with a particular focus on print/newspapers as that relates to the topic of this dissertation. The chapter will traverse the literature in the public domain, putting the South African context under the microscope, with the regional/community press being the nucleus of the scrutiny. The chapter will look at the broader function/role of the media in general before interrogating the concept of community media and implications thereof for society. It will unpack the contested terrain regarding what constitutes a proper and appropriate meaning of community media. It will also seek to establish if there is consensus as to what are the universal or acceptable characteristics or features of community media. The consequent primary mandate of the community press will also be subject to an examination.

2.2 Role of the media and community newspapers in society

Officially, South Africa has three arms of the State – they are the Executive - Government, Parliament and the Judiciary. And as in other democracies, such is the critical role of the mass media that it has the unofficial status of being the Fourth Estate. Coetzee (2016) avouches that the term Fourth Estate was coined in 1787 by the philosopher and political thinker Edmund Burke, and that newspapers seem to be the backbone of the Fourth Estate. Marais and Linström (2011, 36) asseverate that the media's role as the Fourth Estate in a democratic setting such as South Africa "is firmly entrenched, especially the mutually dependent relationship between local government and community media". The authors (*ibid*.) add that:

> "The importance of community media with regard to the functioning of a democracy cannot be emphasised enough. Both community media and local government function at grassroots level. It could be seen as the bridge that links the ordinary citizen with his/her government, and vice versa. The watchdog, information and education roles of journalism are at their most important here" (2011, 49)

Meadows (2017) argues that the community media, especially local newspapers, has that unique and unparalleled connection to their readers or communities due to their proximity, and are critically important for holding local municipalities to account, thus being the eyes and ears of the community through their (media's)

news coverage and reportage. Remarking on the importance of the community press, Marais and Linström (2011) posit that, "If local government is the closest level of interaction for citizens, then the media at community level provide the link for that interaction". Marais and Linström (*ibid*.) add that:

> "The importance of community media is three-fold: Firstly, government and NGOs need the community vehicles of local media (Emdon in Duncan & Seleoane 1998: 204); secondly, community media as participants have the role of defining the terms of community interest and seeing how these are best served by government; and thirdly, to educate readers/listeners on the inner-workings of government on all levels, but especially on municipal level" (2011, 34)

McGonagle and Van Eijk (2014, 5) argue that:

> "Media operating at the regional level have special significance for participatory democracy as the relationship between regional media and persons from the areas and communities they serve tends to be closer, stronger and more representative than equivalent relationships at, say, the national or international levels. That proximity is often evident in audience/readership/user statistics and in levels of participation in the media. The communicative space created by regional media allows regional identities (including cultural, linguistic and religious identities) to be explored, developed, sustained and promoted to a greater extent than is usually possible at the national level. Regional identities and languages are sometimes marginalised by dominant/mainstream national media, which underscores the importance of regional media as alternative discursive forums".

In the American context, Shaker (2011) also posits that community newspapers play a significant role in any democracy, especially during elections. Shaker (*ibid*., 16) adds that:

> "Modern, representative democracy in America has always involved newspapers. Citizens need mediated sources of local political information, governments need channels to disseminate information and communities need a mechanism of oversight of their public officials".

The media is often referred to as a watchdog, tasked with keeping an eye on those in power, especially the ruling elite or government, on behalf of the public (Francke, 1995). In South Africa, the media finds its expression in Section 16(1)(a)(c) of the Bill of Rights (Constitution, 1996) which speaks to media

freedom and its constitutional protection thereof. According to Wasserman (2020, 453):

> "The current South African media landscape can be categorised according to three tiers: public media, commercial media and community media. Recognising that the South African media serves a broad, diverse and socio-economically highly unequal population, the rationale for the public and community media is to provide important counterbalances to the commercial media".

Khadpekar (2012) stresses that the media's mandate in a democracy is to play the role of furnishing the public and the electorate with necessary information so they can make informed choices and decisions. In the South African context, evidence suggests that the media has played a crucial role in both pre-and post-apartheid epochs. However, some media outlets stand accused of having openly supported the repressive government. Wasserman (*ibid*.) notes that:

> "The mainstream, commercial media either displayed varied levels of support for the apartheid regime (in the case of the Afrikaans-language media) or provided a limited criticism of the regime's human rights abuses while benefiting from an association with mining capital that prevented them from a deeper engagement with the economic basis of apartheid. The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) served as a state broadcaster during the apartheid years, while journalists and editors working for alternative, 'underground' anti-apartheid media were routinely harassed or imprisoned" (2020, 454)

2.3 The link between alternative press and community newspapers

Maphiri (2012) states that the roots of local press/media can be traced back to the apartheid era whereby it came about as the result of activism and was often referred to as an alternative press (at the time predominantly print media) to the state-biased mainstream media. Maphiri (*ibid*.) explains:

> "Community media emerged out of the activism of pre-1994 South Africa and was seen mainly as an alternative press, responsible for building a democratic and anti-apartheid consciousness. This alternative media – at the time primarily appearing in a print media format that included posters, newsletters and pamphlets – was used as a platform to expose the brutality

> of apartheid, to provide an alternative point of view, and to help mobilise civil society and build political resistance" (2012, 63)

Despite constant victimisation and reprisals, the alternative press in South Africa remained committed to exposing the apartheid regime's wrongdoings, human right abuses and other atrocities. Another crucial information emanating from the history of alternative press shows the role played by the community media – *Imvo Zabantsundu*, translated '*Native Opinion/Black People's Views'*, became the first ever newspaper to be owned and controlled by an African in 1884 (Touwen, 2011). Weinberg (2011, 6) also links the genesis of the community press with the agenda and mission of the alternative press, saying:

> "Community media was born out of the struggle for a democratic society expressed in the vision outlined in the Freedom Charter with its first clause: 'The People Shall Govern'. This clause refers to four interrelated dimensions of popular democracy: electoral democracy, administrative democracy, constitutional democracy, and participatory democracy. Participatory democracy requires strong institutions outside the state directly controlled by organised communities – institutions that can articulate community perspectives, facilitate democratic processes within the community, and enable the community to engage the state".

However, Touwen (2011) points out that the overwhelming majority of the alternative press did not survive the transition from apartheid to democratic South Africa in 1994. This was partly due to their mission of a free South Africa having been achieved; issues relating to the sustainability, as many relied on donor finding, of their publications; and many resistance journalists being assimilated into the democratic mainstream or mass media. Maphiri (*ibid*.) adds that the role of the community media has evolved post-1994, and that the community press is still considered important in society.

> "Media is an essential enabler in this discourse and it has the potential to help South Africans to create an environment that encourages tolerance of divergent views and also presents diverse voices. This is an ideal to which we all should subscribe, unite behind and work tirelessly towards attaining" (Maphiri, 2012, 74)

2.4 The concept of community media

Community media serves a clearly defined geographical population. Therefore, the content is tailored for a specific audience. For the purposes of the thesis, community press/media refers to both commercial and non-commercial community newspapers. Duncan (2015, 425) contends that:

> "The term 'community media' has created some confusion in the South African context, as to whether it applies to not-for-profit, locally owned media only, or to commercially viable but independently owned local media".

Meanwhile, Berger (1996, 1) asserts that:

> "Community media should not be defined in the abstract, but in relation to a particular purpose, particular social conditions and a particular ethic. It is the purpose that allows one to distinguish between the features both necessary and sufficient for the definition. This purpose in turn is always closely tied to particular social conditions and the ethics associated with them. This approach means we can define community media by both its difference and its commonality with other media, especially independent media, and highlight the distinctive characteristics and their comparative utility".

According to the Media Development and Diversity Agency Act (2002, 2), community media is "any media project that is owned and controlled by a community where any financial surplus is reinvested in the media project" whereas small commercial media is defined or categorised as "independent media enterprises or initiatives that are run for personal gain as micro, very small or small business as classified in the National Small Business Act, 1996". After a rigorous and robust discussions, delegates at the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism (IAJ) two-day workshop in 2005 formulated what is regarded as a detailed or comprehensive meaning of community media and the related attributes thereof.

> "The meeting agreed that the term should include three main groupings: non-profit organisations that are community owned and controlled; non-governmental organisations – like those dealing with gender and Aids, for example – producing media for advocacy; and, small independent commercial media" (Joseph, 2005, 2)

During the deliberations, it became abundantly clear that the community print media sector faces serious challenges pertaining to the matter of revenue-making to make it financially sound in the long run. As Joseph (*ibid*.) puts it thus:

> "On one issue the delegates were united: community print media needed to learn a lesson from the experiences of community radio where culture of donor dependency had developed – and where, despite the various initiatives and large-scale donor funding, many initiatives had remained just that: initiatives. There was a strong feeling that for community media to develop and thrive there was an urgent need to strive for sustainability: to ensure training that gives publications the tools to achieve sustainability and to help generate income and become less dependent on donor funding" (2005, 2)

This watershed meeting/workshop was attended by all relevant stakeholders in the sector including the IAJ, MDDA, the Arts and Media Access Centre, the Southern Africa Institute for Media Entrepreneurship Development, the Southern Africa Media Development Fund, the CEO of the Media Advertising Publishing Printing Packaging Seta as well as the Association of Independent Publications, leading independent journalism trainers and representatives of a number of small community newspapers from all over South Africa (Joseph, 2005).

Meanwhile, Du Toit and Rau (2008, 35) aver that:

> "We suggest that if a definition of 'community media' that emphasises commune-style ownership and community control persists, then it is likely that existing and emerging, small, for-profit, independent newspapers in need of substantial donor funding or assistance may fail to attract the support they need. By juxtaposing a working definition of community media and an in-depth series of case studies, we find that, leaving profit out of the equation, the gaps between community and independent commercial media can be very narrow indeed".

Milne *et al* (2006) contend that the recognition of independent for-profit newspapers as community media is justified due to their ability and capacity to bridge cultural, language, racial and gender divide. They add that:

> "This reflects the IAJ delegates' injunctions that the community media should: challenge racism, sexism, homophobia; publish in indigenous

languages and promote diversity in terms of language and class" (2006, 105).

Froneman and Pretorius (2000, 61) point out that:

> "Pillay's (2000) references to community-based media excluded the typical commercially driven community papers now owned largely by Caxton/ Penrose and Naspers. It is therefore clear that the term 'community press' is not uniformly used, necessitating a clearer definition and/or a useable typology. We suggest that a clear distinction should be drawn between independent commercial community and regional newspapers and non-commercial community-based newspapers".

Froneman and Pretorius (*ibid*.) further opine that independent commercial weekly community and regional newspapers are historically white-owned newspapers, serving predominantly white communities while at the same time acknowledging and noting that this trend has changed in some instances. The authors provide a brief history of the country's commercial community newspapers below:

> "South Africa's commercial community newspapers date back to 1800, when the *Cape Town Gazette* and *African Advertiser/Kaapsche Stads Courant en Afrikaansche Berigte*r was first published, notably in English and Afrikaans, a trend which is still prevalent to a large degree. By the end of the 19th century, Diederichs (1998, 87) notes, 'there was hardly a town of any size without its own newspaper'. He adds that the proprietor and editor was often the same person. This trend has changed markedly during the last two decades. Caxton/Penrose now control some 94 titles (including the old Perskor titles), while Naspers own a number of strong titles, mostly in the Western and Northern Cape, the Free State, Gauteng and North West. Many independent ownerships have fallen by the wayside" (Froneman and Pretorius, 2000, 61)

On the other hand, Duncan (2015, 426) makes a distinction that:

> "Not-for-profit community papers were historically owned and controlled by geographic communities or communities of interest, occupied an important place in South Africa's media system, and that such newspapers played an important role in the struggle against apartheid, but many anti-apartheid papers were donor-funded, meaning when the country

> transitioned to democracy in 1994, donor funding dried up, resulting in many of these newspapers closing shop or dying".

Zazini (2002, 50) argues that:

> "[The] Concentration of ownership and the unfairness of markets can be cited as some of reasons responsible for this extinction of small newspapers. What disappears with the small-scale regional newspapers is their focus on disadvantaged communities. Their extinction means the media of South Africa is skewed towards the affluent, privileged communities. The vehicle to achieve that is the use of small-scale regional newspapers".

Furthermore, Zazini (2002) posits that small community newspapers during apartheid played a vital role in providing a voice to the marginalised and disadvantaged communities that were often neglected by the mainstream media, which served the interest of the elite or powerful in society. However, Zazini (*ibid*.) asserts that these newspapers failed to attract advertising to help them to stay financially afloat, and consequently folded when the country transitioned from apartheid to democracy. Zazini (*ibid*., 3) further posits that "The advertising industry was and is still biased and prejudiced against community media. Most small community newspapers died because of these economic factors".

Another serious issue which has proven detrimental to the continued existence of community or individually owned small community newspapers is the expensive cost of printing. Moyo (2020) posits that printing costs are proving inimical to the sustainability of individually owned community newspapers compared to those (community newspapers) owned by big companies such as Caxton and Media24, and that these newspapers (community/individually owned) find it difficult to secure advertising, which is critical for these publications to remain financially sound. As a recommendation, Moyo (*ibid*.) has the following to say:

> "The researcher recommends that government should assist community newspapers by providing a subsidised printing machine that can be placed in a central place for easy access by the community newspapers. This printer will solve the problem of community newspapers failing to print due to lack of funds. The money previously used for printing costs could then be used to hire professional media staff and for the operations of the community newspapers" (2020, 76)

Duncan (*ibid*.) postulates that Caxton and Media24 have the competitive edge over locally owned small community newspapers due to their deep pockets. Weinberg (2011, 5) shares a similar view:

> "The community print sector remains unprotected from competition with large publishing houses and many print projects that have demonstrated some success are either bought by big media houses or – when they refuse to sell – face unfair competition as the big houses launch competing titles syndicate editorial and advertising, and offering grossly reduced advertising rates. The result is a virtually non-existent community print sector comprising of a handful of niche publications and some struggling community papers that publish intermittently".

Milne *et al* (2006, 10) seem to concur with Weinberg's (2011) view:

> "Large newspaper companies should be prevented from anti-competitive activities designed to maximise their advertiser base, but which use ethically unsupportable ways of luring clients - and sometimes long-standing clients - away from independent community newspapers".

Milne *et al* (*ibid*.) conducted a study focusing on six independently owned community newspapers across South Africa and found that community newspapers owned by big companies such as Caxton and Media24 had an unfair advantage with regards to advertising – in that they would lower their advertising rates in a preposterous manner, thereby putting independent small community newspapers at a huge disadvantage in terms of attracting or retaining advertisers.

However, Dinabantu (2022) also avers that while the local media sphere in South Africa is dominated by community newspapers which are owned by big corporations, the corporate-owned local press also plays an important role. Dinabantu (*ibid*.) explains:

> "The normative role played by these community newspapers is among others, that of being a watchdog in their communities, promoting community participation and a role of being the voice of those communities marginalised by the established national press. A general and dominant view in literature is that these corporately owned community newspapers only exist in the community press ecosystem for commercial reasons than that of the ideal media role in society as prescribed by the normative theory of media" (2022, 56)

On the issue of community press ownership, Mwangi (2007, 2) posits that:

> "The bulk of the community newspapers in South Africa are owned by a handful of oligopolistic publishing conglomerates namely: Caxton & CTP Publishers and Printers Limited (Caxton); Johnnic Communications (Johncom); Naspers; and Independent Newspapers. Proliferation of the corporate-owned community newspapers has provided communities that were previously media-deprived with a platform for communication".

Duncan (*ibid*.) lauds community media for its content which speaks to issues affecting people directly at grassroots level. Duncan (*ibid*., 433) elucidates thus:

> "The one competitive advantage enjoyed by the community and small commercial media organisations which were interviewed, was their content; many of these papers covered stories and addressed audiences that are simply not on the corporate media's radar; as such they are invaluable sources of local information and debate. The inability of corporate media to speak to these needs on a consistent basis has left a gap that community and small commercial media are well placed to address. The growth of indigenous language media, against the odds, is particularly encouraging".

To ensure the thriving and sustainability of the community media, Duncan (2015) advocates for a change in the country's community media adversity policy, especially the rethinking of the current Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) efforts aimed at ensuring thriving media diversity. Echoing Duncan's (2015) sentiments, Moyo (2020) also calls on government to enhance the role of the MDDA and increase the funding allocated to the MMDA in order for the agency to carry out its mandate effectively, thus fostering and nurturing media diversity at community media (newspaper) level.

The advent of democracy saw the establishment of the MDDA in 2003 – through the MDDA Act No. 14 of 2002 – to inculcate, promote and financially support the culture of media diversity. The MDDA plays a crucial role in helping sustain independently owned (as opposed to those owned by one of the country's big media companies) community newspapers, which often battle to stay afloat due to dwindling or lack of advertising revenue. Advertising is crucial for the continued existence and sustainability of the local media. Citing De Jager (1979), Froneman and Pretorius (2000) emphasise that community and regional newspapers would never survive without advertising. Berger (1996),

however, places more emphasis on community involvement, rather than profits, and issue-driven nature of the community press.

> "Community media, from the Misa point of view, needs to be about communities in a process of liberation: i.e. developing human rights in the broadest sense. Community media which trades in development issues divorced from democratic concerns is not community media in the sense deserving attention from Misa. A community radio station that is community-owned, non-profit and acts as an advice office on air will reflect community concerns, help empower people, may even have participation. All this is very valuable - but on its own that is not enough for present purposes. For community media to count in Misa, it needs community journalism too - and journalism with the particular liberatory and human rights ethic that goes with this" (Berger, 1996, 8-9)

This narrative on community journalism lands itself in the domain of citizen journalism. Froneman and Pretorius (2000, 63) offer their perspective on the subject, saying:

> "The concept of civic journalism is based on ancient principles, but as a movement it is a new and important initiative. Civic journalism essentially means equipping readers with what they need to be responsible citizens".

Therefore, Froneman and Pretorius (*ibid*.) suggest that the community print media must give their readers more access to their publications and make them active participants who make a meaningful contribution towards the content direction of the paper. In addition, the authors, are of the considered view that big media companies such as Caxton and Media24 ought to promote and pursue local co-ownership of media titles with communities, thereby assist with regards to pushing the agenda for local media diversity.

Kaniss (1991) argues that to attract, capture and retain their audiences, the local press has had to package their messages (texts or news) in a way which espouses their uniquely local character. Reflecting on the role of the local media in the New South Wales, Willis (2021), argues that regional newspapers play a crucial role.

> "The three New South Wales market towns of Campbelltown, Camden and Picton made up the Macarthur region where several local town-based newspapers emerged in the 1880s. Local newspapers used local history to

> enable their readers to reflect on their past by storytelling and creating an understanding of their cultural heritage. The local press fulfilled several roles from the local bulletin board to a forum for public debate and occasionally chronicling the tales of local historical figures and events" (Willis, 2021, 197)

Willis (*ibid*.) also emphasises the role of regional newspapers in helping create and cement regional identities through their journalistic function since time immemorial. In the African context, specially focusing on East Africa, Nassanga (2009) states that community empowerment through media literacy and education is critical, in that, "Community members will get to appreciate the contribution community media can make toward improving their standards of living" (2009, 44). Nassanga (*ibid*.) is unambiguous about the role of the community press:

> "The media content should address the needs, interests, and problems affecting the community, in addition to reflecting on how broader national and international issues affect the community" (2009, 48)

Carpentier *et al* (2003, 56) postulate the community press is regarded as alternative media, to the mainstream media, due to the following distinguishing attributes:

- *Small-scale and oriented towards specific communities, possibly disadvantaged groups, respecting their diversity;*
- *Independent from state and market;*
- *Horizontally structured, allowing for the facilitation of audience access and participation within the frame of democratisation and multiplicity;*
- *Carriers of non-dominant (possibly counter-hegemonic) discourses and representations, stressing the importance of self-representation.*

According to Howley (2010, 6), the following should be the defining features of community media:

> "As an object of study, then, community media serve as an exceptional vehicle to explore the way local populations create media texts, practices, and institutions to serve their distinctive needs and interests. Community media operate in sharp contrast to their corporate counterparts. For instance, in terms of financing, community media rely on donations, underwriting and limited advertising, grant funding, in-kind contributions, and other non-commercial forms of support".

Furthermore, Howley (*ibid*.) posits:

> "In contrast to corporate and public service media, community media organisations often align themselves with, and emerge from, counter-hegemonic struggles. In terms of ideological critique, then, community media represent a field to examine hegemonic processes at work at the local level. Indeed, by providing a vehicle for individuals and groups routinely marginalised by dominant media to express their hopes and fears, their aspirations and frustrations, community media can serve as a forum for oppositional politics and ideological perspectives that are inconsistent and incompatible with the interests of dominant media. Insofar as community media undermine notions of the passive audience by providing community members with the technical skills and infrastructure to become media makers, community media represent palpable expressions of organised, local resistance to ideological manipulation and repressive regimes of state and corporate power" (2010, 7-8)

Howley (2010,7) seems to agree with the notion that the community press plays an important role in giving the voice to ordinary or grassroots people:

> "From a political economic perspective, then, community media represent a significant intervention into the structural inequalities and power imbalances of contemporary media systems. By providing local populations with access to the means of communication, community media offer a modest, but vitally important corrective to the unprecedented concentration of media ownership that undermines local cultural expression, privatises the channels of public communication, and otherwise threatens the prospects for democratic self-governance."

Swanepoel *et al* (2015, 2) emphasise that community newspapers play a crucial role in being the link between communities and developments, be it events or issues, in their geographically specified areas. Furthermore, Swanepoel (2012,

137) avers that, “Community newspapers are indeed close-knit organisations characterised by strong relationships”.

2.5 The concept of a community

> **“**Today the notion of community has a strong non-physical connotation; so that it is possible to speak about ‘virtual’ reality and virtual communities. But in spite of the new information and communication technologies, ‘community’ still retains a strong physical reference to people in geographic proximity, with frequent, if not continuous, contact. People who share certain cultural attributes have access to certain resources of social organisation and common institutions, resulting in common basic beliefs. Among other things, a human community is built on the exchange of initiatives, information and meanings in the process of defining, creating and maintaining a group identity and interests for survival within a specifiable geographical and/or cultural space. A community thus creates, and is also created by, a community communication system, which includes the various communication roles (and their actors/performers), needs, and resources available to the individuals and subgroups which make up the community. Community media should be viewed then as elements of a community communication system. They serve as instrumentalities for role performance and resource utilisation, for responding to the communication needs of individuals and institutions within the community. These needs are diverse and often require different modalities of expression and satisfaction” Baofo (2000, 12-13)

Flowing from the above assertion by Baofo (2000), it could be reasonably deduced that a community inherently has a specific location, with clear boundaries and attributes/ characteristics – be it class, culture, tradition, ethnicity, language, religion, race and other features. Carpentier *et al* (2003) speak to four approaches that community media adapts in its function to disseminate news to specific target audience and the concept of community thereof. Carpentier *et al* (*ibid*., 55-56) explain that:

> “By choosing a specific community as a target group, the (concept of) community itself is validated and strengthened. The audience is not defined as an aggregate of individuals who only share socio-demographic

> or economic characteristics, but instead as a collective of people holding a series of identifying group relations. In this fashion, the situatedness of the audience, as part of complex set of social structures, is emphasised, deepening and bridging the traditional state-citizen and medium-audience dichotomies that tend to articulate the public and the audience as an aggregate of individuals. Moreover, the aim of community media in approach one to serve the community is often translated as enabling and facilitating access and participation by members of the community. 'Ordinary people' are given the opportunity to have their voices heard. Topics that are considered relevant for the community can be discussed by members of that community, thus empowering those people by signifying that their statements are considered important enough to be broadcast. Especially societal groups that are misrepresented, disadvantaged, stigmatised, or even repressed can benefit from using the channels of communication opened by community media, strengthening their internal identity, manifesting this identity to the outside world, and thus enabling social change and/or development".

Lowrey *et al* (2008, 276) state that, "Community journalism is intimate, caring, and personal; it reflects the community and tells its stories; and it embraces a leadership role". Lowrey *et al* (2008) also argue that the most common denominator when describing and defining the concept of community relates to location. Lowrey *et al* elucidate:

> "Of the 65 studies that offered direct or implied definitions of community, 30 suggested or directly stated that the notion of community is fundamentally tied to physical location. Among all 108 studies analysed, 66 focused on towns, cities, neighborhoods or political districts, and of the 78 studies that provide no explicit definition of community, 41 focused on towns, cities, or political districts. These authors seem to assume community simply means a location demarked by political/legal boundaries. Media are a primary means by which stories are told" (2008, 280-281)

This inquiry's focal point is the diverse community of Lower South Coast, with a particular focus on the regional newspaper, the *South Coast Herald*, and its readers in the suburb of Margate, the township of Gamalakhe and the rural village of Murchison. A community is often heterogonous, in that context that it has divergent and diverse views and perspectives on a number of societal issues, and these views must be equitably heard or accorded space. Van Der Spuy (2020, 93) explains:

> "The role community print newspapers play in the communities they serve, primarily supplying hyperlocal news to their readers, has not changed according to the responses presented in the previous chapter. Community journalists seem to be determined to perform the various roles their readers expect them to as well as the roles traditionally associated with working at a community print journalist to the best of their abilities. The reason why they are so committed to performing these various roles well, is because they realise that the existence of their publications depends (on) the continued support and loyalty from their readers".

Milan (2009, 598) avers that, "Community media represent a crucial input in development processes, playing an important role in democratisation, social struggles, and awareness raising". Milan (*ibid*.) adds that while there are several ways in which community media is defined and classified, the author proffers the following description of the role of the community press and its inherent features:

> "I argue that community media add to the social and cultural dimensions of development by providing channels for participation, social and political empowerment, and the exercise of citizen rights, as they work for community building by transforming individual experiences in a shared vision of (a better) reality" (2009, 599)

Metula and Osunkunle (2019, 935) place a high premium on diversity when it comes to community media:

> "Diverse participation is therefore necessary and it is when community media involves the broader community. The inclusion of diverse voices within the community must therefore be insisted on in order to emphasize community participation. Community newspapers are also to represent a range of demographics of citizens in their content, including social, economic, ethnic, age, cultural and political. This paper posits that scanning the community environment, identifying developmental needs and ways of addressing such needs, as well as inclusion of diverse voices will no doubt ensure the success of any community media such as community newspapers".

2.6 Locals' expectations and perceptions of community newspapers

Swanepoel (*ibid*., 152) posits that:

> "The community does not only expect a community newspaper to provide quality journalism by focusing on a wide variety of topics, but readers also want more details than they would get elsewhere. Moreover, local communities expect sensitivity as well as comprehensive coverage about relevant issues. Geographically defined community newspapers have an important task to reflect the diversity of the community as a whole".

Using *Fourways Review*, a Caxton-owned community newspaper in Johannesburg, as a case study, Potter (2016) found that while the publication was widely accepted in the community, it was not seen as sufficiently community-oriented as a community newspaper ought to be, which in turn affected how the community members used the paper. Potter (*ibid*., 177) notes that:

> "The findings that the community journalists and community members criticised Fourways Review's market-driven approach to reporting demonstrates a need for future research into the validity of corporate involvement in community journalism".

From the outcomes of Potter's (2016) study, it is clear that several respondents felt that the newspaper did not adequately adhere to the widely accepted definition of a community media as per resolutions of IAJ (2005), which have been alluded to earlier in this chapter. Contrast the above academic inquiry with a similar study undertaken in the Eastern Cape which had overwhelmingly positive results for the community newspaper under scrutiny. Metula and Osunkunle (2019) conducted a study of an Eastern Cape community newspaper, *Idikelethu*, as a tool for community development from the perspective of the publication's readers. The researchers argue that:

> "There are five characteristics that describe community media, including community newspapers, and they are: localism, diverse participation, storytelling, deliberation and empowerment. These are the five characteristics that are expected from *Idikelethu* newspaper. It must also be noted that community media are usually created where residents are, at a specific geographical place, and the duty of community media is to explore local issues. It also helps to differentiate and define places where people live and how people relate to others. Culture and local values are

> part of the issues that community media are likely to reflect on" (Metula and Osunkunle, 2019, 935)

The findings revealed that development-related issues such as health awareness, education and community safety, among others, are regularly addressed by this community newspaper (Metula and Osunkunle, 2019). They further postulate:

> "Looking specifically at the role of community media in community development, it must be noted that community media usually seek to provide a voice to rural or marginalised poor communities, especially those without access to media. While public or commercial media work towards their own of agendas of acting as a government mouth-piece or setting out to make a profit, community media are usually set up to give a voice to communities by providing platforms for them to identify and address issues that affect them" (2019, 934)

The study reached findings which showed that the publication executed its mandate accordingly in terms of facilitating community development through news reportage and other related journalistic means. Metula and Osunkunle (*ibid*.) explain that:

> "The focus group discussions revealed that *Idikelethu* newspaper is doing its best to ensure interaction between government and communities, especially to facilitate community development. The findings of this study have shown that community newspapers can be used as a communication tool for community developmental purposes, as noted by the participants. This paper also concludes that community newspapers do have the capability to promote social or communal participation, to mobilise people and to inform them about the development processes that are taking place in their respective locations, and this is what *Idikelethu* newspaper is doing in Alice. To a large extent, this paper concludes that community newspaper is indeed a powerful and relevant tool for community development" (2019, 941-942)

2.7 Community media/newspapers and the digital era

> "Legacy media like broadcasters and especially newspapers by contrast are becoming relatively less important as distributors of news even as they remain very important producers of news. They are also under growing pressure to develop new digital business models as their existing sources of revenue decline or stagnate. The general response from legacy media has been a combination of (a) investment in pursuing digital opportunities, (b) cost–cutting and (c) attempts at market consolidation in pursuit of market power and economies of scale. Because of the competition for attention and advertising, and the limited number of people who pay for online news, there are very few examples of legacy media that make a profit from their digital news operations – despite twenty years of often substantial investments and sometimes significant audience reach. It is not clear that the new environment is significantly more hospitable for digital-born news media organisations" Nielsen *et al* (2016, 4)

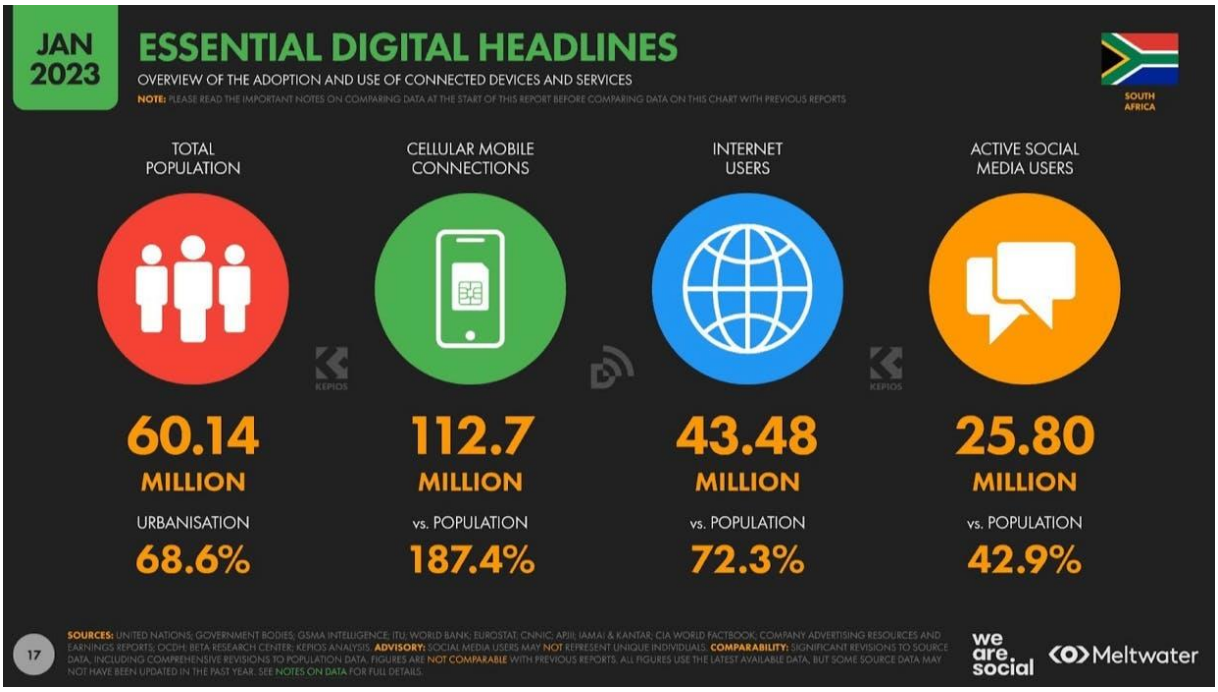
Franklin (2008) posits that newspapers in general are in a state of uncertainty due to ever changing societal dynamics including the advent of the social media phenomenon. Franklin (*ibid*.) explains:

> "These changes are sometimes dramatic, invariably rapid and prompt reconsideration of three fundamental questions. First, the availability of online editions means that common sense understandings of newspapers as simply the printed 'hard copy' edition no longer provide an adequate response to the question, 'What is a newspaper?' Second, in an age of citizen journalism, when news is gathered, but less frequently reported and edited, by amateurs as well as professionals, the issue of 'Who is a journalist?' is attracting considerable but often contested consideration" (2008, 306).

However, what has become apparent, the media in general, including local press (print), has accepted the reality of the digital era and now use social media platforms to report news. Unlike traditional media, social media offers instantaneous interactivity between content producers and their audiences. Chung (2009) asserts that audiences or readers find it crucial to be involved in the processes of news delivery and presentation. The author conducted a study on what readers/audiences perceived as journalists' function/role at identified online community newspapers.

> "The interpretive role was also considered important but converged with the disseminator role. While research shows a steep decline in perceptions of the disseminator role by journalists, this audience still seems to want news quickly that is relevant to a general mass audience. The results also indicate that interactivity can be promoted through different types of features that serve unique purposes" (Chung, 2009, 78)

As a result of the digital age, many local publications/newspapers have a presence on Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok and other related social media platforms. According to Meltwater (2023), a total of 43.48 million people, out of the 60.14 million population, in South Africa are regular Internet users, and the main reason for this Internet utilisation is to get information, with most of them using cellphones to access the virtual world. The Meltwater infographic below puts matters into perspective:



Reproduced from Meltwater (2023) website.

Vorhaus (2020) also argues that many people now read news online as opposed to purchasing copies of newspapers or watching news television channels. Martin (2018, online) tends to agree, saying social media has become the main source of news online, "with more than 2.4 billion internet users, nearly 64.5% receiving breaking news from Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Snapchat and Instagram instead of traditional media". However, social media comes with a great risk of dissemination of fake news. Albright (2017) argues that journalists

have a crucial role in arresting and stopping the proliferation and spread of fake news. Albright (*ibid*., 87) adds that:

> "For the news industry, information is used to tell stories, which have traditionally been organised around 'facts'. A growing problem, however, is that fact-based evidence is not relevant to a growing segment of the populace. Journalists need facts to tell stories, but they need data to understand how to engage audiences with this accurate information. The implementation of data is part of the solution to countering the erosion of trust and the decay of social discourse across networked spaces".

Bosch (2014) postulates that social media is also considered a form of participatory media, and so community journalism, particularly when it converges with social media, might be seen as a heightened form of citizen/civic journalism. However, Bosch (*ibid*.) contends that the digital divide is still a key issue for the rest of Africa, particularly in the exploration of the use of internet-based technologies for journalism.

Citing Lewis (2008, 12), Nassanga (2009, 51) points out:

> "Through use of mobile phones and the Internet, the locally based community media parameters have now expanded as they offer services to wider audiences across countries and regions, creating virtual communities based on community media structures".

Furthermore, Lewis *et al* (2010, 14) note that:

> "As the Web allows news to become increasingly hyper-local and hyper-personal, tailored to niche enclaves of interest and individuals' distinct concerns, it will be essential to better understand how journalism operates at the very local level; how it serves communities, both real and virtual; and how it negotiates participatory forms of media production vis-à-vis longstanding norms of professional control."

Many media practitioners and experts have long expressed concerns about ramifications regarding the practice of traditional media, in particular newspapers, generating revenue through adverts, and they argue this would be at risk because most things are readily or freely available on the Internet. However,

to address this issue, as Franklin (2008, 312), citing Herbert and Thurman (2007), points out that, "Newspaper companies have identified three sources of income from online news: subscription, advertising and 'ad hoc' sales". Nielsen *et al* (2016, 34) contend that:

> "These developments mean that Internet users will have access to more and more information from more and more sources even as the media environment they navigate is increasingly dominated by a limited number of very large players and see consolidation and cost-cutting elsewhere in the media landscape which can over time reduce media pluralism by undermining the diversity of original, professional news production".

2.8 Conclusion

Based on the literature which has been perused in this chapter, it is evident that community media makes an invaluable contribution to society, giving a voice to people at grassroots/local level to have their issues heard or addressed. Accentuating the significance of community media, Swanepoel (2012, 210) emphasises that:

> "These newspapers are in a unique position to provide a community's most intimate news in a manner that allows readers to function as responsible, informed citizens in a democracy. It is because community newspapers are in this unique position that they should pay attention to the quality of their organisations, processes and products".

Kirkpatrick (2001, 21) advises community media journalists that:

> "When you work on a community newspaper you soon absorb the message that the everyday life of the community is of interest to your readers. The annual events that shape the community's traditions are newsworthy and readers expect to find them mentioned in the newspaper so that they can note them on their social calendar and plan to attend them. In many instances, the community newspaper is communicating the good news that nothing terrible has happened in the past week whereas the metropolitan daily has communicated all the bad news about corruption among people in high places, the falling Australian dollar, a company in collapse or a sporting team that has taken bribes. The importance of comprehending the news values of a community newspaper, and of not belittling them, must be communicated to journalism students if for no other reason than that many of them will

> begin their careers and some of them spend many years of those careers on community newspapers."

The watershed Institute for the Advancement of Journalism (2005) workshop was crucial in assisting in coming up with a widely accepted convergence point regarding the comprehensive definition of the community media and the concomitant attributes thereof. Of particular significance is the requirement for the community media to espouse and promote diversity. In the case of this study, the focus is on a regional newspaper, the *South Coast Herald*, on the South Coast of KwaZulu-Natal wherein suburban, township and rural readers of an English-medium local newspaper give their perspectives on messages transmitted/disseminated by the publication, whether or not the news reportage or the paper adequately executes its function in terms of paying sufficient attention to issues affecting their respective areas. The crux of the matter relates to the newspaper's reception in these diverse areas in which the publication is distributed. In attempting to thoroughly deal with the subject, the most appropriate theoretical framework to be utilised for the study is the reception theory, also commonly known as audience reception theory, particularly as advocated by scholar Stuart Hall in his Encoding/Decoding Communication Model.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

> "Hall wanted to formulate an alternative to the linear transmission model (sender – message – receiver) and argued that seeing communication as a process of meaning production including semiotic concepts as codes and signs give a more fruitful model. Hall argues that decoding could be done from three kinds of audience positions. The first he calls the dominant-hegemonic, which means that a message is decoded according to the same code as it was encoded. It is important to note here that Hall assumes that e g news are produced within the dominant ideology. The professional code deals with technical solutions when producing e g a news item, but within the framework of the dominant hegemony. The second position he calls the negotiated code. It accepts the hegemonic definition of the world on a general level but is critical at a more specific level. The third position, the oppositional code, means that the interpreter reads the message with the help of a radically different frame of meaning" Ross (2011, 1, 3 &4)

3.1 Introduction

Flowing from the previous chapter, the theoretical framework section will look to apply an appropriate theory applicable to the research questions which have been posed of this study. The chapter will endeavour to gain insight and understanding of how the reader interacts with the text or messages transmitted/disseminated by the newspaper being investigated. This will help establish several important issues with regards to how readers perceive or decode news articles or information contained by the *South Coast Herald* in relation to their specific needs as the publication caters for a diverse audience/readership. In terms of their interpretation, is there symmetry or asymmetry or even more permutations? This chapter suggests that the point of departure in answering these questions lies in the **reception theory**, also referred to as **audience reception theory**, especially as advanced by the late renowned academic Stuart Hall. The dissertation will also revisit Hall's ground-breaking Encoding/Decoding Communication Model, which he first introduced in September 1973 in his paper titled, "Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse". This was at the Council of Europe Colloquy on "Training In The Critical Reading of Televisual Language". Furthermore, the section will take the matter further and analyse the views of other theorists and academics who have made critical contributions to the evolution of reception studies.

Xie *et al* (2022, 190) explain encoding and decoding concepts as follows:

> "Encoding refers to that the information disseminator transforming the conveyed message, meaning, intention or viewpoint, through verbal or non-verbal form, into a symbolic code or information form that has specific rules and is easy to understand and translate. Decoding meant the process that the recipient of the information interprets the code, and/or recreates the conveyed ideology. The decoding or interpretation activities of the decoders reflected the complexity of the communication process and the diversity of society".

Basdogan *et al* (2020, 2059) offer this explanation regarding the encoding process, "According to Hall (1980), encoding refers to constructing messages that may involve encoders' inner thoughts, ideas, feelings, and knowledge".

3.2 Stuart Hall and reception theory

Prior to Hall's Encoding/Decoding Communication Model, theorist Hans Robert Jauss was regarded as the pioneering proponent of the reception or audience reception theory. Mambrol (2016) credits Jauss as the person who conceptualised the reception theory. Teel (2017) points out that Hall was a passionate/key exponent of reception theory as advanced by Hans Robert Jauss, but improved on it, by introducing ground-breaking elements to it. Jauss's idea of audience reception amounted to a simplistic approach and linear in nature (Teel, 2017). Mambrol (*ibid*., online) states that the reception theory puts an emphasis on "altering interpretive and evaluative responses of generations of readers to a text". Rockhill (1996, 85-86) explains Jauss's approach:

> "Jauss's version of reception theory emphasised the reader's reception of a text at a specific time or over a specific time period and the development of the reader's reception. Jauss's reception theory called for the advancement of new theories and the destruction of the literary canon".

Kinoshita (2004) recognises Jauss for his contribution. Kinoshita (*ibid*.) points out that:

> "Hans Robert Jauss, one of the main contributors to Reception Theory, published an essay, 'The Change in the Paradigm of Literary Scholarship'

> in 1969. In this essay, Jauss points out the rise of the new paradigm and emphasises the importance of interpretation by the reader, replacing the obsolete literary scholarship methodology which involved the studies of accumulated facts. Jauss's theory views literature 'from the perspective of the reader or consumer' and treats literature 'as a dialectical process of production and reception" (2004, 1)

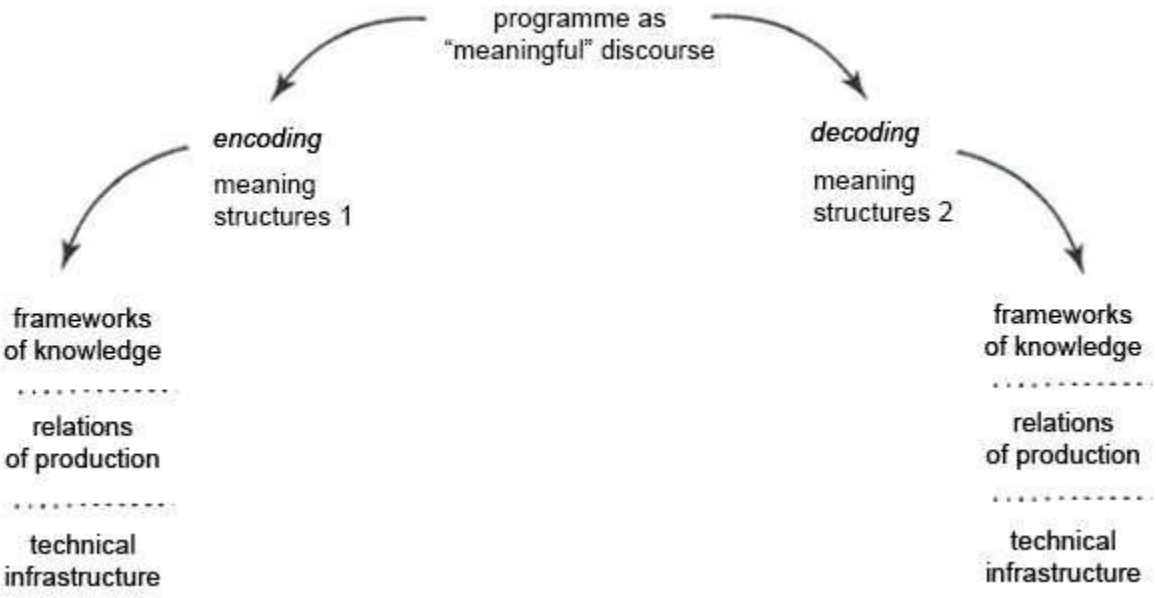
In seeking to crystallise this important epoch in the evolution of audience reception theory, (Holub, 1984 cited in Kinoshita, 2004, 1) explains the concept thus:

> "In his book, *Reception Theory* (1984), Robert C. Holub characterises Reception Theory as 'a general shift in concern from the author and the work to the text and the reader.' Reception Theory reflects a paradigm shift in the history of literature, and it is considered 'a reaction to social, intellectual, and literary developments in West Germany during the late 1960s. According to Holub, Reception Theory was a revolutionary approach to contemporary literary criticism".

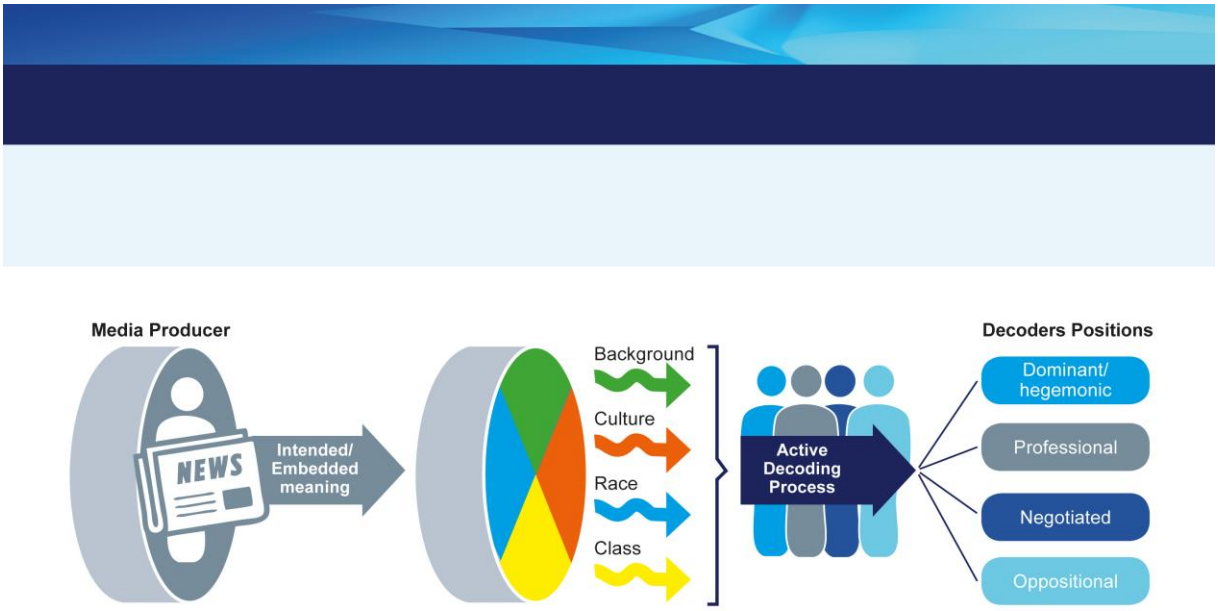
Soroka (2020) points out that Hall's version of reception theory entered unchartered grounds as it moved away from two previous/preceding theories which only put an emphasis on passive audience, with regards to interpretation in films/television. Hall (1973) avers that a producer of a media text has an intended or embedded meaning or interpretation of their original message, but the interpretation/decoding of the text by the reader or audience is not a passive process which results in a symmetry all the time. There are four codes attached to the decoding process, namely; dominant or hegemonic, professional, negotiated and oppositional positions (Hall, 1973). Therefore, Hall (*ibid.*) adds, the reproduction of these codes by a reader or audience is directly linked to the messages' reproduction by the decoder. Important to note is that the decoding of media texts is dependent on a number of factors including the background, culture, race and class of the audience.

Xie *et al* (2022) stress that the Hall Encoding/Decoding Model is not only limited to television programmes, but also applicable to other media discourse issues where it can be used as a theoretical framework/tool for analysis. Glasspool (2020) argues that the processes of encoding and decoding by text producers and receivers are a complex matter wherein issues such as, among others, culture and power relations form part of the equation. Glasspool (*ibid.*

online) adds, “Unlike the linear communications model, with its straightforward sender-message-receiver process, this model proposes that the process is more complex”.



Hall’s encoding/decoding model reproduced from (Hall, 1999, 510)



Xie *et al* (2022, 190) posit that, “Hall's research has become the theoretical background that supports present reception studies, particularly for studying audience acceptance in a specific social and cultural context”. Xie *et al* (*ibid*.) describe the encoding process as the one which:

> "Refers to that the information disseminator transforming the conveyed message, meaning, intention or viewpoint, through verbal or non-verbal form, into a symbolic code or information form that has specific rules and is easy to understand and translate" (2022, 190)

Aligwe *et al* (2018, 1019) argue that:

> "Every designer of media message has the audience in variable which limited the effects of the mass media mind while designing the messages. Consequently, the message. This thinking gave rise to two-step-flow in media are full of messages from different sources, which case, the opinion leaders got information from consequent upon which the media audience members are the media and then passed same to the other media inundated with an avalanche of messages".

Furthermore, Aligwe *et al* (*ibid*.) point out that:

> "The import of Hall's Encoding/Decoding Model is that audience members are not docile or passive, but are capable of giving various interpretations to the media content they have exposed themselves to, based on their experiences" (2018, 1019) …According to Stuart Hall, consumers of media messages can give three types of readings to media messages. They include preferred reading, negotiated reading and oppositional reading. The type of reading they give to the media messages is as a result of the position they assume while reading the text which can either be dominant/hegemonic position, negotiated position or oppositional position; and this together with the context and cultures of media messages have both denotative and connotative meanings. He also believes that codes and signs have multiplicity of meanings. This is what he calls polysemy. Therefore, media messages can be polysemous in nature" (2018, 1020)

Aligwe *et al* (*ibid*.) further emphasise that encoders of messages or media texts must carefully study their audiences before deciding on formulation of particular messages. Makwambeni (2013) asserts that Hall's Encoding/Decoding Model is

widely considered to be the first generation of reception or audience reception theory studies. The scholar adds:

> "Hall's encoding and decoding model (1980) represents a significant shift from reception studies in the late 1960s and early 1970s and enshrined in the *Screen Journal* that regarded audiences as subject to the ideological influence of media institutions. Consistent with the critical paradigm in media studies that was emerging at the Birmingham University's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), Hall's encoding and decoding model moves away from textual determinism to foregrounding readers' ability to resist 'preferred/dominant' encoded in media texts" (Makwambeni, 2013, 75)

The author adds that Hall's model marked a critical point in the history of audience reception studies in that it represented:

> "A significant advance on effects theory in so far as it opens up the question of differential interpretation and simultaneously setting up the basic conceptual framework that has informed audience reception studies" (Morley, 1991; Schroder *et al,* 2003 cited in Makwambeni, 2013, 75)

Makwambeni (*ibid*., 73) posits that the crux of the encoding/decoding model is the meaning determination by the decoder reacting to the message disseminated by the encoder, and that "Consequently, the model enriches audience reception studies by positing that audiences actively negotiate meaning from media texts by inflecting the preferred reading to take account of their social position". Furthermore, the author elucidates on the importance of the model and its bearing on the trajectory of reception theory:

> "Hall's encoding and decoding model is seminal to audience reception studies in so far as it enabled the media to be studied in relatively new ways: as a transmitter of dominant discourse; conceptualising media text as polysemic; studying audiences in terms of their readings within social contexts rather than psychological needs and focusing more on discourses rather than single texts" (Ross & Nightingale, 2003 cited in Makwambeni, 2013, 76-77)

In addition, Makwambeni (*ibid*.) explains:

> "The model advances three positions informing audiences decoding of television/media discourses: the dominant reading, the negotiated reading and the oppositional reading. The dominant reading is commonly referred to as the "preferred reading" of a media text. According to Hall (1980), audiences or readers of media texts do not automatically adopt the dominant meaning encoded in the text by the producers because their social situations may lead them to adopt different stances or positions. The unexpected or unanticipated reading of the text by audiences' results suggests that meaning is not embedded in the text (as argued by the normative paradigm) but arises out of the interaction between texts and the discourses of the socially situated reader" (2013, 76)

Mambrol (2020, online) is of the considered view that Hall's Encoding/Decoding Model is, "Arguably the most widely circulated and debated paper and had a major impact on the direction of cultural studies in the 1970s and 1980s and is central terms remain keywords in the field". Kinoshita (2004) hails the reception theory for bringing forth a new trajectory in terms of the interaction between the reader and text:

> "Reception theory's revolutionary approach to the role of the reader in relationship to the notion of interpretation was one of the most important contributions to the history of literature, and its new perspective on the literary experience established a new paradigm for writers and theorists" (Kinoshita, 2004, 9)

There is similarity to be drawn between historians and literary theorists as to how they approach minimalism and reception theory respectively yet with similar lenses focusing on spectators and readers (Kinoshita, 2004). Lu (2021) says the three decoding positions as espoused by Hall became the nexus for contemporary audience reception studies. "Most contemporary cultural researchers have followed Hall's three positions of decoding to analyse popular culture" (Lu, 2021, online). Kinoshita (2004) emphasises that hermeneutics is the critical element of reception theory.

3.3 Application of Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding Model

During (1999, 507) provides an insightful input regarding the encoding/decoding model in that:

> "Stuart Hall's influential essay offers a densely theoretical account of how messages are produced and disseminated, referring particularly to television. He suggests a four-stage theory of communication: production, circulation, use (which here he calls distribution *or* consumption) and reproduction. For him, each stage is 'relatively autonomous' from the others. This means that the coding of a message *does* control its reception but not transparently – each stage has its own determining limits and possibilities. The concept of relative autonomy allows him to argue that polysemy is not the same as pluralism: messages are not open to any interpretation *or* use whatsoever – just because each stage in the circuit limits possibilities in the next. In actual social existence, Hall goes on to argue, messages have a 'complex structure of dominance' because at each stage they are 'imprinted' by the institutional power relations. Furthermore, a message can be received at a particular stage only if it is recognisable or appropriate – though there is a space for a message to be used *or* understood at least somewhat against the grain. This means that power relations at the point of production, *for example*, will loosely fit those at point of consumption. In this way, the communication circuit is also a circuit which reproduces a pattern of domination. This analysis allows Hall to insert a semiotic paradigm into a social framework, clearing the way for further work both textualist and ethnographic. His essay has been particularly important as a basis on which fieldwork like David Morley's has been proceeded".

Mambrol (2020) points out that Morley was a pioneering figure in putting Halls's dominant, negotiated and oppositional readings into practice using television audiences. Aligwe *et al* (*ibid*., 2018, 1022) adds that:

> "Morley found out that only few persons went for dominant reading. However, at the other extreme, a group of union shop stewards liked the format of the programme but objected to its messages. They saw it as too sympathetic to middle management and failing to address fundamental economic issues. Morley labelled their decoding as oppositional".

In his own words, Morley (1992, 60) explains that:

> "In considering the process of how meaning is generated in communications I employ here two distinct modes of analysis (semiotics and sociology) to analyse two distinct types of constraints on the production of meaning. These are: (a) the internal structures and mechanisms of the text/message/programme which invite certain readings and block others (and which can be elucidated through semiotics); and (b) the cultural background of the reader/recipient/viewer, which has to be studied sociologically. The interaction of these two constraining structures will define the parameters of a text's meaning —thus avoiding the traps of either the notion that a text can be interpreted in an infinite number of (individual) ways or the formalist tendency to suppose that texts determine meaning absolutely".

Morley (*ibid*.) adds that the study focused on the how the programme was designed in terms of messages or texts intended for the audience, and how this was perceived or received by diverse audiences, with a particular focus on utilisation of cultural frameworks to determine or arrive at a particular interpretation.

> "The premises on which this approach is based are: (a) the same event can be encoded in more than one way; (b) the message always contains more than one potential 'reading'. Messages propose and prefer certain readings over others, but they can never become wholly closed around one reading: they remain polysemic; (c) understanding the message is also a problematic practice, however transparent and 'natural' it may seem. Messages encoded one way can always be read in a different way" (Morley, 1992, 78-79)

Glasspool (2020) points out that, according to Hall (1973), the encoding and decoding process are autonomous or independent of each other, with factors or considerations such as race, gender, background and others playing a critical role in readers' interpretation of the media texts or original messages by the producer. Makwambeni (*ibid*.) points out that:

> "Morley's *'Nationwide Audience'* represents the earliest seminal studies in audience reception research that utilised Hall's *encoding and decoding model* to investigate audiences' reception of media texts Through focusing on an edition of *Nationwide*, a 1970s current affairs programme screened by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the qualitative study examined the ways in which different viewer's interpretations or readings of *Nationwide* could be related back to the varying social economic positions of the audience such as trade union membership, youth subcultures, class, sex, race and age (Morley, 1986). Morley's study epitomises an early attempt in audience reception studies to illustrate how audiences' social positioning would influence whether they read the television text from a dominant, negotiated or oppositional position" (Morley, 1986 cited in Makwambeni, 2013, 77-78)

There have also been other noticeable cases pertaining to the application of the ground-breaking Hall Encoding/Decoding Model. Aligwe *et al* (2018, 1022) point out that:

> "Apart from David Morley, Dick Hebdige and Janice Radway have also applied Hall's Encoding-Decoding Model. For example, Hebdige who studied under Hall became influential through his book 'Subculture: The Meaning of Style' an idea he borrowed from Hall's idea of subculture. In that influential book, he argues that younger generations are challenging dominant ideologies by developing distinct styles and practices that manifest their separate identity and subversions. Also, Janice Radway, an American literary and cultural studies scholar carried out research on romance reading by women in her book 'Reading The Romance: Women Patriarchy and Popular Literature'. Radway studied women that read romance novels. Radway argued that the activity of reading romance novels acted as personal time for women who never had one for themselves. Even though her work was not recognised as scientific because it applied only to a small number of women, she interpreted how women could related to their everyday life activity to a fiction book like romantic novels".

The model has had a profound impact and influence in Brazil with regards to academic and empirical research based on Hall's version of reception theory (Jacks and Wottrich, 2016). Jacks and Wottrich (*ibid*.) add:

> "The text evokes the itinerary of Hall's contributions to the field of communication in the country, in particular to reception studies. It discusses how his reflections were used by theses and dissertations in the field, defended in the Brazilian graduate programs between 2000 and 2009. The analysis reveals Hall's importance for consolidating them in Brazil for offering theoretical and methodological inputs within a context of expansion of research centers and of problematics addressed" (2016, 159)

Here in South Africa, Tomaselli (2016) points to a court case which saw the utilisation of the encoding/decoding model in a matter between an apartheid regime defence minister and an anti-apartheid organisation, End Conscription Campaign (ECC), in which the latter was seeking to halt a concerted smear campaign propagated by the apartheid-era military. As part of its defence strategy, the military had relied on a master's degree dissertation which had found resonance with many right-wing publications (Tomaselli, 2016). Tomaselli (*ibid*.) further states:

> "The ECC's lawyers had contacted me as they had no answer to the minister's witness, whose testimony was that anti-conscription posters a priori encouraged revolution on the part of readers. That is to say, the hegemony of the C–M–R model was so pervasive that even the ECC legal team had no counter-argument – initially. Our team – that included graduate students at the Centre for Communication, Media and Society, CCMS, University of KwaZulu-Natal – responded to the Supreme Court affidavit by applying the encoding/decoding model to this legal setting" (2015, 66)

The ECC won the case, and the Hall Encoding/Decoding Model was enhanced and strengthened by the simultaneous combination with Peirceian semiotics (Tomaselli, 2016). Elsewhere, the encoding/decoding model has also been employed in Morocco to gauge and assess the views of citizens in relation to two

programmes broadcast on state-owned television stations (Zaid, 2014). Zaid (*ibid*.) explains below:

> "The study applies Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding theory to examine the interactions of the Moroccan audience with the content of the two public service television stations. This study focuses mainly on television viewers of lower educational backgrounds and those with lower incomes because they could benefit most from the developmental role of public service television. The study examines the extent to which tv programming addresses the viewers' lifestyles and concerns and the expectations viewers may have of their public service stations" (2014, 284)

The application of the model proved useful in helping provide an analytical framework to assist in understanding how the producers of the two programmes encoded messages and how, in turn, the audiences or viewers decoded the original message to make their own independent interpretation or reading (Zaid, 2014). However, Zaid (*ibid*.) points out, there are some challenges which emerge as the main audience is illiterate, "Given that the audience is largely illiterate, and therefore would seem to be unable to engage in the process of decoding the encoded messages, the findings may seem predictable" (2014, 286).

As a result of the application of the model, may respondents (audiences) felt that the two programmes mainly catered for the rich while they, as the poor, were neglected and issues concerning them not given sufficient coverage or consideration (Zaid, 2014). Meanwhile, Espiritu (2011), using the encoding/decoding model, examined the reception of Korean television dramas by young Filipino women in a Philippines society, which is highly influenced by the American culture. The author explains:

> "The study is undertaken within the cultural studies framework using critical cultural theories such as Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding theory and Anthony Giddens' thoughts on self-identity and modernity. Hall's theory is essentially anchored in Gramsci's concept of hegemony, which is illustrated in the entrenched American cultural hegemony in the Philippines. Korean television dramas that cater to young audiences are

> sites of hegemonic struggle as young Filipino women may either articulate their subscription to or negotiation with the dominant capitalistic patriarchal values in the dramas or express a counterhegemonic consciousness to these dominant values" (Espiritu, 2011, 359-360)

Espiritu (*ibid*.) adds that factors pertaining to social, economic, and cultural backgrounds played a role in their interpretation of the encoded messages and in their decoding process. In South Africa, Onyenankeya *et al* (2022) used Hall's model to study or examine how one of South Africa's television soap operas, *Generations*, depicts diverse African cultures, mainly of those Africans who are indigenous to the country. Based on the outcomes of the inquiry, Onyenankeya *et al* (*ibid*.) state that:

> "The current study explored the representation of indigenous cultures in the television soap opera, *Generations: The Legacy* in the context of Hall's (1973) audience reception theory. The results showed that while indigenous cultures increasingly find expression in mainstream soap operas, the representation reinforces African traditions and people stereotypes" (2022, 68)

The authors recommended that the soap opera ought to assume an active role in dispelling some societal stereotypes which continue to be in existence to this day. In scrutinising the **#BlackLivesMatter** phenomenon which occurred in recent history in the United States of America, Teel (2017) posits that the application of Hall's Encoding/Decoding Model in this case could assist to make sense of it all regarding the campaign which gained worldwide prominence:

> "The hashtag #BlackLivesMatter was created with the simple and seemingly uncontroversial goal of promoting that a black life matters as much as every other life. No matter how often the group repeated the original intended meaning of the slogan, criticism continued. How did a group with a specific person have so many different meanings attributed to it" (Teel, 2017, online)

Teel (*ibid*.) avers that the original or intended message of the campaign got lost in translation due to different or varied decoding of the message, with members

of the public making own readings based on number of factors applicable in their lives and worldview on societal issues. Hence, Hall's Encoding/Decoding Model is an important tool of analysis to make use of in an attempt to pinpoint and locate the causes of the #BlackLivesMatter imbroglio to establish what could have gone wrong, with regards to what appears to be the mutation of the intended encoded message by the founders of the movement. In addition, the issue brings into sharp focus the matter of polysemy as pointed out by Hall in his essay.

Castleberry (2016) applied the encoding/decoding model to the television programme *Breaking Bad*. Castleberry (ibid) points out that although the encoding/decoding model was initially focused on cultural studies, it has since found resonance or has had huge impact on communication studies.

With regards to the epoch of technology, Bødker (2016) applied Hall's Encoding/Decoding Model to journalism in the digital era, in the context of online/social media platforms which have revolutionised the manner in which communication happens.

> "The encoding/decoding text(s) refer on several occasions to 'current affairs', but later applications of this model have somewhat neglected the sphere of journalism. Given the status of Hall's model, the overall goal of this re-reading is twofold: seeing Hall through contemporary issues puts into perspective key aspects of Hall's thinking, while Hall's framework in turn helps illuminate important characteristics of how journalism is ascribed meaning in a digital landscape" (Bødker, 2016, 409)

Yushar *et al* (2021) also utilised the encoding/decoding model to determine the socio-economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in an online domain/space, primarily focusing on YouTube. Yushar *et al* (*ibid*.) explain:

> "YouTube is an alternative media that plays an important role in conveying information related to the Covid-19 pandemic. The wearesocial.com survey in 2021 noted that YouTube is the most visited site after Google. Apart from that YouTube is also the most popular video streaming application, and also the most used social media platform. This study identifies some characters of netizen's reception that are manifested in the online comments. This shows that a message can be interpreted differently from what the sender originally intended. The diversity of meanings shows that netizens are active interpreters who interpret

> messages according to what they think, what they feel, and what they imagine, about the videos they watch. YouTube is an interesting thing to research because it provides a new platform for critical content and critical responses, and presents a unique form of interaction in the online space between senders and receptors" (2011, 108&111)

3.4 Improving and refining Hall's Encoding/Decoding Model

In his analysis of Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding Model, Mambrol (2020, online) makes it clear that it must be noted that, "Hall's positions are hypothetical, they are not intended as prescriptive templates for studies of actual audiences". Mambrol (*ibid*.) adds that Hall himself stated that his theoretical assertions needed to be tested and improved upon, if need be.

Bødker (2016, 412) revisits the interview Hall had regarding his Encoding/Decoding Model:

> "Important note on the model and its genealogy is that Hall himself saw it as somewhat provisional and developing. 'I didn't think,' he said in an interview, of it as generating a model which would last for the next twenty-five years for research'" (Hall cited in Gurevitch & Scannell, 2003, 245)

Bødker (*ibid*., 412) adds that:

> "The development of the emphasis of the model, Hall's doubts about the lifespan of the model, as well as his emphasis on theorising in relation to contemporary issues supply me with a certain licence to, first, base my arguments on a conglomerate of the 1973 and 1980 texts, and, second, to use, develop, and twist some of the central elements from the model in relation to a digital landscape".

Makwambeni (*ibid*.) explains Morley's approach to advancing the concept of audience reception theory and possibly taking it to the next level:

> "Morley's influential *Family Television study* (1986) sought to investigate how audiences interpreted television messages, not as individuals, but as a

> family or household with the intention of understanding television consumption as an activity. Results from the study show that men and women relate in contrasting ways to television. Men appeared to be more attentive to television than women supposedly because their lives were generally divided between industry and home whereas the division for women is less clear. The differences in consumption can thus be articulated to the social construction of men and women which divides responsibilities within the household" (2013, 80)

The limitations or shortcomings emanating from the application of Hall's encoding/decoding model as evidenced by Morley's research led to what could be referred to as the second generation of audience reception studies (Makwambeni, 2013).

> "Morley further argued that media readings cannot be reduced to social determinism thereby suggesting that future studies needed to focus on genre and contextual based investigations grounded in audience's media consumption" (Morley, 1981 cited in Makwambeni, 2013, 78)

Morley (1992, 110) posits that:

> "The basic dominant, negotiated or oppositional code model will need to be considerably refined before it can provide us with an adequate conceptual framework for accommodating all the relevant sub-divisions and differentiations within the basic code patterns"

Ross (2011, 11-12) asseverates that:

> "The influence of Hall's model is undisputed. It stimulated, with the help of Morley's *The 'Nationwide' Audience* (1980), a new field of audience research, reception analysis. But Hall himself saw 'Encoding/decoding' as an unfinished first attempt to formulate an alternative to the transmission model. More trouble starts when you try to use it as a general communication model for all kinds of research questions, which is sometimes the case in media education. The model proper can be used as general model but the typology is not always useful if you want to study aspects where ideology is not on the agenda. Models are simple maps, their function is to help us see phenomena which, for some reason, may be regarded as more important than things that is not included in the model".

Makwambeni (*ibid*.) recapitulates that the second generation of audience reception studies flows from Hall's encoding/decoding model, but its focal point is ethnography.

> "The critical turn in the second generation seeks to understand the social dynamics of audience activity and the specific social and cultural complexity of the audience as a key empirical phenomenon" (Morley, 1987 cited in Makwambeni, 2013, 79).

Furthermore, the author posits that:

> "The second generation of audience reception studies signifies early beginnings of an interpretive paradigm which refutes the simplistic view of differences in television viewing as mere expressions of different needs, uses or readings but fundamentally seeks to relate these nuances to the ways in which subjects are structurally positioned" (Makwambeni, 2013, 79)

Genzuk (1999, 1) defines ethnography and its attendant attributes/characteristics as follows:

> "Ethnography is a social science research method. It relies heavily on up-close, personal experience and possible participation, not just observation, by researchers trained in the art of ethnography. These ethnographers often work in multidisciplinary teams. The ethnographic focal point may include intensive language and culture learning, intensive study of a single field or domain, and a blend of historical, observational, and interview methods. Typical ethnographic research employs three kinds of data collection: interviews, observation, and documents. This in turn produces three kinds of data: quotations, descriptions, and excerpts of documents, resulting in one product: narrative description".

Results from ethnographic research can yield or result in new paradigms or identify areas which need further investigating or academic probing (Genzuk, 1999). Genzuk (*ibid*.) adds that this practice has its genesis in anthropology and sociology. "Present-day practitioners conduct ethnographies in organisations and communities of all kinds" (Genzuk, 1999, 1).

In unpacking the concept of ethnography, LeCompte and Schensul (2010, 1) assert that:

> "Ethnography takes the position that human behaviour and the ways in which people construct and make the meaning of their words and their lives are highly variable and locally specific".

In terms of approach to an inquiry, ethnographic research can be both qualitative and quantitative in nature (Hammersley, 2006). Makwambeni (*ibid*., 79-80) observes that:

> "The turn to the historically and socially situated reader in the second generation of audience reception studies dialectically re-moored audience reception methodologies and methods by emphasising the need to study reception of media texts from the audience's point of view through in-depth interviews. Morley's Family *Television study* (1986) is a milestone in audience reception studies in so far as it contributes to a fledgling understanding that the television viewer/reader is a complex being who may negotiate or read a media text in ways that can be shaped by the environment or social relations (the domestic context of consumption)".

Furthermore, Makwambeni (*ibid*.) asserts that the third generation of audience reception studies places an emphasis on the sociological aspect in trying to get to the bottom of readers' responses to encoded messages by media producers. Makwambeni (*ibid*.) explains in the following paragraph:

> "The fledgling third generation of audience reception studies emerged in the 1990s and signifies what is now commonly referred to as the sociological turn in audience reception studies. Although this emergent generation of audience reception studies can be conceptualised as a paradigm shift in audience studies, it does not necessarily jettison audience ethnography but rather utilises it as a springboard for investigating the role of the media in audience's everyday lives in contemporary media culture. Consequently, third generation studies investigate audience reception of media texts within the broader social, cultural and economic context of consumption" (2013, 82)

3.5 Criticism of Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding Model

In a heterogeneous society, criticism forms an integral part of life. With respect to its inherent nature, society is constituted by diverse people who hold a multiplicity and plurality of views. Also importantly, evolution is an ongoing process, with concomitant changes happening at different epochs and from generation to generation. Therefore, it is to be expected that there will be those who criticise, agree or disagree with Hall's famous encoding/decoding communication model.

Makwambeni (*ibid*.) has the following to say on the essence of criticism directed at Hall:

> "Despite being a seminal study in audience reception research, Hall's *encoding and decoding model* (1980) has been criticised by audience researchers for several reasons: it has been considered limited for simply providing the three logical possibilities of the receiver either sharing, partly sharing or not sharing the code in which the message is sent thereby making a dominant, negotiated, or oppositional decoding of the encoded message; the model's conception of language has been viewed as that of conveying preconstituted meanings and by so doing to confusing textual meaning with the conscious intentions of the broadcasters; The concept of preferred reading which is central to the model has also been viewed as blurred" (2013, 77).

In the abstract of their paper, Aligwe *et al* (2018, 1019) state that:

> "Media effect studies have engaged the industry of media scholars for over a century. Different periods produced different results. As science and technology advanced and as instruments for research improved with the focus of researchers, results have continued to emerge. The Stuart Hall Encoding-Decoding model is one of such studies. Through analysis of the model and criticisms on it, these authors note that the model shall remain significant in media effect studies".

Aligwe *et al* (*ibid*.) further point out that Hall's model has its own shortcomings, in particular that it is premised on the:

> "Subjective interpretation of media reports, cannot address the presence or absence of effects, uses qualitative research methods, which preclude casual explanations and that it has been too oriented toward the micro level" (2018, 1023)

In his defence and that of Hall, Morley (1992), who took the encoding/decoding model further by subjecting it to an actual experiment to test the hypothesis, takes on Hall's critics – who also had negative comment on his now famous television programme study – by first giving the following background before addressing the actual content of their critique:

> "In particular, I am concerned with how the *Nationwide* work has been retrospectively positioned as 'the point where the encoding/decoding model starts to break down. Thus, Fiske claims of the *Nationwide* work that 'what Morley found was that Hall had over-emphasised the role of class in producing different readings and had underestimated the variety of determinants of reading" (Turner 1990a, 136; Parkin, 1971; Fiske, 1987, 63 cited in Morley, 1992, 10)

Morley (*ibid*.) details his rebuttal below:

> "Had Hall or I been attempting to demonstrate some utterly mechanistic form of social determination, in which decodings were rigidly determined by class, then evidence of a lack of such correspondence would, clearly, have been damning to the whole enterprise. However, that is not what either Hall or I was proposing, but rather a much more complex process, through which structural position might function to set parameters to the acquisition of cultural codes, the availability (or otherwise) of which might then pattern the decoding process. Moreover, while the results of the *Nationwide* study showed that the patterning of decodings was certainly more complex than could be accounted for by class alone, those results did demonstrate a quite significant degree of patterning, which a non-mechanistic theory of social determination can, in fact, help us to account for productively. To this extent, I would argue that both Fiske and Turner not only misread the evidence offered in the *Nationwide* study but,

> more fundamentally, misrepresent the questions to which that evidence was intended to contribute some (if partial) answers" (1992, 11)

Some scholars have argued that the encoding/decoding model has serious shortcomings or limitations in some non-Western countries (Zaid, 2014). Zaid (*ibid*.) argues, based on the outcome of a Moroccan study focusing on state television programme audiences, that:

> "The application of Stuart Hall's theory in the Moroccan context reveals some of the model's strengths as well some of its limitations. While the model provides rich analytical tools that help us understand the relationship between how television producers encode messages and how audiences decode them, this study illustrates the limits of Hall's theory application to non-western audiences. Hall's model is founded on the assumption that audiences are capable of decoding the television content and that the variations in the decoding process are the outcome of the audiences' reactions to the hegemonic message. The study found that this was not applicable to Moroccan audiences and that additional theoretical tools needed to be in place for an audience reception analysis to be complete and substantial" (2014, 284)

The recent examination of the Hall Encoding/Decoding Model in relation to its application to journalism in the digital era has shown that it needs to be refined further to keep up with latest communication developments pertaining to the phenomenon of online/social media platforms (Bødker, 2016). Bødker (*ibid*.) avers that while:

> "Hall's insistence on seeing the circulation of journalism within a broader circuit of culture is as important as ever, some of his main tenets and assumptions need to be rethought and supplemented in light of newer developments" (2016, 409)

Ross (2011) points out that although there seem to be "unresolved problems" regarding the encoding/decoding model, it remains useful in the current dispensation. Ross (*ibid*.) further asserts that:

"Despite the questions about the encoding/decoding model that was raised since the 1980s few attempts have been made to modify or replace it. One notable exception is Schrøder's multidimensional model which solves some of the problems with Hall's model (Schrøder 2000). It is a different kind of model than Hall's, Schrøder calls it dimensional while Hall's is a process model. Schrøder's model do not include the encoding part, it is only a reception model. He does not specify the process of interpretation but instead sets up six dimensions of reception that ought to be considered in reception analyses. Michelle's (2007) 'composite multidimensional model' is also a dimensional model rather than a process model. This is probably the most elaborated attempt to construct an alternative framework to the encoding/decoding model, drawing on both Hall, Schrøder and others. A few other reception theorists have tried to replace Hall's model not with another model but with another research approach. Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) proposed nothing less than another paradigm. They situated the encoding/decoding model within what they call The Incorporation/Resistance Paradigm, IRP, and argued that it has fulfilled an important function but by the time was hampered with some limitations. The paradigm is according to them succeeded by the Spectacle/Performance Paradigm, SPP, focusing more on processes of performance both in the media and among the audiences in their everyday life context. Media audiences are now more interactive and perform media input in their daily life. Atkinson and Dougherty (2006) take their point of departure from the Spectacle/Performance Paradigm, but argue that it does not take account of questions of power and ideology in a sufficient way. Instead they modify the paradigm into what they call the Resistance/Performance Paradigm, RPP. This paradigm can deal with oppositional groups like social justice movements. This is interesting because they are an unusual case dealing with 'oppositional' texts, i.e. the kind of texts that I argue cause trouble for the encoding/decoding model. Couldry (2004) proposes a somewhat similar approach, seeing media as 'practices', meaning that media research ought to be much broader than focusing on interpretation of specific texts" (2011, 10-11)

3.6 Conclusion

Hall's Encoding/Decoding Model remains a critical theoretical framework in audience reception studies. The model marked a turning point in reception theory – it demonstrated that the reader or receiver of text is not a passive participant who could just accept the intended meaning by the encoder without independently processing and interpreting it. The model has found resonance in South Africa and many other parts of the world as evidenced by information contained in this chapter. Notably, its application in the South African context resulted in a major victory for an anti-apartheid organisation against the repressive regime's military, which was intent on spreading falsehoods and running smear campaigns against those who dared to oppose the then segregationist system (Tomaselli, 2016). As part of the evolution of the audience reception studies over different points in history, the model has been improved on or refined by other scholars who put the hypothesis to practice. The model's criticism notwithstanding, it remains relevant to this day in perpetual endeavours aimed at understanding and contexualising readers' responses to coded texts. The first, second and third generations of audience reception studies are interlinked, interwoven and interdependent. Hall's seminal work is what has brought the reception theory to its current state. The audience reception studies are not cast in stone. The role of a reader in interpreting messages or texts remains a key area for exploration in the advancement of audience reception studies.

Hall's Encoding/Decoding Model will be employed in this study to unpack how both the producer (*South Coast Herald*) and the audience (readers) relate to media texts contained in the newspaper as the inquiry, in the main, seeks to establish the reception of the publication by diverse readers located in rural, township and suburban areas. The participants' responses will assist to determine their reading with regards to Hall's dominant (hegemonic), negotiated and oppositional readings. Likewise, the responses from the editor of the newspaper will assist the investigation to gain an understanding in relation to the newspaper's encoding or approach to news.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

Methodology is a systematic way employed to assist in resolving an academic research problem (Patel and Patel, 2019). Patel and Patel (*ibid*.) further explain that:

> "It may be understood as a science of studying how research is done scientifically. In it, we study the various steps that are generally adopted by a researcher in studying his research problem along with the logic behind them. It is necessary for the researcher to know, not only the research methods/techniques, but also the methodology" (2019, 48)

In this chapter, the research methodology – a qualitative approach, sampling and data collection techniques – utilised in the inquiry to solve the research questions will be explained, looked into and discussed in detail. The investigation employs **purposive sampling**, which has become synonymous with a qualitative research approach, especially when it comes to selecting participants for a specific phenomenon. The researcher is *au courant* with dynamics of the place and its residents/locals thereof, making it more appropriate to employ purposive sampling in pursuance of the answer(s) to the research questions. Furthermore, the resultant limitations related to the methodology and concomitant approaches/techniques will also be addressed.

4.2 Putting reception theory into practice – a qualitative approach

A study premised on audience reception theory is mostly better suited to employ a qualitative design approach to sufficiently address the objectives and resultant questions of the investigation (Makwambeni, 2013). Makwambeni (*ibid*.) further explains that: "Reception analysis is a qualitative methodology whose main purpose is to study the social production of meaning" (2013, 120-121). Mabweazara (2006) argues that reception/audience reception theory is inherently rooted in the qualitative research design wherein human interpretation of issues is involved. Mabweazara (*ibid*.) further asserts that:

> "The need to study the consumption of media or social behaviour within social context as underlined in qualitative research is fundamental to reception theory. The philosophical underpinnings of qualitative methodology are typically attributed to phenomenology. The point about the phenomenological position is that it takes the actor' s perspective as the empirical point of departure. In this light, qualitative studies start from the assumption that in studying humans, we are examining a creative

> process whereby people produce and maintain forms of life and society and systems of meaning and value. The creative activity is grounded in the ability to build cultural forms from symbols that express this will to live and assert meaning." (2006, 53)

Adjoteye *et al* (2021) aver that using a qualitative methodology is the most appropriate way to deal with reception theory studies. Furthermore, Adjoteye *et al* (*ibid*.) point out that audience reception analysis is unique in that it falls within the ambits of both humanities and social sciences. Adjoteye *et al* (*ibid*.) add:

> "The process of meaning creation requires qualitative descriptions. The nature of the meaning process requires a qualitative approach since meaning perforce cannot be quantified. The audience experience of the mass media is the general concern of reception analysis. The researcher can thus use a qualitative interview approach and a qualitative content analysis of the interview transcripts as a modality of reception analysis. The object of analysis will thus be the text that is derived from the interviews. The researcher can for instance use the reception of the news genre as the point of departure for the interviews. This is with a view of problematising the modus operandi of the qualitative interview that is generated for reception analysis. The validity of the interview process can in this way be underpinned. The interview method used for qualitative analysis and the interview guide and procedure and the units of analysis used should thus be qualitative." (2021, 1547)

Alase (2017) argues that phenomenology is a key element of a qualitative process in adequately understanding lived experiences. Alase (*ibid*.) posits that:

> "As a research methodology, qualitative research method infuses an added advantage to the exploratory capability that researchers need to explore and investigate their research studies. Qualitative methodology allows researchers to advance and apply their interpersonal and subjectivity skills to their research exploratory processes" (2017, 9)

Hesse-Biber (2010, 455) gives the contextual meaning of the approach to an academic inquiry:

> "A qualitative approach to research aims to understand how individuals make meaning of their social world. The social world is not something independent of individual perceptions but is created through social interactions of individuals with the world around them. One primary method of a qualitative approach involves values reflection and listening

> with the goal of empowering and giving voice to respondents' experiences. Most of all, a qualitative approach privileges the exploration of the process of human meaning making".

Ytre-Arne, 2011, contends that one of the most crucial advantages of the qualitative approach is that it offers or generates conditions which give rise to an in-depth analysis of information procured from study participants. McGuirk and O'Neill (2016, 3) explain:

> "Qualitative research seeks to understand the ways people experience events, places, and processes differently as part of a fluid reality, a reality constructed through multiple interpretations and filtered through multiple frames of reference and systems of meaning-making".

Creswell (2013) posits that the utilisation of the qualitative research becomes necessary when an issue or problem or phenomenon needs to be explored or studied in order to fully understand it or get to the bottom of it. In solving the problem, Creswell (*ibid*.) focuses on five qualitative approaches to an academic investigation or study. Creswell (*ibid*.) explains:

> "We need to identify our approach to qualitative inquiry in order to present it as a sophisticated study, to offer it as a specific type so that reviewers can properly assess it, and, for the beginning researcher, who can profit from having a writing structure to follow, to offer some way of organising ideas that can be grounded in the scholarly literature of qualitative research. My primary intent in this book is to examine five different approaches to qualitative inquiry – narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case studies – and put them side-by-side so that we can see their differences" (2013, 2 & 69)

Cresswell (*ibid*.) emphasises that a case study – as is the case with this inquiry focusing on the *South Coast Herald* and its reception in rural, township and suburban areas – is inherently qualitative in its approach to unpacking the phenomenon being probed by the researcher.

> "A hallmark of a good qualitative case study is that it presents an in-depth understanding of the case. In order to accomplish this, the researcher collects many forms of qualitative data, ranging from interviews, to observations, to documents, to audiovisual materials" (Cresswell, 2013, 98)

Sofaer (1999) explains that a qualitative study or inquiry applies specific and intentional sampling methods which will ensure results conform with this nature of study. Sofaer (*ibid*.) expounds as follows:

> "Qualitative research methods are valuable in providing rich descriptions of complex phenomena; tracking unique or unexpected events; illuminating the experience and interpretation of events by actors with widely differing stakes and roles; giving voice to those whose views are rarely heard; conducting initial explorations to develop theories and to generate and even test hypotheses; and moving toward explanations. Qualitative and quantitative methods can be complementary, used in sequence or in tandem. The best qualitative research is systematic and rigorous, and it seeks to reduce bias and error and to identify evidence that disconfirms initial or emergent hypotheses" (1999, 1101)

4.3 Sampling procedure/framework

4.3.1 Purposive sampling

This inquiry makes use of purposive sampling as a qualitative approach to study the phenomenon which is under the microscope with regards to the *South Coast Herald*'s diverse audience reception phenomenon. Creswell (2013, 166) asserts that, "The idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants or sites (or documents or visual material) that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question". Shaheen *et al* (2019, 25) point out that, "[The] Selection of participants in qualitative research depends on the purpose of the research and is found to rely heavily on the researcher's discretion".

Palys (2008) asseverates that purposive sampling is akin to a fulcrum or pivot for any qualitative research. Palys (*ibid*.) insists that:

> "Purposive sampling is virtually synonymous with qualitative research. For one thing, qualitative researchers are less often interested in asking about central tendency in a large group (e.g., 'What do most people in this population think about an issue?'), and much more interested in case study analysis - why particular people (or groups) feel particular ways, the processes by which these attitudes are constructed, and the role they play in dynamic processes within the organisation or group. Embedded in this is the idea that who a person is and where that person is located within a group is important, unlike other forms where people are viewed as essentially interchangeable" (2008, 697)

Ishak and Abu Bakar (2014, 23) give more insight into the sampling approach:

> "Purposive or judgmental sampling is the more acceptable sampling procedure for qualitative research, particularly, when it involves selecting participant for special situations. This sampling procedure uses the judgment of an expert in selecting cases or the researcher selects cases with a specific purpose in mind. Since generalisation (and not analytical generalisation) is not an issue, the selection of participants can be conducted non-random".

Purposive sampling is a non-probability technique. Etikan and Bala (2017, 215) define the concept thus, "Non-probability sampling is a sampling procedure that will not bid a basis for any opinion of probability that elements in the universe will have a chance to be included in the study sample". Furthermore, Acharya *et al* (2013, 332) explain:

> "Non-probability samples are those in which the probability that a subject is selected is unknown and results in selection bias in the study. They include the most commonly used convenience/purposive sampling, quota sampling, snowball sampling, etc".

Tongco (2007, 154) points out that, "Non-probability methods contribute more to internal validity than external validity. In purposive sampling, interpretation of results is limited to the population under study". Tongco (*ibid*.) stresses that purposive sampling produces reliable data, adding that, "Though recognised as a tool in the social sciences, purposive sampling is conceptually used in the natural sciences as well, such as in ecology" (2007, 154).

Singh and Masuku (2013, 128) contend that, "Purposive sampling provides biased estimate and it is not statistically recognised. This technique can be used only for some specific purposes". Rai and Thapa, 2015, accentuate that sample size of a purposive sampling approach will not be as big as with the probability-based techniques. Rai and Thapa (*ibid*.) elucidate:

> "The main goal of purposive sampling is to focus on particular characteristics of a population that are of interest, which will best enable you to answer your research questions. The sample being studied is not representative of the population, but for researchers pursuing qualitative or mixed methods research designs, this is not considered to be a weakness. Rather, it is a choice, the purpose of which varies depending on the type of purposing sampling technique that is used. Purposive sample is a non-representative subset of some larger population, and is constructed to serve a very specific need or purpose" (2015, 6)

Rai and Thapa (2015, 11) stress that, “Purposive method gives more leverage to the researcher to perform and bring out the best information possible from the samples and it depends on the knowledge, judgment and intellect of the researcher to a large extent”. Sharma, 2017, argues that this sampling technique is useful in according justified reason(s) to researchers to make particular generalisations about areas of their specific inquiry. Sharma (*ibid*.) adds:

> “Qualitative research designs can involve multiple phases, with each phase building on the previous one. In such instances, different types of sampling techniques may be required at each phase. Purposive sampling is useful in these instances because it provides a wide range of non-probability sampling techniques for the researcher to draw on. For example, critical case sampling may be used to investigate whether a phenomenon is worth investigating further, before adopting an expert sampling approach to examine specific issues further” (2017, 751)

For example, Sibona and Walczak (2012) applied a multi-phase/sampling strategy for their study on Twitter. Sibona and Walczak (*ibid*.) explain:

> “Purposive sampling (e.g. judgment and quota) is an approach where members conform to certain criteria for selection. In judgment sampling, a researcher may only want to survey those who meet a certain criteria. Judgment sampling is also appropriate in early stages of research where selection is made based on screening criteria” (2012, 3 511)

Tongco (2007, 155) posits that, “Purposive sampling is a practical and efficient tool when used properly, and can be just as effective as, and even more efficient than, random sampling”. Ishak and Abu Bakar (2014, 32) postulate that purposive sampling is useful for case studies in three situations whereby:

> “A researcher wants to select unique cases that are particularly informative, when a researcher would like to select members of a difficult-to-reach and specialised population, and when a researcher wants to identify particular types of cases for in-depth investigation”.

Obilor (2023) asserts that purposive sampling should be used when the study focuses on issues related to human behaviour. Obilor (*ibid*.) further argues that this technique “selects sample members from well-defined criteria based on researcher’s expertise” (2023, 1). Obilor (*ibid*.) further details this sampling technique:

> "The entire sampling process depends on the researcher's judgment and knowledge of the context. Purposive sampling is also known as subjective or judgement sampling. It is often used in qualitative research, where the researcher wants to gain detailed knowledge about a specific phenomenon rather than make statistical inferences, or where the population is very small and specific. An effective purposive sample must have clear criteria and rationale for inclusion. If done right, purposive sampling helps the researcher filter out irrelevant responses that do not fit into the context of the study. It also lowers the margin of error in data collection because the data sources are a close fit to the research context. Findings of a study based on purposive sampling can only be generalised to the sample from which the results are obtained and not to the entire population. Qualitative researchers use purpose sampling to recruit participants who can provide in-depth and detailed information about the phenomenon under investigation" (2023, 4&6)

In keeping with the intentional nature of purposive sampling, the study deliberately focuses on rural, suburban and township readers of the English medium regional newspaper, *South Coast Herald*. This academic investigation focuses on the identified areas of Margate, Gamalakhe and Murchison which are known to have regular readers of the newspaper, as listed in the publication's distribution list. They represent the type of diverse readers the study seeks to reach and interview with regards to their reception of the newspaper. As it is a non-probability sampling method, the insightful knowledge of the target population by the investigator/researcher is of critical importance. The qualifying factor for participation is that the participants must be readers of the newspapers and be residents of the designated areas – these are the defining characteristics/features of the study. All those who do not meet this condition are rejected. The initial design or plan was that a total of **30 participants** would be drawn from these three communities in an equitable manner of 10 from each selected as per the criteria for inclusion and exclusion.

November 27, 2020

Masters student seeks participants

Former journalist and communications specialist, Cedric Mboyisa, who is a Masters degree candidate at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, is conducting academic research into the relationship between regional newspapers and their diverse readers.

He is using the South Coast Herald as a case study to investigate the newspaper's approach to news and its reception in rural, township and suburban areas.

To this end, Mboyisa, who hails from Gcilima, is looking for a total of 30 participants to take part in the study by answering a questionnaire which will be sent to them via e-mail.

The targeted areas are Gamalakhe, Margate and Murchison. These three identified places will each have 10 participants.

They must be over 18 years of age and regular readers of the paper.

In terms of gender representation, each area must have a 50/50 split. Participation in the study will be on a voluntary basis.

Those who are interested can contact Mboyisa at 083 3802847 or email 220112162@stu.ukzn.ac.za.

Cedric Mboyisa of Gcilima.

A news article (above) was published by the *South Coast Herald* newspaper, informing the readers about the study and calling on those who are willing to be participants to contact the researcher via e-mail or cellphone number provided in the story. In addition, social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp were utilised to recruit participants, stressing that they would be doing so out of their own volition.

The inclusion and exclusion selection criteria stipulated that:

- Be residential in one of the three defined areas
- Be over 18 years of age
- Be a regular reader of the newspaper
- Must have been reading the newspaper for a minimum of one year
- No minors (under 18), no people with disabilities whose mental capacity is diminished or impaired, and no elderly people (vulnerable group) whose

mental state and sense of judgment has also been diminished due to old age.

4.3.2 Covid-19 lockdown imbroglio for data collection

Initially, the envisaged or ideal method of collection of data was through focus groups. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and concomitant lockdown, the inquiry had to utilise e-mail communication to dispatch questionnaires – which under normal circumstances, form an important part of focus group discussions – to study participants and the responses were also received via e-mail. Ramos (2021) points out that the pandemic had an adverse impact on academia, with students, researchers and scholars facing challenges pertaining to collecting data for their inquiries. This was due to limited or restricted in-person contact due to stringent lockdown measures enforced worldwide (Ramos, 2021).

To circumvent the Covid-19 lockdown, Wolf *et al* (2022) say researchers resorted to collecting data remotely. However, Wolf *et al* (*ibid*., online) lament the fact that, "The largest barrier to remote data collection was network connectivity. Even after successful recruitment, it was difficult to reliably reach participants for baseline data collection due to network connectivity". Michell (2021) posits that the Covid-19 lockdown ushered in an era with opportunities for researchers to do things differently such as employing technological means to conduct or collect data.

Adom *et al* (2020) embarked on a study to find alternative measures of collecting data during the pandemic. Adom *et al* (*ibid*.) conclude that:

> "Society relies on researchers to find proactive solutions to the challenges they constantly face. This is more needed in periods of pandemics such as the Covid-19. Therefore, researchers are expected to be productive at all times, especially when pandemics strike, to speedily offer insightful measures in overcoming its associated problems. The study concludes that researchers can collect essential data using text-based chats, telephone and video interviews, e-survey administration and the use of secondary data from print, audio, and video media to offer solutions to societal problems" (2020, 5)

It is not only qualitative researchers who were faced with unprecedented reality of the lockdown, but the whole educational system. Tang (2023) contends that – in the review of the impact the prolonged Covid-19 lockdown had on primary, secondary and tertiary education – the pandemic disrupted the actual education process at various levels, with varying distinctive degrees related to the negative effect. Tang (*ibid*.) states that:

> "The review shows that a shift of learning remotely or online has affected educators and learners, especially in relation to learning loss among

> learners, limitations in instructions, assessment and experiential learning in virtual environment, technology-related constraints, connectivity, learning resources and materials, besides psychosocial well-being. These impacts are exacerbated by inequalities in the distribution of resources as well as inequities attributed to socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity, learning ability and physical conditions. The recommendations for future educational practices comprise adaptability of curricula to embed independent and online learning options, concurrence of diverse learning modalities for seamless learning transitions and flexibility, flexible staffing and learning model, enhanced support, technological and curricular innovation with simplification and standardisation, as well as interactive, responsive and authentic virtual environment" (2021, 23)

With a specific reference to studies/inquiries conducted at tertiary level, Jowett (2020) advocates for collection of data online by qualitative researchers during times such the Covid-19 lockdown. Jowett (*ibid*., online) adds that, "For data generation, perhaps the most obvious is the use of video-calling (e.g. Skype/Zoom) or the use of text-based instant messaging (e.g. Whatsapp) to virtually replicate the face-to-face interview or focus group".

4.3.3 Focus group discussions

This brings us to the focus group discussion mechanism, which needs some detailed elucidation before focusing on the alternative of questionnaires which was employed for this investigation as a result of the two-year long lockdown in South Africa. Lunt and Livingstone (1996) draw attention to the use of focus groups in putting the encoding/decoding communications model to practice and assessing it. Lunt and Livingstone (*ibid*.) point to the resurgence of the technique in audience reception studies. Lunt and Livingstone (*ibid*., 8) add that:

> "His (Morley's) analysis of the focus group discussions following viewing of the current affairs television programme, *Nationwide*, revealed how audiences with difference socio-economic backgrounds make different 'readings' of the current affairs programme, thereby opening up the path for many other investigations into diversity in audience reception".

Makwambeni (2013, 127-128) points out that:

> "The research method has proven to be very useful in understanding the differentiated meanings that audiences negotiate from media texts. The main aim of employing the research technique in reception analysis is to make use of group interaction and dynamics to produce data and insights".

Makwambeni and Sibiya (2022, 9) explain that:

> "Focus group discussions allow participants to experience and speak freely to the content while also making associations with their lived experiences. Focus group discussions are the primary tool used in audience reception analysis to produce data".

Moriarty (2011, 10) seems to agree with the spontaneous nature of group deliberations, saying, "They may generate discussion on a greater number of topics than an individual interview and the discussion may be more naturalistic than that in a one-to-one interview". Creswell (2013, 168-169) explains the process within the realm of qualitative approach:

> "In qualitative interviews, the researcher conducts face-to-face interviews with participants, interviews participants by telephone, or engages in focus group interviews, with six to eight interviewees in each group. These interviews involve unstructured and generally open-ended questions that are few in number and intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants".

Gill *et al* (2008, 293) explain that "Focus groups are used for generating information on collective views, and the meanings that lie behind those views". Furthermore, according to Gill *et al* (*ibid*.), "Focus groups were first used as a research method in market research, originating in the 1940s in the work of the Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia University" (2008, 293). Gibbs (1997) submits that one of the advantages of focus groups is to garner insight into people's understanding of events and how they are prone to influence by others in a group environment. Gibbs (*ibid*.) explains the focus group concept thus:

> "The main purpose of focus group research is to draw upon respondents' attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences and reactions in a way in which would not be feasible using other methods, for example observation, one-to-one interviewing, or questionnaire surveys. These attitudes, feelings and beliefs may be partially independent of a group or its social setting, but are more likely to be revealed via the interviews, which aim to obtain individual attitudes, beliefs and feelings, focus groups elicit a multiplicity of views and emotional processes within a group context" (1997, 2)

McLafferty (2004) argues that the focus group strategy yields rich data for a qualitative inquiry. Rabiee (2004, 656) stresses the importance of time in this information and data gathering exercise in that, "Each group interview usually lasts approximately 1-2h, based on the complexity of the topic under investigation. It is, therefore, ethical and good practice to warn the participants

about their time commitment". Khan *et al* (1991) posit that focus groups are crucial in answering questions related to how and why in an attempt to get to the bottom of a particular phenomenon or issue. Khan *et al* (*ibid*.) add that:

> "Generally, the participants are chosen purposively and it is recommended that they should be homogeneous with respect to characteristics which might otherwise impede the free flow of discussion. It is also considered desirable that the participants should not know each other or the subject of the discussion in advance. Focus group discussions have considerable potential to be used as a complementary approach to enrich social and behavioural research" (1991, 145&148)

Lunt and Livingstone, 1996, state that the focus group mechanism is usually employed in the field of social sciences where the inquiry seeks to establish respondents' processes of deriving meanings and understandings of particular issues. Lunt and Livingstone (*ibid*.) further argue that:

> "Focus groups can reveal underlying cognitive or ideological premises which structure arguments, the ways in which various discoursers rooted in particular contexts and given experiences are brough to bear on interpretations, the discursive construction of social identities, and so forth" (1996, 18)

Ho (2006, 05.2) is of the considered view that "The hallmark of focus group interviews is the explicit use of group interaction as data to explore insights that would otherwise remain hidden". Basch (1987, 414) emphasises that, "The focus group interview is a qualitative research technique used to obtain data about feelings and opinion of small groups of participants about a given problem, experience, service or other phenomenon". Basch (*ibid*.) espouses the advantages of focus group discussions as follows:

> "Focus groups are relatively easy to use for learning about respondent subgroup's ideas and opinions. The researcher has the ability to assemble groups according to stratification criteria (e.g., sex, age, educational level, etc,) and he or she can obtain a permanent record of verbal and non-verbal communications and group dynamics by using audio and audio-visual recording equipment and transcripts. Synergism producing a wide range of information and potentially uncovering important understandings serendipitously is a key asset; there is a potential for groups to provide a stimulating and secure setting to express ideas" (1987, 433)

Hyde *et al* (2005, 2593) argue that, "Focus groups have the potential to allow fears, vulnerabilities and uncertainties to come to the surface, and to become a

dominant perspective at times within the focus group". Heary and Hennessy (2002) point out that focus group discussions have the capacity to elicit large amounts of data within a short period of time. Doody *et al* (2013, 19) sum up focus group discussions as follows:

> "Focus groups generate distinct data through group interaction and explore topics that may not be easy to explore in one-to-one interviews. A fundamental condition for their use is that they must suit the purpose of the research. Researchers can derive many benefits from using focus groups. One is that focus groups are an economical, fast and efficient method of obtaining data from multiple participants, and potentially increasing the overall number of participants in a qualitative study. Focus groups should include enough participants to yield diversity in the information generated, yet should not be too large because this can create an environment where participants do not feel comfortable sharing their thoughts, opinions, beliefs and experiences".

In terms of size, Guest *et al* (2017) argue that there are few studies which focus on establishing the acceptable number of focus groups for an academic investigation. Guest *et al* (*ibid*.) conducted a thematic analysis, which is mostly a result of a qualitative methodology, of 40 focus groups, and their findings were that two to three focus groups were all able to produce more than 80% of all themes while 90% of all themes could be discovered within three to six focus groups.

Gill *et al* (2008, 293) stress that:

> "Group size is an important consideration in focus group research. The optimum size for a focus group is six to eight participants (excluding researchers), but focus groups can work successfully with as few as three and as many as 14 participants."

Basch (1987, 413-414) asserts that the size of the group is ordinarily between 6 to 12 respondents while pointing out that "though this is flexible and productive groups can be conducted with fewer or more participants". Gibbs (1997, 4) states that, "The recommended number of people per group is usually six to ten (MacIntosh 1993), but some researchers have used up to fifteen people (Goss & Leinbach 1996) or as few as four (Kitzinger 1995)".

4.3.4 Questionnaires and collection of primary data

As stated earlier, the inquiry had intended to utilise focus group discussions with the readers of the *South Coast Herald* in the selected areas of Margate,

Gamalakhe and Murchison. However, the deadly Covid-19 pandemic precipitated a hard lockdown, which started on 27 March 2020, as part of the government's efforts aimed at arresting the spread of the virus. Lebuso (2022) states that the country was in lockdown for a period of two years.

The prolonged lockdown period necessitated a change of tact for the study pertaining to the data collection technique. It must be pointed out that questionnaires are a crucial integral part of focus groups as the very group discussions are premised on questions by the moderator posed to participants. Heary and Hennessy (2002, 50) note that:

> "Focus groups have numerous applications in the development and adaptation of questionnaires. For example, they can be used to determine respondents' ideas regarding the content of the questionnaire, the language used, and the question and response format. This could include the adaptation of questionnaires from one cultural setting to another".

Hence, the utilisation of questionnaires in this regard for the readers and the editor of the newspapers to assist in systematically finding answers to research objectives and questions in addressing the phenomenon of suburban, township and rural readers' reception of the *South Coast Herald*, a popular English medium regional newspaper in Port Shepstone, KwaZulu-Natal.

Akbayrak (2000) mentions social science and education researchers as one of those who make use of questionnaires in their inquiries when probing certain phenomena in their respective fields of specialisation. The questionnaire method of data collection has its roots in the late 1880s and was invented by Sir Francis Galton (Roopa and Rani, 2012). Roopa and Rani (*ibid*.) add that "When properly constructed and responsibly administered, questionnaires become a vital instrument by which statements can be made about specific groups or people or entire populations" (2012, 273). Singh (2017, 790) propounds that, "Questionnaires are the most commonly used data collection methods in applied research for evaluation or assessment of inputs".

Rathi and Ronald (2022, 7697) assert that, "The questionnaire is a highly used tool of data collection as compared to interview and observation in empirical research". Dalati and Gomez (2018) stress that questionnaires serve as an important tool or one of acceptable ways to collect primary data for a study or an inquiry, and that the questionnaire design is also of critical importance. Mathers *et al* (2007, 21) amplify Dalati and Gomezi's (2018) assertion regarding the questionnaire design when they emphasise that:

> "Questionnaires can only produce valid and meaningful results if the questions are clear and precise and if they are asked consistently across all respondents. Careful consideration therefore needs to be given to the design of the questionnaire".

Young (2016, 4-5) explain when it is appropriate to utilise questionnaires thus:

> "Questionnaires are very frequently used for determining things like:
>
> - reporting participants' background and demographic information (age, biological sex, nationality, income); reporting behaviours (what people did, or would do, in response to certain cues or stimuli, for example);
> - expressing attitudes (towards a cultural group other than their own, for example);
> - reporting opinions (about the desirability of multiculturalism or other social phenomena);
> - for determining their factual knowledge about something (what proportion of a country's population are immigrants, for example;
> - for determining psychometric properties (such as the degree of extroversion a person exhibits);
> - for determining their future intentions or aspiration (about whether they will, or would like to, have contact with particular groups of people, for example)."

Cleave (2023) asserts that questionnaires are utilised as a primary tool to extract or gather data from a particular audience when researchers are seeking to unpack or get answers related to a certain phenomenon. Mcleod (2023, online) states that:

> "Questionnaires can be an effective means of measuring the behaviour, attitudes, preferences, opinions and intentions of relatively large numbers of subjects more cheaply and quickly than other methods. Often a questionnaire uses both open and closed questions to collect data. This is beneficial as it means both qualitative and quantitative data can be obtained".

The ability to yield both qualitative and quantitative data is the provision of a comprehensive and insightful understanding of the phenomenon which is the subject of the inquiry (Lindemann, 2023). McGuirk and O'Neill (2016) also

draw attention to the questionnaire's capacity to produce both qualitative and quantitative data for researchers.

However, McGuirk and O'Neill (*ibid*.) add that:

> "In seeking qualitative data, questionnaires aim not just at determining attitudes and opinions but at identifying and classifying the logic of different sets of responses, at seeking patterns or commonality or divergence in responses, and at exploring how they relate to concepts, structures, and processes that shape social life. There are ways of constructing and delivering effective questionnaires that are largely qualitative in their aspirations, being mindful of the possibility of acquiring deep analytical understandings of social behaviours through careful collection of textual materials," (2016, 21-22)

Landsheer and Boeije (2008) point out the existing knowledge or insight of the researcher is important when designing a questionnaire. Wang *et al* (2023) accentuate the importance of open-ended questions to bring about qualitative data for researchers. Taherdoost (2016) emphasises that a good questionnaire can yield credible data for researchers. Taherdoost (*ibid*., 38) adds that:

> "In order to facilitate the collection of accurate information, the researcher needs to take into account two key issues. First, an appropriate set of questions needs to be included within the main body of the questionnaire. Second, the questionnaire must be aimed at the right target audience. A poorly selected sample can lead not only to a set of biased results, but also to a high non-response rate".

Phellas *et al* (2011, 189) list several ways, including e-mail, in which questionnaires can reach respondents, while stressing that "More people have email than have full Internet access. You may want to send email questionnaires only to people who expect to get email from you". With regards to this inquiry, a total of 30 participants from Margate, Gamalakhe and Murchison were e-mailed questionnaires after agreeing to take part in the study. A total of 16 questions, mainly open-ended in design/nature were dispatched to each of the 30 participants. Each identified area was allocated a total of 10 participants, making it an envisaged combined total of 30 respondents from the three areas. There was a 100% (10/10) response rate from Gamalakhe while Margate stands at 90% (9/10) and six out of 10 (60%) of Murchison's participants returned responses. Overall, this puts the response rate at 83.3% (25/30). A questionnaire – comprising 19 questions – was sent to the Editor of the *South Coast Herald*, David Rush, and he furnished the researcher with answers to all the inquiry questions.

4.4 Target population

The target population comprises three diverse areas which are Margate, Gamalakhe and Murchison which fall under the Ray Nkonyeni Municipality, which in turn is under the jurisdiction of Ugu District Municipality on the South Coast of KwaZulu-Natal. The study will reflect these varying groups. The main objective of the study is to determine the readers' reception of the *South Coast Herald*, with a specific focus on rural, township and suburban communities. The three identified areas will aid the investigation in terms of achieving this objective. The diverse population is composed of a suburb (Margate), township (Gamalakhe) and a rural village (Murchison). The research is not designed to focus on race, but looks at heterogeneous readers based on their location, class, background and other clearly defined selection criteria requirements.

Margate is a seaside and multiracial town, which is one of the country's preferred holiday destinations, especially during the festive season or school holidays. The town is mainly made up of Ward 6, which has a total population of 9 697 of which 55% is female and 45% male, with the racial breakdown of African 67%, White 28%, Indian and Coloured at 2% each (Stats SA, 2016). Stats SA (*ibid*.) reveals that young people – ages 1-36 years are in the majority – dominate the population stakes while the elderly population is also strongly represented. The area has bonded houses on municipal land. Residents include the middle class and the rich, both black and white population, whose mode of transportation is mainly their own cars. There are two multiracial schools, a primary and high school, and a public library. There is a private hospital, owned by Netcare, and number of doctors' practices in the area. It boasts two shopping malls and a small airport which recently received a cash injection of R10 million to be utilised for upgrades and renovations. It has several supermarkets, restaurants and other businesses. It provides a number of job opportunities for local people from surrounding rural areas. It also has a taxi rank which is used by people from surrounding rural villages to travel to and from Margate town, either for work/business purposes or leisure.

Conversely, Murchison is a rural place, which is under traditional authority whose residents are a mix of the poor, the working class, low-income earners, and the emerging middle class. The population is entirely black, mainly Africans, very few Indians and immigrants from Pakistan. This area is made up of wards 22 and 23. Stats SA (2016) indicates that the total population is 15 317 with females dominating in terms of numbers in both wards, with gender splits of 55%-45% and 52%-48% respectively. In addition, Stats SA (2016) reveals that both wards have two similar dominant population groups: 1-14 years and 14-36 years. Houses are not bonded as they are built on traditional/communal land. While some residents have their own cars, the majority still use taxis and buses. There are still gravel roads in this part of the world and there are no

streetlights in some areas. It is one of those KwaZulu-Natal villages which experienced political violence in the early 1990s. Several locals are employed by Idwala Carbonates and NPC factories whose operations are based in the area. There is a public hospital, nine schools, three high schools and six primary schools, and several tuckshops.

Gamalakhe is the only township on the South Coast. It mainly comprises Ward 5 whose total population is 9 082, with the male and female split being 45% and 55% respectively (Stats SA, 2016). The population is entirely black and there are 1 261 households. There exists the dominance of the population group between 0 and 40 years, and this population group is composed of youths who are economically active and children of school-going age (Stats SA, 2016). Most residents are middle income earners living mostly in bonded houses. The township is well-developed with a total of eight schools (four secondary schools and four primary schools), a TVET college, library, youth centre and a football stadium. The township's clinic has been recently upgraded to a fully-fledged public hospital and there are several private doctors' rooms. In terms of economic status of the township, several businesses including Pep, Boxer, Shoprite Checkers, Cashbuild, KFC and Total Petrol Station operate in the area.

4.5 Limitations

When listing disadvantages of purposive sampling, Rai and Thapa (2015) point out issues pertaining to non-probability, lack of thorough knowledge of the population by researchers and their inherent bias. However, Basch (1987, 412) argues that, "Small group discussion and group process has played a central role in behavioural science". Shaheen *et al* (2019, 26) point out that:

> "Qualitative inquiry has no stringent rules regarding the sample size. It depends on the purpose of the research, what is at stake, what is useful, what is credible, and what is the line of research that can be undertaken within the timeframe and use the resources at hand".

Mohsin (2016) explains that this sampling technique does not have to apply to the whole population as it only chooses participants relevant to the criteria by the researcher. The inquiry – focusing on the regional newspaper and its reception in rural, suburban and township areas – is a case study intended to unpack this phenomenon linked to this specific geographical area. In addition, it seeks to establish whether the newspaper caters sufficiently for its diverse readers. The researcher is *au fait* with the dynamics of the area, hence the utilisation of purposive sampling in an endeavour to objectively investigate the phenomenon. Furthermore, the questionnaire method of collecting data, instead

of focus group discussions, as initially envisaged, assists the inquiry to mitigate drawbacks or disadvantages or address issues of perceived or conformation bias associated with focus group discussions. In giving some distinguishing features of the questionnaire strategy, Rathi and Ronald (2022, 7698) state that:

> "Perceptions, views and opinions of the researcher/interviewer do not get reflected in the respondent's responses. In the interview, the response may be prompted by the interviewer/researcher. In the interview and observation tool of data collection, there is a possibility of reflection of the opinion, perception or biases of the researcher/interviewer. In this sense, the data collected through the questionnaire tool is more reliable".

4.6 Conclusion

Drury *et al* (2010, 23) point out that, "Qualitative data are necessary to develop an accurate understanding of categories, processes, relationships and perceptions, and are particularly important in a cross-cultural context". The qualitative approach employed by the researcher seeks to unravel the phenomenon which is the central focus of the inquiry. Purposive sampling has been found to be at the very heart of the qualitative study. The literature consulted in this chapter has shown, beyond any scintilla of doubt that, by nature, the qualitative methodology is intrinsically linked to the judgmental sampling technique. As stated earlier, focus groups were originally intended to be used to collect data. However, due to the prolonged Covid-19 lockdown, which restricted human contact in groups and large crowds, the inquiry opted for questionnaires as a means of data collection. The questions were mainly open-ended, thereby placing the research firmly in the domain of qualitative study. Consequently, in analysing the resultant data, thematic analysis will be applied to assist in finding answers and possible solutions to the research questions. As Alhojailan (2012, 10) points out:

> "Thematic Analysis is considered the most appropriate for any study that seeks to discover using interpretations. It provides a systematic element to data analysis. It allows the researcher to associate an analysis of the frequency of a theme with one of the whole content. This will confer accuracy and intricacy and enhance the research's whole meaning. Thematic Analysis allows the researcher to determine precisely the relationships between concepts and compare them with the replicated data".

Chapter 5: Data Analysis

5.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to make sense of the data collected through a clearly delineated process which has been explained in detail in the preceding chapter. The consequent data will now be scrutinised and interpreted to find meaning(s) to participants' responses to the questionnaires. The reader questionnaire comprised 16 questions. In addition, responses to 19 questions from the editor of the regional newspaper, the *South Coast Herald*, will be subjected to an examination. This chapter will be crucial in shedding light on the Stuart Hall Encoding/Decoding Communication Model in practice and in terms of assisting with finding answers pertaining to readings or the decoding process associated with the readers in making meanings of the messages contained in the newspaper. Similarly, the editor's responses will be useful in understanding the encoding process as the producer of texts/messages transmitted to readers/audience. In seeking to achieve a thorough analysis and understanding of the phenomenon in question, Thematic Analysis (TA) will be utilised to establish or determine meaning(s) of the predominantly qualitative data gathered – through mainly open-ended questionnaires – dispatched to the editor of the newspaper, and readers of the publication from rural, township and suburban areas on the South Coast of KwaZulu-Natal.

In conducting thematic analysis to find answers to the research questions, the Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach will be deployed and applied to each identified location/place individually to generate themes which are exclusive to the readers of that area. Upon completion of this targeted thematic analysis, the resultant themes will be juxtaposed in a bid to paint a bigger picture and emerge with overall consolidated themes. Similarly, the answers from the editor will be subjected to the clearly delineated six-step process of generating themes from raw data in a systematic approach which includes coding.

5.2 Qualitative data analysis

Flick (2014) avers that data analysis is a crucial element of any qualitative research/ inquiry. Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2007, 562) expand that, "One of the

most important steps in the research process is analysis of data". Flick (*ibid*.) defines qualitative data analysis thus:

> "Qualitative data analysis is the classification and interpretation of linguistic (or visual) material to make statements about implicit and explicit dimensions and structures of meaning-making in the material and what is represented in it. Meaning-making can refer to subjective or social meanings. Qualitative data analysis also is applied to discover and describe issues in the field or structures and processes in routines and practices. Often, qualitative data analysis combines approaches of a rough analysis of the material (overviews, condensation, summaries) with approaches of a detailed analysis (elaboration of categories, hermeneutic interpretations or identified structures). The final aim is often to arrive at generalisable statements by comparing various materials or various texts or several cases" (2014,5)

Dey (1993, 31) emphasises that, "The core of qualitative analysis lies in these related processes of describing phenomena, classifying it, and seeing how our concepts interconnect". Ngulube (2015, 20) postulates that, "Qualitative data analysis involves the identification, examination, comparison and interpretation of patterns and themes". Male (2016) argues that this sort of analysis in often employed in inquiries which deal with phenomena aimed at finding meaning or an in-depth understanding thereof. Rogers and Goodrick (2010) also state that qualitative data analysis, unlike quantitative analysis, goes beyond numbers or figures, and unpacks issues with regards to meanings, thereby allowing for a deeper understanding of phenomena.

Dey (*ibid*.) elucidates as follows:

> "In qualitative analysis, there is a strong emphasis on describing the world as it is perceived by different observers. For some, this is the hallmark of the qualitative approach, distinguishing it from supposedly 'positivist' social science. Setting aside this ideological debate about 'legitimate' methods, we can certainly acknowledge that qualitative analysis is usually concerned with how actors define situations, and explain the motives which govern their actions. Though as researchers we may develop our

> own concepts for analysing these actions, we want to ensure that this relates to intentions of the actors involved" (1991, 37)

Graue (2015, 12) explains that, "There are four key steps most qualitative data analysis approaches have in common: data collection, data reduction, data displays and conclusion drawing/verification". Jacelon and O'Dell (2005) stress that the researcher's ability to analyse data properly is essential for the inquiry's credibility. Jacelon and O'Dell (*ibid*.) add that, "The data analysis phase of a qualitative study is often prolonged and extends long after the data collection has been completed" (2005, 220). Maguire and Delahunt (2017, 3351) argue that:

> "Data analysis is central to credible qualitative research. Indeed, the qualitative researcher is often described as the research instrument insofar as his or her ability to understand, describe and interpret experiences and perceptions is key to uncovering meaning in particular circumstances and contexts. While much has been written about qualitative analysis from a theoretical perspective, we noticed that often novice, and even more experienced researchers, grapple with the 'how' of qualitative analysis".

De Casterle´ *et al* (2012) points out that conducting qualitative data analysis is not a straightforward process or not an easy task. De Casterle´ *et al* (*ibid*.) add that:

> "Qualitative data analysis is very complex, and any description of the practical aspects of the analysis process runs the risk of oversimplification. There is no one right way to work with qualitative data" (2012, 2).

Thorne (2000, 68) concurs with De Casterle´ *et al* (2012), saying, "Unquestionably, data analysis is the most complex and mysterious of all of the phases of a qualitative project, and the one that receives the least thoughtful discussion in the literature". Thorne (*ibid*.) adds that interpretations play a crucial role in trying to understand phenomena in qualitative inquiries, hence deployment of particular data analysis techniques in such academic investigations.

Smith and Firth (2011, 3) observe that:

> "Despite the diversity of qualitative methods, data is often obtained through participant interviews. Methods for undertaking qualitative data analysis can be divided into three categories: Socio-linguistic methods that explore the use and meaning of language such as discourse and conversation analysis; Methods that focus on developing theory, typified by grounded theory; Methods that describe and interpret participants' views such as content and thematic analysis".

In terms of the actual analysis process, Bradley *et al* (2007, 1760) contend that:

> "There is no singularly appropriate way to conduct qualitative data analysis, although there is general agreement that analysis is an ongoing, iterative process that begins in the early stages of data collection and continues throughout the study".

Chenail (2012, 248) explains what constitutes a thorough quantitative data analysis process:

> "In the simplest terms, QDA (qualitative data analysis) involves collecting quality talk, observations, and/or documents, and being able to talk about the talk, make observations about the observations, and/or document the documents along with the ability to talk about the talk about the talk, make observations about the observations about the observations, and/or document the documents about the documents. From this perspective QDA can be understood as both the analysis of the data and the analysis of the analysis of the data. Because of this study within a study structure, you must be able to manage your study, your study of your study, and yourself very well and you must also be able to re-present both processes efficiently and effectively in your presentations and publications".

Chenail (*ibid*.) cautions that merely paraphrasing what the respondents say or presenting how often participants refer to an issue is not tantamount to qualitative data analysis, but that "Qualitative data analysis to be QDA must involve the results from an abstracting process that allows the analyst to see something in terms of a qualitative something else" (2012, 250). Baptiste (2001, 1) asserts that, "All QDA (regardless of methodological or disciplinary

orientation) comprise four interrelated phases: defining the analysis, classifying data, making connections between data, and conveying the message(s)".

Liamputtong (2009) argues that qualitative data analysis should start at the very beginning of the inquiry, and that coding should be the first step in this approach to making sense of data collected from participants or respondents. Froggatt (2001, 434) describes coding in the following paragraph:

> "Coding is a fundamental process within qualitative data analysis. Coding is a generic term that entails the assigning of labels to bits of data, so all text under that label can be retrieved and brought together. The data can then be simplified by coding. Linking the codes to the text can be undertaken in a variety of ways: codes may be written in the margin of the text; different coloured pens can mark text assigned to different codes; or text can be physically cut up and placed in folders, each representing a different code".

St. Pierre and Jackson (2014, 716) explain:

> "To code data, then, one must assume that words textualised in interview transcripts and field notes are not only data but also brute data that can be broken apart and decontextualised by coding — even using existing coding schemes from others' research projects".

Lacey and Luff (2007) point out that there are various crucial stages involved in the qualitative data analysis process including transcription, organisation of data, familiarisation with collected data, coding and building/developing themes, which often result from codes.

Seers (2012, 2) unpacks the link between codes and themes:

> "A first step is to sort and organise the data, by coding it in some way. For example, you could read through a transcript, and identify that in one paragraph a patient is talking about two things; first is fear of surgery and second is fear of unrelieved pain. The codes for this paragraph could be 'fear of surgery' and 'fear of pain'. In other areas of the transcript fear may arise again, and perhaps these codes will be merged into a category

> titled ‘fear’. Other concerns may emerge in this and other transcripts and perhaps best be represented by the theme ‘lack of control’. Themes are thus more abstract concepts, reflecting your interpretation of patterns across your data. So from codes, categories can be formed, and from categories, more encompassing themes are developed to describe the data in a form which summarises it, yet retains the richness, depth and context of the original data”.

Basit (2003) stresses that coding is a critical step in analysing data and trying to make sense of it in a systematic manner through a qualitative inquiry. Basit (*ibid*., 152) adds that, “What coding does, above all, is to allow the researcher to communicate and connect with the data to facilitate the comprehension of the emerging phenomena and to generate theory grounded in the data”.

Froggatt (*ibid*.) explains the importance of proper analysis:

> “Just as qualitative research assumes that reality is constructed, so the analysis of qualitative data is itself a socially constructed process. It is therefore important to articulate how meaning has been arrived at, so that judgements can be made about its worth in the context of the study and its underlying theoretical perspective,” (2001, 436)

5.3 Thematic analysis

Herzog *et al* (2019, 1) posit that, “Thematic analysis (TA) is a popular and foundational method of analysing qualitative policy data”. Alhojailan (2012, 10) explains that thematic analysis applies to qualitative data wherein “It is used to analyse classifications and present themes (patterns) that relate to the data”. Dawadi (2020, 62) provides further clarity on the technique “Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method that researchers use to systematically organise and analyse complex data sets”. In accentuating the qualitative nature of the thematic analysis process, Joffe and Yardley (2004, 56) argue that this mechanism “pays greater attention to the qualitative aspects of the material analysed”. Javadi and Zarea (2016, 39) state that:

> “TA is an approach for extraction of meanings and concepts from data and includes pinpointing, examining, and recording patterns or themes.

> TA not only provides a flexible method of data analysis in qualitative research, it establishes the more systematic and explicit form of it without threatening depth of analysis. Overall, considering the advantages and limitations of this method, the researcher decides whether to employ this method or not".

Herzog *et al* (*ibid*., 1) postulate that, pertaining to thematic analysis:

> "It is concerned with the identification and analysis of patterns of meaning (themes) and constitutes a widely applicable, cost-effective and flexible tool for exploratory research. More generally, it constitutes a cornerstone of qualitative data analysis."

Clarke and Braun (2016, 1) proffer the following explanation or perspective regarding the concept of thematic analysis:

> "Thematic analysis (TA) is a method for identifying, analysing and interpreting patterns of meaning ('themes') within qualitative data. TA is unusual in the canon of qualitative analytic approaches, because it offers a method - a tool or technique, unbounded by theoretical commitments – rather than a methodology (a theoretically informed, and confined, framework for research). This does not mean that TA is atheoretical, or, as is often assumed, realist or essentialist. Rather TA can be applied across a range of theoretical frameworks and indeed research paradigms."

With regards to the actual process of deriving themes, Smith and Firth (2011, 3) point out that:

> "Generating themes from data is a common feature of qualitative methods and a widely used analytical method. Thematic analysis is an interpretive process, whereby data is systematically searched to identify patterns within the data in order to provide an illuminating description of the phenomenon".

Bradley *et al* (2007, 1766) explain the development of themes from data thus:

> "Themes are general propositions that emerge from diverse and detail-rich experiences of participants and provide recurrent and unifying ideas regarding the subject of inquiry. Themes typically evolve not only from the conceptual codes and subcodes as in the case of taxonomy but also from the relationship codes, which tag data that link concepts to each other".

Friese *et al* (2018, 8-9) offer the following detailed description related to the occurrence of sequence of processes which ultimately culminate in the formation of a theme:

> "It is an outcome of coding, but is not represented by a single code directly. Codes help in organising, structuring, and retrieving data and they support the identification of themes, but rarely is a code also a theme. Prevalence in the data, i.e. frequency of occurrence within or across document is not necessarily a criterion for developing a theme. Essential is the researcher's assessment of whether or not the theme captures something important in relation to the overall research question. This is guided by the overall aim of the analysis, which in turn influences the level at which themes are identified".

Braun and Clark (2006, 28) assert that, "A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set". Furthermore, Braun and Clark (2022) argue that thematic analysis is the commonly employed mechanism to analyse data in psychology. However, Terry *et al* (2017, 29) point out that the utilisation of thematic analysis extends beyond psychology, noting that:

> "TA has been used in almost every conceivable field of scholarship in the social and health sciences, and suits any subdiscipline and area where general qualitative research questions about experience, understanding, social processes, and human practices and behaviour make sense".

Braun and Clark (*ibid*.) advocate for the utilisation of thematic analysis beyond parameters of psychology. Braun and Clark (*ibid*., 3) add that:

> "What distinguishes TA from most other qualitative analytic approaches — such as grounded theory and narrative analysis— is that it is more akin

> to a method (a transtheoretical tool or technique) than a methodology (a theoretically informed framework for research)".

Lochmiller (2021, 2029) avers that, in relation to thematic analysis, "The method is principally concerned with the identification of patterns which are then reported as researcher-generated themes". Finlay (2021) argues that thematic analysis can be conducted in numerous ways. Finlay (*ibid*.) adds:

> "Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method that aims to identify patterns and meanings within data. Thematic analyses can take multiple forms, some of them systematic, others intuitive; some more explicitly scientific, others creatively artful. The ways in which researchers engage the process and write up themes also vary considerably. In many ways, 'good' thematic analysis depends on the aims and context of the research and the specific methodology adopted. What type of thematic analysis is engaged depends on the epistemological positioning of the research/researcher" (2021, 103)

Braun and Clarke (2006) identify six phases which are key in conducting thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (*ibid*., 87-93) classify these phases in a sequential manner as "familiarising yourself with your data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report".

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarising yourself with your data	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code
3. Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2),

	generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme
6. Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Phases of Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clark, 2006)

Citing Braun and Clarke (2006; Clarke and Braun, 2013), Finlay (*ibid*., 107) also refers to the critical significance of the aforementioned six essential steps. The author also adds that:

> "The flexible procedures set out by Braun and Clarke (2006; Clarke and Braun, 2013) can be adapted for a range of theoretical frameworks, whether those requiring more scientific descriptive coding or those embracing artful interpretive modes. More recently, Braun and Clarke (2019a, 2019b, 2021) have extended and elaborated their method in an effort to distinguish their explicitly constructivist approach from approaches employing different variants of thematic coding procedures. The important element Braun and Clarke have added to the process is that of reflexivity. Reflexivity can be defined as researcher's critical self-awareness: the process by which they examine understandings of self/other and analyse the ways in which these preconceptions influence and impact the research (Finlay, 2016). Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) thus interrogates, and makes transparent, the researcher's role in knowledge production" (2021,107)

Caulfield (2019) stresses that following the above prescribed six-step process when conducting thematic analysis can assist the researcher to avoid falling into the trap of confirmation bias, which often happens in an inadvertent manner. Herzog *et al* (2019, 2) emphasises that thematic analysis is a fundamental

technique in a qualitative inquiry utilised "for analysing experiences, perceptions and understandings". Dawadi (2020, 63) sheds light on how researchers can approach thematic analysis:

> "Thematic analysis can be made in both deductive (top-down) and inductive (bottom-up) way (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the inductive analysis, the data is coded without trying to fit the themes into a pre-existing coding frame or the researcher's pre-conceptions about the research (Brown & Clark, 2006). So, themes emerge through the data itself without paying attention to the themes included in other studies. Themes are strongly linked to the data instead of the researcher's theoretical interest in the topic. On the other hand, the deductive approach is explicitly researcher-driven allowing the researchers to analyse the data in relation to their theoretical interest in the issues being investigated (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher using this approach usually begins the analysis with the themes that are identified by the researcher through a literature review".

Crosley, 2021, states that inductive – which she terms "without any preconceptions" – and deductive – which she terms "with pre-determined set of codes" – are main approaches to conducting thematic analysis. Furthermore, Caulfield (*ibid*.) points out that also inherent to thematic analysis are semantic and latent approaches. Javadi and Zarea (*ibid*., 35-36) unpacks the semantic approach:

> "In semantic approach the themes are detected at "the surface or semantic appearance" and the researcher is not after something beyond what the participant has said or what is written in the text. This is the simplest and the most evident type of theme. In this method the data are explained and it is simply for showing patterns that exist in the data and are organised in the forms of content, summarised or interpreted meanings".

Javadi and Zarea (*ibid*.) add that the distinct feature of the latent approach is that it goes beyond the face-value tack embedded in the semantic approach, but delves deeper into the responses to establish what actually informs them and what this says about the respondents or participants in the inquiry in relation to the research questions. Braun and Clark (2006, 84) explain in detail:

> "A thematic analysis at the latent level goes beyond the semantic content of the data, and starts to identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualisations – and ideologies – that are theorised as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data. If we imagine our data three-dimensionally as an uneven blob of jelly, the semantic approach would seek to describe the surface of the jelly, its form and meaning, while the latent approach would seek to identify the features that gave it that particular form and meaning. Thus, for latent thematic analysis, the development of the themes themselves involves interpretative work, and the analysis that is produced is not just description, but is already theorised".

Friese *et al* (2018, 9) elucidate further:

> "In comparison (to semantic approach), A latent level analysis goes beyond the semantic content of the data. It starts with examining the underlying meanings, assumptions, and conceptualisations that inform the semantic content of the data. In addition to applying codes to the data, the researcher is writing detailed analytic memos. Thus, the development of the themes involves interpretative work and the results are not mere description but are already theorised".

Braun and Clarke (2006) point out that one of the features of thematic analysis is its flexibility.

5.4 Software tools for analysis

Burnard *et al* (2008, 430) state that, "There are several computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) packages available that can be used to manage and help in the analysis of qualitative data". Gilbert *et al* (2014) pinpoint the advent or origins of computer programs to the early 1980s. Furthermore, Gilbert *et al* (*ibid*, 222) point out that:

> "Examples include Thomas Seidel (the Ethnograph), Lyn and Tom Richards (NUD*IST, later NVivo), Udo Kuckartz (MAX, later WinMax, then MAXqda), and Thomas Muhr (ATLAS.ti). For the most part, these

> developers were themselves qualitative researchers who created the programs primarily to facilitate the analysis of their own qualitative data, some of whom then moved into providing software to other researchers".

Gilbert *et al* (*ibid*., 222) describes the nature and purpose of the software:

> "This genre of software, known as Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDAS or QDA software), is specifically designed to support qualitative research, as opposed to tools primarily used for the collection of data (such as audio or video recorders), or presentation of findings (such as presentation or modeling software)".

Talanquer (2014, 83) provides more details:

> "Computer assisted qualitative data analysis (CAQDAS) packages facilitate managing multiple tasks in qualitative research, from organising data sources based on relevant characteristics, segmenting and categorising data according to themes, searching for and retrieving information, to building visual representations that more easily elicit significant patterns in the data".

However, Burnard *et al* (*ibid*.) hasten to point out that these computer programs do not conduct the actual analysis of data, but arrange data in a way manageable way – analysing data remains the exclusive duty or function of the researcher responsible for the inquiry. Thorne (2000, 68) also supplements the point, noting that:

> "Although there are many qualitative data analysis computer programs available on the market today, these are essentially aids to sorting and organising sets of qualitative data, and none are capable of the intellectual and conceptualising processes required to transform data into meaningful findings".

Hwang (2008, 524) explains:

> "As with any software, this QDA software does not do the work for you automatically. You still do the work because it is an intellectual task. But

> you get the computer to work as your research assistant, which can save time and make your work better, especially for large data sets. There can be a higher initial learning curve issue for QDA software compared to other software packages. QDA software can be used at any point along the qualitative research spectrum, whether it is close to the theory-building or grounded-theory end or close to the theory testing or hypothesis-testing end".

Importantly, with regards to the aforementioned requisite six steps or phases which must be carried out during the thematic analysis process, Friese *et al* (2018, 11) make a crucial point in that, "If CAQDAS is used for data analysis, it is necessary to add an extra phase. After the initial coding phase, a structured code system needs to be developed so that the data can be queried using the software". In deciding which software/program/tool to employ, Sotiriadou *et al* (2014, 27) opine that, "When selecting a CAQDA tool, researchers should give due consideration to the differences resulting from their expertise and philosophical considerations such as their values and beliefs concerning research in general".

Burnard *et al* (*ibid*.) cite ATLAS.ti and NVivo as common computer programs utilised to assist researchers with analysing qualitative data. Making a specific reference to tyro researchers, Peters and Wester (2007, 636) argue that:

> "The available computer programs can be seen as a collection of tools, but the functions and features of these programs are so divergent, that it is hardly possible for a novice qualitative researcher to select the proper qualitative procedures, let alone to pick the most efficient functions of the computer programs to support such a procedure".

Hwang, 2008, says ATLAS.ti has proven itself useful, especially in social science studies. Smit (2002, 65) posits that "ATLAS.ti is a powerful workbench for qualitative data analysis, particularly for large sections of text, visual and audio data". Friese *et al* (*ibid*., 11) give the history of ATLAS.ti thus:

> "ATLAS.ti was developed as part of the ATLAS project (1989-1992) at the Technical University of Berlin, Germany. The acronym ATLAS.ti stands for 'Archiv für Technik, Lebenswelt und Alltagssprache' (Archive

> for Technology, the Life World and Everyday Language). The extension 'ti' stands for "text interpretation." In addition to the more academic minded project name, it was also the Greek God *Atlas* that inspired the software name. According to Greek mythology, Atlas tried to conduct a raid to destroy Zeus. As he was unsuccessful, he received a punishment from Zeus for having confronted him, which was to carry the world on his shoulders".

Smit (*ibid*.) rates the program highly, saying:

> "It provides a comprehensive overview of a research project, which is called the *Hermeneutic Unit* (HU) in ATLAS.ti, and it facilitates immediate search and retrieval functions. This programme also has a network-building feature, which allows one to visually connect selected texts, memos, and codes by means of diagrams" (2002, 65)

NVivo is produced "by Qualitative Solutions and Research Pty. Ltd. of Melbourne, Australia" (Azeem *et al*, 2012, 264). Azeem *et al* (*ibid*.,262) argue that, "NVivo helps tremendously from conceptualisation and coding of data to an entire research project". Azeem et al (*ibid*., 263) further contends that, "NVivo, among all the qualitative analysis software packages, has a particular set of tools that is most significant feature for analysing literature and flexible as compared to other qualitative analysis software packages". Azeem *et al* (ibid., 265) add that, "NVivo assists in the management and synthesis of ideas. It offers a variety of analysing tools for developing new understandings and theories about the data and testing of answers to research questions".

Sotiriadou *et al* (2014) posit that utilising NVivo enhances and speeds up the data analysis process, to the benefit of the researcher in pursuance of answers to their inquiry questions. Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2011) are also of the considered view that NVivo is useful for conducting a credible process of data analysis. After assessing the efficacy of NVivo 8, Bergin (2011, 6) concluded that while it was challenging to utilise, it augured well for the "the robustness of qualitative research". Bergin (*ibid*., 12) adds as follows:

> "The use of a QDA program such as NVivo 8 allows for consistent coding schemes and provides the analyst with the tools to query and audit the

> coding processes. In so doing, more robust interpretations of data can be achieved. However, analysts need to be aware of the demands placed on them in trying to balance the mechanics of working through a QDA program while simultaneously remaining conscious of the value of all sources in their studies".

Gilbert *et al* (*ibid*.), offering advice to novice researchers in particular, say they must be more concerned about the analytical approach or framework to be used in their intellectual processing or analysing of data, and view computer programs from a vantage point of how they can aid them in achieving a credible and scientific sound analysis. Gilbert *et al* (*ibid*., 222) add that:

> "Just as word processing programs support writing but do not magically transform the user into a good writer, QDA software programs support qualitative research, but still require knowledge and skill on the part of the user to produce good qualitative research".

LaPelle (2004, 107) argues that even the simple Microsoft Word program, when used properly, can do a reasonable job in conducting data analysis:

> "For many, though not all, data management and analysis functions, Microsoft Word can be used as QDA software. There are clearly some instances where dedicated QDA software is superior, e.g., in handling visual data and in doing complex Boolean searches across text-based categories".

While asserting that these computer programs assist researchers in conducting the analysis of data, Talanquer (2014, 94) points out that they come with some challenges:

> "For example, accessing and retaining rich multimedia data may raise ethical issues in terms of ownership, privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality. Participation of multiple individuals who can easily access and exchange research data will demand careful research design and monitoring. Researchers should thus carefully reflect on the specific practical, legal, and ethical issues that may emerge from the use of qualitative software".

Gilbert *et al* (2014, 233) submit that:

> "When we hear casual and unsubstantiated claims that software is either a panacea or a plague, we are concerned that the polarising discourse is essentialising a quite complex interaction between software and method in practice. While this interaction certainly deserves more rigorous research attention, we can conclude from the existing literature that the relationship between method and software, as practiced by qualitative researchers, can be positive and productive if the researcher is reflective, critical, creative, and open to recognition of error".

5.5 Inquiry data analysis

The inquiry is investigating how the regional newspaper, the *South Coast Herald*, is received by its diverse readers in rural, suburban and township areas of Murchison, Margate and Gamalakhe, located in Port Shepstone, south of the KwaZulu-Natal province. The concomitant research questions are as follows:

- How does the newspaper approach the coverage of news or events?
- How does the newspaper cater for the multiplicity of its readers?
- How is the newspaper received by its diverse readers?

The employment of thematic analysis to unravel the phenomenon which is under scrutiny. Furthermore, the Stuart Hall (1980) Encoding/Decoding Communication Model is at the centre of the systematic approach of the inquiry in seeking to find answers to the research questions. Studies which focus on Stuart Hall's (1980) reception theory or audience reception theory mainly employ the technique of focus groups to collect data. Alternatively, as is the case with this inquiry, open-ended questionnaires/surveys are employed to extract participants' views on a particular phenomenon being studied. The compulsory lockdown occasioned by the deadly Covid-19 pandemic necessitated a data collection technique which averted any human contact. Hence, two sets of predominantly open-ended questionnaires, one for the readers and the other for the newspaper's editor were dispatched via e-mail to participants. Similarly, the rural, township and suburban participants or respondents and the editor of the *South Coast Herald* newspaper also had to provide their responses through e-

mail to the researcher. A total of 16 questions were sent to readers of the identified places. Below is the reader questionnaire in its entirety:

1. *What is your home language?*
2. *What age group would you fall into: 18-30/ 31-64/Over 65?*
3. *Are you male or female?*
4. *Are you employed/in full time study/unwaged/retired?*
5. *How many people in your household read the South Coast Herald?*
6. *How long have you been the reader of the South Coast Herald?*
7. *What draws you to the newspaper? Why do you read it?*
8. *What specific news items or issues do you always look for in the newspaper? Are they adequately covered by the paper?*
9. *How has the newspaper helped to shape or contribute towards your worldview?*
10. *How does the content by the paper influence your thinking?*
11. *How has your (cultural, religious, racial, class, political and otherwise) background influenced the way in which you perceive the paper or interpret articles published by the paper?*
12. *What do you do with the information gleaned from the paper?*
13. *How important are adverts contained by the newspaper?*
14. *What are local news items or issues you would like the paper to cover more?*
15. *What changes or improvements would you like to see at South Coast Herald?*
16. *Do you read any other newspapers? If so, which one(s)?*

The editor questionnaire is as follows:

1. *How would you classify your paper?*
2. *What is the average print run per issue of the South Coast Herald?*
3. *What would you estimate the average readership to be?*
4. *What is the geographical distribution range of the newspaper?*
5. *How long have you been the editor?*
6. *What was your career profile to the editor's chair?*
7. *How many reporters/journalists does the South Coast Herald have?*
8. *Does your newspaper have a mission statement? If so, what is it? If no, what are the underlying aims and approaches of the South Coast Herald?*
9. *How often do you meet with your team to discuss news items or coverage?*
10. *What is your approach to news to make sure you cater for all your diverse (suburban, rural and township) readers?*
11. *To what extent is the South Coast Herald similar and to what extent different from other similar newspapers in the Caxton stable?*
12. *How has your newspaper navigated some of the most sensitive cultural and racial issues in its coverage or reportage? Can you give an example?*
13. *How do you measure the efficacy of your strategy with regards to catering for your diverse readership?*
14. *What has been the feedback from your diverse readers pertaining to coverage of their local news?*
15. *What could you do better to ensure your paper has more coverage and reportage of news for your diverse readers?*
16. *What would you list as your newspaper's greatest achievement?*

17. *What is the correlation between advertising and a diverse readership?*

18. *Taking into consideration the current COVID-19 situation in the country and the media in general, how important is the thorough understanding of your diverse readership?*

19. *Where do you see the South Coast Herald in 10 years' time?*

Initially, the inquiry sought a total of 30 participants from each constituency (10 each from Murchison, Gamalakhe and Margate respectively). However, a total of 25 respondents furnished the researcher with their e-mailed responses – 10 from Gamalakhe, nine (9) from Margate and six (6) from Murchison. In carrying out thematic analysis in an endeavour to find answers to the research questions, the Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach will be deployed and applied to each identified location/place individually to generate themes which are exclusive to the readers of that area. Upon completion of this targeted thematic analysis, the resultant themes will be juxtaposed in a bid to paint a bigger picture and emerge with overall themes. Similarly, the answers from the editor will be subjected to the well-established six-step clearly delineated process of generating themes from raw data in a structured procedure which includes coding. As explained earlier in the chapter, the function of analysing qualitative or any inquiry data, for that matter, is the exclusive domain of the researcher, who, in this case, brings a wealth of insight and knowledge in the community media sphere and demographic dynamics of the South Coast region of KwaZulu-Natal as he hails from the place.

The following tables (5.5.1 – Table 1; 5.5.2 – Table 2, 5.5.3 – Table 3 and 5.5.5 – Table 4) represents the thematic process for Murchison, Margate, Gamalakhe and the *South Coast Herald* respectively:

5.5.1 Murchison (rural) group

Table 1: The Murchison Group (Rural)

Excerpts from study participants	Initial codes	Generating initial themes	Reviewed themes	Defining and naming themes
"Herald is one of the cheapest ways to stay informed. It keeps us informed with local current affairs. South Coast Herald broadens the general knowledge and improves the understanding of general topics. I just read the paper because it is easy to access otherwise I need investigative journalism."	Affordability Local news/information Source of information Accessibility Probing journalism	Reasonable pricing More local reach Centrality of local news and information Exposing wrongdoing	News locality and affordability Investigative journalism	News locality and affordability – local media is defined by the rich local content (news/editorial/opinion pieces) Investigative journalism – more probing stories other than those readily available in the public domain.
"The adverts on Jobs or Mayoral budget meetings are very important in terms of keeping informed."	Job adverts Municipal information	Crucial nature of adverts Local government updates	Importance of adverts Regular local government updates	Importance of adverts – the central nature of adverts for both the paper and readers Regular local government updates – a community newspaper is akin to a noticeboard for residents, especially regarding important updates from local municipalities.
"Advertisements in classifieds ads help much people who are job seekers."	Adverts Classifieds section Job opportunities	Significance of advertisement	Indispensability of adverts	Indispensable nature of adverts – adverts are key for both the news producer and readers. It is part of crucial symbiotic relationship between newspapers, readers and advertisers.
"The paper is predominantly focused on Indians and whites it does not cover African religion may be there is nothing to cover. I would to see the paper deep into local corruption eg Ugu and Ray Nkonyeni monies disappearing."	White and Indian focus No African issues Expose maleficence	White bias Black or African exclusion Exposing local corruption	Racial bias Holding local government to account	Racial bias – the newspaper focusing more on issues or news mostly pertinent to white readers to the exclusion of black readers. Holding local government to account – playing the old media role of being a watchdog and expose maleficence and other wrongdoing on the part of local government entrusted with public coffers.
"There is still distinctive approach by officials in addressing social ill, they still tend to attend and cover mostly the side dominated by white race in comparison to those black and	Local government bias	Racial favouritism	Municipal bias in favour of whites over blacks	Municipal bias in favour of whites over blacks – black residents' service delivery issues not taken seriously

marginalised groups. The white race complains evenly and get prompt attention while on the other side people have to barricade the roads in order to get attention."				as those of white residents.
"The paper is dominated by white, most of the time front page will dominated by white race, non-selling news."	White focus	White bias Black exclusion	Racial bias	Racial bias – the newspaper focusing more on issues or news mostly pertinent to white readers to the exclusion of black readers.
"Most publication looks like it is designed for the certain group of people (whites)."	White focus	White bias Black exclusion	Racial bias	Racial bias – the newspaper focusing more on issues or news mostly pertinent to white readers to the exclusion of black readers.
"Try and balance race coverage, acknowledges work done people who are developing the community, kind of find out from locals if they are happy with ward councillors eg filling what has been achieved by ward committees."	News balance	Diversify news coverage	Equitable coverage of news across racial spectrum	Equitable coverage of news across racial spectrum – news stories or articles must cover all areas which are covered by the publication in a fair and equal manner.
"I believe not all is bad about our town/ coast. More coverage on positive news about ordinary citizens and institutions, private and government, would be appreciated too. More coverage on local rising stars across different fields in order to mobilize community support towards their pursuit for greatness. Charity begins at home."	Good news	Publish good stories	Positive reporting	Positive reporting – good news also needs to be reported on, not always bad news or controversy.

5.5.2 Margate (suburban/town) group

Table 2: Margate Group (Suburban/Town)

Excerpts from study participants	Initial codes	Generating initial themes	Reviewed themes	Defining and naming themes
"It is the only paper in our area that always give us updates about the area."	Local updates	Local news	Local news	Local news – this is the defining feature of any community media – locality of content.
"Other papers have a clear dividing factor when it comes to the discussing stories but with Herald, I feel as though no matter my race or class, I am equally represented."	Equal representation	Fair coverage	Diverse content	Diverse content – news items or content which sufficiently cater for the newspaper's diverse readership.

“The paper covers the stories from many different viewpoints and helped me have an open minded.”	Different viewpoints	Diverse content	Diverse content	Diverse content – news items or content which sufficiently cater for the newspaper’s diverse readership.
“South Coast Herald is well-balanced and very informative for both local and visiting readers.”	Balanced Relevant information	Objective content	Objective reporting	Objective reporting – reporting news in an accurate, factual and objective manner (in the keeping with the requirements of the Press Code which governs print, broadcast, online and all other forms of media in South Africa)
“The only thing that draws me in reading Herald is to know what is happening in surrounding areas, Herald is the leader in local news for its broad mix of news.”	Broad mix Local news	Diverse local content	Diverse content	Diverse content – news items or content which sufficiently cater for the newspaper’s diverse readership.
“I am not biased but most of the times it dominates the white people.”	White dominance	White bias Black exclusion	Racial bias	Racial bias – the newspaper focusing more on issues or news mostly pertinent to white readers to the exclusion of black readers.
“The content of the paper is more focused on issues affecting certain race.”	White focus	White bias Black exclusion	Racial bias	Racial bias – the newspaper focusing more on issues or news mostly pertinent to white readers to the exclusion of black readers.
“I feel it it’s biased toward certain ethnic group. I feel it is being biased say to certain racial group and political group. I tend to associate the editors with that group.”	White focus Politics	White bias Black exclusion Political bias	Racial bias	Racial bias – the newspaper focusing more on issues or news mostly pertinent to white readers to the exclusion of black readers.
“I’m South African. I’m Indian. I am a born-in-the-1950’s-model. I’m Christian. All these influence the way in which I perceive the paper.”	Background	Behavioural influence	Behavioural influence	Behavioural influence – one’s background such as culture, race, religion and other related factors impacting how the person makes meanings of things or interpret issues.
“I understand racial minority better now, as well as political views of different people.”	Minority focus	White bias Black exclusion	Racial bias	Racial bias – the newspaper focusing more on issues or news mostly pertinent to white readers to the exclusion of black readers.
“It must cover more stories about black communities.”	Black stories	Racially diverse content	Diverse content	Diverse content – news items or content which sufficiently cater for the newspaper’s diverse readership, including black people in particular.
“To be more inclusive in terms of demographics, not to focus more on urban areas matters.”	Inclusiveness	Inclusive coverage	Diverse content	Diverse content – news items or content which sufficiently cater for the newspaper’s diverse readership.
“It must focus more on community development issues, especially opportunities that are available in the South Coast for designated groups.”	Community development Black readers	Developmental journalism	Developmental journalism	Developmental journalism – the reporting which puts more emphasis on the developmental issues or community development issues in society.
“The paper doesn’t go the extra mile to scout news. They share things that are already on the public domain.	Probing stories	Probing reportage	Investigative journalism	Investigative journalism – more probing stories other than

They must show investigative journalism. They must hunt the news from all corners of South Coast."				those readily available in the public domain.
"For me the articles published are fine, they do not pose any offence to my cultural background and religion in any way."	Background	Behavioural influence	Behavioural influence	Behavioural influence – one's background such as culture, race, religion and other related factors impacting how the person makes meanings of things or interpret issues.

5.5.3 Gamalakhe (township) group

Table 3: Gamalakhe Group (Township)

Excerpts from study participants	Initial codes	Generating initial themes	Reviewed themes	Defining and naming themes
"South Coast Herald would rather publish a story about a white man or Indian man saving a cat rather publish a story about African's achievements, to them Africans are corrupt and the face of local criminality."	White/Indian focus Blacks ignored African corrupt and criminal	White/Indian bias Black exclusion Demonisation of Africans	Racial bias	Racial bias – the newspaper focusing more on issues or news mostly pertinent to white/Indian readers to the exclusion of black readers. Demonisation of Africans – news coverage/reportage that portrays black people in bad light as being synonymous with corruption and crime.
"Mostly the only time they would report about rural areas and Gamalakhe would be if crime took place there or any of their white friends happen to have been in these places."	Rural and township crimes	Rural villages and townships cesspit of crime	Rural villages and townships as crime hotspots	Rural villages and townships as crime hotspots – the dominant news which gets coverage is related to crime when it comes to rural places and township.
"Newspapers like South Coast Herald would never even make an attempt to profile Gamalakhe as a tourist destination instead they would go all out to profile it as a hub of criminality thus ensuring that they keep tourists within the coastal belt where white people enjoy dominance."	Gamalakhe impugned	Intentional negative portrayal	Intentional negative portrayal	Intentional negative portrayal – the township, Gamalakhe, is depicted in a negative manner on purpose.
"My cultural, racial and political background has assisted me a lot in being able to spot the narrative that this newspaper is directing. I can safely say that evidence is there that South Coast Herald is mostly concerned about white people and their businesses and nothing else."	Background	Behavioural influence	Behavioural influence	Behavioural influence – one's background such as culture, race, religion and other related factors impacting how the person makes meanings of things or interpret issues.

“They (adverts) are very important because they assist in communicating various services and products required by people.”	Adverts	Importance of adverts	Importance of adverts	Importance of adverts – this section of the newspaper is very useful.
“I feel like the paper still has a bigger task to do in promoting the black culture in the South Coast, be more vocal on the issues of race and political affairs. These are grey arears which I believe the paper has been lacking on and requires more improvement.”	Promote black content	Lack of diversity content	Diverse content deficiency	Diverse content deficiency – the newspaper needs to cover more stories or publish articles which also appeal to and are relevant to the black readership.
“The paper has to be ‘pro-poor’ – majority of the people who would like to engage with the paper are the disadvantaged and less privileged and they can’t associate themselves with the paper because it is portrayed as the “elite” kind of a newspaper. They must re-think their model and channel it accordingly, to speak to the greater masses.”	White focus	White bias Black exclusion	Racial abuse	Racial bias – the newspaper focusing more on issues or news mostly pertinent to white readers to the exclusion of black readers.
“What draws me to the newspaper is the fact that it is local; it has local stories and local content.”	Local stories	Local content	Local content	Local content – the publication is full of local stories/articles.
“This is a newspaper that focuses on certain aspects or people i.e. you will see prominent business people (mostly Whites and Indians) whereby if they had passed on, we are notified, and their works are exalted. We hardly see prominent Black figures being given the same honour.”	White/Indian focus	White/Indian bias Black exclusion	Racial bias	Racial bias – the newspaper focusing more on issues or news mostly pertinent to white readers to the exclusion of black readers.
“The content focuses more on the urban areas, it does not cover the rural and townships. I understand that the argument might be that the Newspaper institution has Eyethu to accommodate those places, but we need to understand that majority of South Africans (Especially the Youth) are familiar in the content that is provided in English, therefore, they can read, speak and understand clearly what is being written. Most of the schools are now English Medium, so it is backward thinking to say, ‘We have Eyethu for those areas’.”	Urban news	Urban coverage bias	Urban coverage bias	Urban coverage bias – rural and township areas are neglected in terms of coverage in favour of urban areas.
“They (adverts) are very important. More especially the classified adverts since unemployment is high in this country. I believe that is another reason why people buy this paper in the first place - to look for jobs.”	Adverts	Adverts important	Importance of adverts	Importance of adverts – they are key content of the newspaper.
“The management, the newspaper looks as if it has hit the ceiling, therefore, a new management is	Newspaper management	Change of Management	Change Management	Change Management – new management needed to ensure a truly inclusive news content

needed in order to bring a fresh perspective and a new approach. To align the newspaper not only to a certain grouping, but all members across racial, age and demarcation groups."	White bias Change	Racial bias White bias Black exclusion	White bias and black exclusion	White bias and black exclusion – the newspaper focusing more on issues or news mostly pertinent to white readers to the exclusion of black readers.
"Originally, this newspaper was established for white people. It hasn't extricated itself 100% from the thinking of whites even now (new dispensation)."	White focus No change	White bias Black exclusion Unwillingness to change	Racial bias	Racial bias – the newspaper focusing more on issues or news mostly pertinent to white readers to the exclusion of black readers. Unwillingness to change – lack of will to change in order to ensure diverse content.
"I always look for township and rural news but it's very limited. The paper normally covers suburban news. Cover good news from townships and rural areas and not only crime and deaths."	Urban focus White focus Limited rural and township news More good news	Urban news bias White focus Black exclusion Lack of rural and township news	Urban news bias Racial bias Lack of rural and township content	Urban news bias – covering predominantly suburban stories. Racial bias – the newspaper focusing more on issues or news mostly pertinent to white readers to the exclusion of black readers. Lack of rural and township content – no sufficient stories from rural and township areas.
"(South Coast Herald) To hire more black journalist and cover stories of the previous disadvantaged areas like Madlala, Mvutshi(ni), Gcilima, Izingolweni, Murchison, Gamalakhe and KwaNzimakwe."	More black journalists Cover more rural and township areas	Editorial staff diversity Heightened rural and township coverage	Editorial staff diversity Heightened rural and township coverage	Editorial staff diversity – hiring of more black reporters. Heightened rural and township coverage – diverse staff will result in more diversity of news coverage.
"I grew up with a belief that this paper is for white people."	White focus	White bias Black exclusion	Racial bias	Racial bias – the newspaper focusing more on issues or news mostly pertinent to white readers to the exclusion of black readers.
"I love how the classified section helps a number of our unemployed youth get jobs, so they can fend for themselves and families. Newspaper adverts by retail adverts help one compare prices before going to grab necessities, what specials to look out for and establish which stores they are going to shop with a set budget, which in turn helps them save time."	Classifieds Adverts Specials	Importance of adverts	Importance of adverts	Importance of adverts – advertisement is a crucial element of the newspaper.
"Background checks should be made for adverts before they are put up on the newspaper. My cousin once ran into some bad luck after taking a number on the newspaper to buy a car which ended up being a scam authentication measures should be put out."	Background checks	Advert verification	Advert verification	Advert verification – ascertain the veracity of adverts placed in the news to avert a possibility of readers being scammed.
"I have always found it problematic how the South Coast Herald and many other community newspapers	Homosexuality	Lack of gay community news	Lack of gay community news	Lack of gay community news – issues related to homosexuality

in the South Coast never covered anything that spoke to members of the LGBTQI+ community, until December 2020, when the South Coast Fever covered an event that I did."				are hardly covered by the newspaper.
"For stories to reflect more the diversity and demographics of the South Coast."	Reflect diversity	More diverse content	More diverse content	More diverse content – the coverage of news or events by the newspaper must reflect the diverse nature of its reads all over the South Coast, which comprises rural, township and urban places.

5.5.4 Overall final consolidated themes for Murchison (rural), Margate (suburb) and Gamalakhe (township) groups

The list of the final consolidated themes from the three groups (Murchison, Margate and Gamalakhe) is as follows:

- Racial bias
- Urban coverage bias
- Local content
- Lack of rural and township coverage
- Negative portrayal of rural and township places
- Diverse content
- Investigative journalism
- Developmental journalism
- Newsroom representation
- Importance of adverts
- Behavioural influence

5.5.5 *South Coast Herald*

Table 4: *South Coast Herald*

Excerpts from the Editor of the South Coast Herald	Generating initial codes	Generating themes	Reviewed themes	Defining and naming themes

"Started as a junior reporter, then went on to become sports editor. Following that, senior journalist, then deputy editor. Now editor. It was through a combination of being promoted and then taking over the chair following the retirement of the previous long-standing editor."	Junior reporter Sports editor Deputy editor Editor	Veteran journalist Experienced editor	Experienced editor	Experienced editor – the person in charge of the newspaper's editorial management is a veteran journalist who started his career with the publication.
"In our newsroom we have two Indian journalists, two black journalists (one Zulu, one Xhosa) and one white journalist. I've found that they tend to produce news from their communities and their interests. However, this does not mean it follows a demographic line, as all have reported on stories on people of all race groups."	Staff Community and interests	Diverse staff Driven by community interests	Diverse staff Driven by community interests	Diverse staff – the newsroom is representative of the regional demographics Driven by community interests – Journalists tend to be more amenable to covering news pertaining to their communities.
"Our goal is always to be as hyper-local as possible, and I'm keenly aware of the changing demographics of our region and country and we try to cater for a readership that may be very different in the future to what it looks like now, but which is definitely changing, without it being forced."	Hyper-local stories Changing demographics Diverse readership Voluntary change	Local content Recognition of diverse readers Adapt to change	Local content Change editorial coverage	Local content – the newspaper's primary focus is on local news. Change editorial coverage – the newspaper recognises that its readership is diverse, and that it has decided to, out of its own volition, to endeavour to accommodate all its readers with the content relevant to them.
"Our paper has traditionally catered for a large retired population, plus a large school going population. That probably makes it a little bit different from some of the group's (Caxon's) city papers. It has meant that, largely, we have had loyal readership. It's similar in that it's a regular community paper, covering all the usual, sometimes quirky, news that makes community papers so great."	Retired Schools	Traditional readership	Traditional readership	Traditional readership – the newspaper admits that it has historically served the retired population and schools on the South Coast.
"I can say that we have made a big effort to ensure our paper is balanced in terms of news about people of all race groups. In the past, there has been a perception that the paper only catered for whites and to a lesser extent, Indians. We have worked really hard to get the balance right, and shed any perception that it might still be that way. Since becoming editor I have been involved in some deep, open and honest discussions with staff at all levels as to where we get it wrong and where we get it right. It's an ongoing process and about listening and learning all the time."	Big effort Change Balanced news All races White/Indian focus perception Honest discussions Listening/consultations Ongoing process	Concerted effort to transform Perceived racial bias Perceived White/Indian bias Perceived Black exclusion	Concerted effort to transform Perceived White/Indian bias	Concerted effort to transform – the newspaper has embarked on a process to consult all staff members to do an introspection with a view to eliciting their input or comments in a bid to ensure that the publication sufficiently caters for its diverse readers located in rural, township and urban areas. Perceived White/Indian bias – the paper admits that in the past it had been accused of being blatantly biased in favour of its white and Indian readers.
"Our website has shown that we have many readers of all backgrounds. Many inbox with stories and things they would like us to follow up, or do, and they are from all backgrounds, in reasonably equal measure."	Website Social media All backgrounds	Online newspaper diverse Social media presence	Digital platforms with diverse readers/content	Digital platforms with diverse readers/content – the advent of the digital era has benefited the paper in that it has shown more racial representation and consequently, diverse content on the website and social media platforms.

		Representative readership		
"Once Covid is over (hopefully sooner rather than later) the plan is for a nicely balanced newsroom to continue making inroads and forming relationships with the community at large and their specific areas as well."	Post-Covid Community engagement	Post-Covid-19 plans for balanced newsroom Consultation with readers	Post-Covid-19 plans for balanced newsroom Consultation with readers	Post-Covid plans for balanced newsroom – the newspaper's intention to intensify transformation plans post-Covid-19 Consultation with readers – the paper's stated intention to engage readers regarding their specific news/coverage needs.
"We are aware of the need to groom all the journalists to be able to run the paper, if necessary. And explained to the younger ones the importance of the role they play now, and the role they will need to play in the future."	Groom young journalists	Journalist mentorship	Journalist mentorship	Journalist mentorship – grooming of journalists to nurture the culture of ensuring diversity of content.
"It (advertising) is vital."	Adverts	Adverts key	Importance of adverts	Importance of adverts – advertisement plays a crucial role, especially with regards to generating revenue for the newspaper, thereby ensuring its sustainability.

5.5.5.1 The *South Coast Herald* themes

The main resultant themes of the newspaper are:

- Experienced management
- Willingness to transform
- Hyper local content
- Diverse digital platforms
- Importance of adverts

5.6 Conclusion

Having utilised the Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach to carry out the thematic analysis to raw data garnered from participants who are from the rural village of Murchison, the township of Gamalakhe and the suburb of Margate, a total of eleven (11) themes have emerged in pursuance of finding answers to the phenomenon of the reception of the newspaper, the *South Coast Herald*, in these clearly diverse areas. Five of the six stages have been completed.

The sixth stage or phase, which is the write-up, will be the subject of the next chapter, which will provide a detailed or comprehensive account or report of the reader themes, explaining each theme in great detail.

In addition, the five editor themes will also be elaborated on in the next chapter, which is exclusively focusing on the findings of the data analysis, which has been achieved using thematic analysis. The findings chapter will be instrumental in finding answers to the research questions and assist the inquiry to acquire a better understanding of the phenomenon under scrutiny.

Chapter 6: Findings

6.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the last stage of the Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach to conducting thematic analysis on qualitative data which is crucial in understanding and unpacking the phenomenon that is the subject of this inquiry. The section will proffer a detailed write-up and interpretation of the final main themes emanating from a systematic thematic analysis process. These themes, and the interpretation thereof, will assist in answering the research questions of the academic investigation. The main objective of the inquiry is to establish the approach of this regional newspaper, the *South Coast Herald*, to news and its reception by its diverse readers in the rural village of Murchison, the township of Gamalakhe and the suburb of Margate on the South Coast of KwaZulu-Natal. The following consequent research questions apply:

- How does the newspaper approach the coverage of news or events?
- How does the newspaper cater for the multiplicity of its readers?
- How is the newspaper received by its diverse readers?

Due to the data collection of the inquiry taking place at the height of the devastating and deadly Covid-19 pandemic, which necessitated a hard lockdown, predominantly open-ended questionnaires were sent via e-mail to study participants (readers or decoders) and the newspaper's editor (encoder) respectively. A total of 25 responses (out of 30) or 83% were completed and received (via e-mail) from participants. The editor furnished the researcher with his answers (via e-mail) as well.

6.2 The quintessence of qualitative research findings

Citing Guba (1981) and Krefting (1991), Anney (2014) points out that, "There is no absolute truth and qualitative inquiries are not generalisable. They assume that the purpose of inquiry is to develop idiographic knowledge". Citing Ashworth (1997b), Cutcliffe and McKenna (1999, 375) posit that:

> "Qualitative research is based upon the belief that there is no one singular universal truth, the social world is multi-faceted, it is an outcome of the interaction of human beings, a world that has no unequivocal reality. It is

> concerned with describing, interpreting and understanding the meanings which people attribute to their existence and to their world".

Cutcliffe and McKenna (*ibid*., 379) add that:

> "Perhaps the most useful indicator of the credibility of the findings produced is when the practitioners themselves and the readers of the theory view the study findings and regard them as meaningful and applicable in terms of their experience".

Goldblatt *et al* (2011) caution against sharing of qualitative study findings with participants as a means to enhance the credibility of the study. Goldblatt (*ibid*., 389 and 394) add that:

> "Although this strategy has good intentions, it is not necessarily the best method for achieving credibility. Occasionally, participants' life situations change, which might alter their perspectives and experience. For example, the phenomenological experience of acute illness or trauma is bound to change with time or with recovery. Sharing qualitative research findings or member-check is a controversial and complex procedure. We have seen that in certain cases, member-check is not necessarily the best strategy for achieving credibility, and might risk our commitment to the ethical principle".

Noble and Smith (2015, 3) propose strategies such as "truth value, consistency/neutrality and applicability" in order to enhance the credibility of a qualitative inquiry and the accompanying findings or results. Referring to a particular case involving a study focusing on a health-related matter, Noble and Smith (*ibid*., 3) further argue that "[The] Use of rich and thick verbatim extracts from carers of patients managed without dialysis assists the reader to make judgements about whether the final themes are true to participants' accounts". They conclude that:

> "In summary, it is imperative that all qualitative researchers incorporate strategies to enhance the credibility of a study during research design and implementation. Although there is no universally accepted terminology and criteria used to evaluate qualitative research, we have briefly outlined (above) some of the strategies that can enhance the credibility of study findings" (Noble and Smith, 2015, 3)

Shufutinsky (2020, 51) asserts that, "One of the critical underpinnings of qualitative research is that participants' narratives of their experiences are not flat, linear, and fixed". Shufutinsky (*ibid*.) adds:

> "Qualitative research is generally rooted in interpretivism, and the constructivist-interpretivist philosophies veer from traditionally positivist research underpinnings and instead suggest that social situations form units of analysis. The researcher is responsible for much of the data and the manner in which the data is managed during collection, analysis, and reporting. Thus, the researcher is generally the main instrument of the research, collecting, analysing, interpreting, and reporting the study findings. This is why *use-of-self* by the researcher is vital to the validity and credibility of qualitative research" (2020, 52)

Expanding on the concept of "use-of-self", Shufutinsky (2020, 52) avers that, "Use of self is critical in qualitative inquiry because it is a method of addressing the potential biases associated with the main research instrument (the researcher)". Shufutinsky (*ibid*., 57) asserts that:

> "Tools, such as (a) ecliptic self- bracketing, (b) self-transparency, (c) self-exclusion, and (d) reflexivity, among others, are epoche approaches that, when used effectively, promote the abatement of confirmation bias. Additionally, methods such as code-checking, mirroring, and TRAAM are described as practical *use-of-self* tools for data and outcomes validation and verification. The additive or comprehensive uses of these tools and instruments can foster increased rigor and transparency around the research, increasing confidence, trustworthiness, and credibility surrounding research design, data collection, data analysis, findings, and qualitative interpretations".

Stahl and King (2020, 26) point out that, "Lincoln and Guba (1985) rely on four general criteria in their approach to trustworthiness. These are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability". Stahl and King (*ibid*., 26) elucidate thus:

> "Credibility asks the 'How congruent are the findings with reality?' Asking about findings' congruence in qualitative research is analogous with questions about internal validity in quantitative research. One is seeking to understand how the reported findings 'hang together' in that the ideas should share some relationship with each other. But unlike quantitative research, there is no expectation that all reactions to coherence credibility would result in the same answer. Credibility is a construction on the part of the reporter(s) and the subsequent reader(s)" (2020, 26)

6.3 Unpacking the audience/readers' themes

The preceding chapter produced 11 final consolidated themes from the three groups (Murchison, Margate and Gamalakhe) which are listed below:

- Racial bias
- Urban coverage bias
- Importance of adverts
- Local content
- Diverse content
- Lack of rural and township coverage
- Negative portrayal of rural and township places
- Investigative journalism
- Developmental journalism
- Newsroom representation
- Behavioural influence

Some of these themes have sub-themes, and the identified themes will be coalesced into one (category) when there is sufficient convergence in terms of meaning and similarity.

6.3.1 Racial bias (and urban coverage bias)

The results show that the overwhelming majority (67.78%) of respondents/participants feel that the *South Coast Herald* is blatantly biased in favour of the white readers, and to an extent also towards the Indian readership as well. Numbers indicate that 66.67% of Murchison respondents, 66.67% Margate of respondents and 70% of Gamalakhe respondents view the newspaper

as being primarily concerned with covering issues affecting in the main white residents. A participant from Gamalakhe (township) was scathing in his response:

> "*South Coast Herald* promotes white supremacy and if it was in their powers, they would be selling their newspaper to whites and Indians only. Their narrative has influenced my thinking into being open to the victimisation that local Africans suffer from at the hands of white people who always put a blame on everything African. According to them even local government institutions are corrupt and full of people who are deployed and not worthy of their positions and people who don't know what they are doing. *South Coast Herald* would rather publish a story about a white man or Indian man saving a cat rather publish a story about African's achievements, to them Africans are corrupt and the face of local criminality. It has confirmed the narrative that there was white supremacy in South Africa and the world. It has helped me to realise that white people control the direction on how Africans think of themselves".

Another Gamalakhe respondent opined:

> "It basically tells me that this is a newspaper that focus on certain aspects or people i.e. you will see prominent business people (mostly Whites and Indians) whereby if they had passed on, we are notified, and their works are exalted. We hardly see prominent Black figures being given the same honour".

Furthermore, another Gamalakhe resident asserted that:

> "Originally, this newspaper was established for white people. It hasn't extricated itself 100% from the thinking of whites even now (new dispensation)".

Participants from the rural village of Murchison were also unambiguously critical of the newspaper in their responses. One stated that: "The paper is dominated by white[s], most of the time front page will dominated by white race, non-selling news". The sentiment also reverberated among many respondents from the suburb of Margate, with one stating that:

> "I feel it's biased toward certain ethnic group, my thinking for sure will be negatively influenced to empathise with. I interpret the particular statement in a way I feel it is being biased say to certain racial group or

political group. I tend to associate the editors with that group, to an extent I racialize the paper itself".

The South African media has in the recent past been embroiled in accusations of racism. Durrheim *et al* (2005) argue that the media downplayed the seriousness of racism allegations levelled against the fraternity in the 1999 Human Rights Commission inquiry into racism. Durrheim *et al* (*ibid*.) posit that:

> "The HRC report on racism in the South African media was greeted with scorn and incredulity by the media and other commentators. Given the changes that had taken place since the days of deep apartheid, and the current market-driven reporting practices, how could anyone say that the media was racist? The media speculated that perhaps Braude was confused as a result of being on drugs, or having unhappiness in her personal life, when she did the investigation. Or perhaps the biased and untrue report was to be explained by some sinister agenda on the part of Barney Pityana, to curtail media freedom. Of course the academic commentators were more sophisticated. For them the problem was primarily methodological. Braude had used qualitative methods and had allowed her own subjectivity to becloud the issue. However, there is one very difficult problem that these commentators must confront. If it is really true that the media is not racist, and Braude and Pityana were being malicious or simply misguided, why did difference of opinion continue to break down along racial lines" (2005, 20-21)

Kolbe (2005, 185) proffers the summary of the Commission's major finding thus, "the SAHRC report into racism in the media found that the media reflected a persistent pattern of racist expressions and concluded that the South African media 'can be characterised as racist institutions'". In his defence and that of the Commission, Pityana (2000, 532) argues that:

> "What was apparent in much of this discursive argument, is that white South Africans were inclined to deny or avoid any substantive discussion of racism. It was clear also that much work needs to be done to help journalists understand the multiple characteristics of racism, its new forms and mutations as well as its manifestations. There is general agreement that such a task is urgent and immediate for the good of South Africa. The task of ridding our society of all forms of racism has to be an ongoing duty".

In his paper on the claims that the print media perpetuates racism through its biased reportage on education matters in South Africa, De Wet (2001, 105) asserts that, "A common feature of media discourse on racism is either the denial of racist attitudes and actions in the former white schools or that these schools are doing their utmost to eradicate racism". Kulaszewicz (2015, 2) avers that, "The topic of media influencing racism in our society is significant in research. It targets media bias, and therefore it is wise to explore how media contributes to racism in explicit ways". Kulaszewicz (*ibid*.) insists that:

> "Understanding how racism can be reinforced through media is an important contribution to may professions including social work. How media impacts our belief system, conscious and unconscious is important. Social workers need to (be) promoting racial, cultural and ethnic awareness in practice. It is imperative that professions, such as social work understand biases, including their own to further promote justice. Awareness is also about knowing where bias can come from as well as promoting change where change needs to happen. The media has very large institutional impacts. Promoting change and understanding of what needs to be addressed or changed on a macro level is key to fostering social change and promoting equality, a core value of social work" (2015, 39-40)

Kolbe (2005) contends that both the Afrikaans and English media openly sided with the apartheid regime, although the English press would occasionally berate the segregationist government of the day, at the time. Kolbe (*ibid*., 6) adds that:

> "Despite its efforts, fundamental political change was never the agenda of the press, nor was equality of the various races. Definitely not the Afrikaans press and certainly not the English press despite the role that it seeks to claim in the post-apartheid era as a de facto opposition and a constant nagging thorn in the side of government."

6.3.2 Importance of advertising

There is absolute consensus among participants from diverse areas of Murchison (rural), Margate (suburb) and Gamalakhe (township) regarding the significance of advertisements in the newspaper, the *South Cost Herald*. Some varying degrees of importance notwithstanding, the totality of respondents agree 100%

that adverts are crucial for them as readers, irrespective of their location. One respondent from Gamalakhe township put it this way:

> "They are very important because they assist in communicating various services and products required by people. It would help if *South Coast Herald* would from time to time, sponsor adverts to emerging African businesses in rural areas and Gamalakhe in order to contribute to their development and local economy".

Another one from the township asserted:

> "I love how the classified section helps a number of our unemployed youth get jobs, so they can fend for themselves and families. Newspaper adverts by retail adverts help one compare prices before going to grab necessities, what specials to look out for and establish which stores they are going to shop with a set budget, which in turn helps them save time. In terms of the company itself, adverts generate income for the newspaper so that they can pay employees and keep the newspaper running".

Another Gamalakhe respondent explained:

> "They are very important. More especially the classified adverts since unemployment is high in this country. I believe that is another reason why people buy this paper in the first place - to look for jobs. The paper should encourage the companies to place jobs adverts in order for the people to apply and be employed".

A participant from Margate stated that:

> "It depends on the type of advert and its intended target, for me important adverts will be the ones that talks to empowerment of designated groups and other community development initiatives. The adverts about furniture shops and the likes I do not like them and gain I cannot suggest that they scrap those out because there are people who are just interested at checking adverts in any newspaper, so it's different strokes for different folks".

Murchison respondents were also unambiguous about the importance of adverts in their local newspaper:

> "Very important – you know exactly where to shop".

> "Extremely important. One gets informed of specials as well as products and businesses that are new in town".
>
> "The adverts on jobs or mayoral budget meetings are very important in terms of keeping informed".

The study participants' assertion on what appears to be indisputable importance of adverts in the newspaper confirms some publicly available literature, which accentuates the significance of advertising in the newspapers/mass media for both readers and the Fourth Estate itself. Gustafsson (2006) traces the emergence of the importance of advertising in the media fraternity to the 19th century. Gustafsson elucidates:

> "Then the initiative came from the media. Advertising and media were equal but media had the ideas about contents which would catch the masses. Newspapers and magazines took the lead, even if advertising played a larger role in the development of magazine publishing. During the beginning of the 20th century the initiative moved over to the advertising agencies. When the radio industry lacked visions about radio, a void was created which the advertising agencies quickly filled. It is obvious that without advertising there would not have been any mass media. The media would have been reserved for the elites. It is the interaction between advertising and media that creates mass media" (2006, 28)

Larkin (1979) argues that readers have high levels of confidence in newspapers, and they find their credibility to be beyond reproach. Larkin (*ibid*.) adds that:

> "They believe for example that newspapers are the best source of shopping information, the best source of information about sources of entertainment and that they contain the most useful advertisements of the four media included in this study. They also feel that newspaper advertisements are the most truthful and informative, and would be least willing to give up the advertising content of their newspaper when compared to the other media included in this study" (1979, 5)

Larkin's (1979) study or inquiry looked into the perceptions of consumers/audiences regarding the advertising content contained in the media, focusing on newspapers, television, radio and magazines. What emerged from

the study is that consumers/audiences considered newspapers as their primary source of information, especially with regards to the adverting content or advertisements. Larkin's inquiry found that:

> "The medium with the most annoying or intrusive advertising according to the respondents was television with 79 percent indicating it as first choice. Second choice was radio with 11 percent and third was magazine with 8 percent. Only 2 percent indicated they felt advertising in newspapers was annoying. Newspaper advertising is considered to be the most informative by 56 percent of the respondents in this study. The second choice was magazine with 29 percent and third choice was television with 11 percent. While 12 percent of the respondents felt that newspaper advertising was misleading, 59 percent felt that it was the most truthful, thus making it the first choice among the four media in question. Magazines were second with 19 percent and television was third with 11 percent of the total" (1979, 6)

Mwangi (2007, 75), who conducted a study into four Caxton-owned community newspapers – two in township areas and two in a suburban areas – in the Johannesburg area, avers that:

> "The content in the conglomerate-owned community newspapers has a market-driven orientation. The newspapers have allocated huge percentages of their space to advertising and in the remaining newshole, the volume of consequential news was relatively low".

Zigomo's (2009) investigation findings assert that Caxton-owned community newspapers are much more interested in generating revenue than serving the editorial needs of their audiences or readers. Zigomo (*ibid*., 56) further states that:

> "The findings of the study largely suggested that commercial considerations such as the desire to increase profit and advertising revenue were some of the key factors considered in determining the target audience and publishing site for Caxton's community media. The study found that while there was a relative focus on the community, this focus was primarily on the community as consumer and as potentially useful to

> advertisers rather than on the 'media needs' of informing, educating and entertaining the relevant communities. It was found that newspaper publishers, and Caxton in particular, were increasingly taking advantage of community media to boost their revenues and market presence, as the medium allowed publishers to present advertisers with specified, niche audiences that were more likely to purchase advertised products, thus luring much needed advertising content and revenue for community media publishers."

Odendaal (2002) points out that editors of community newspapers have a difficult task of striking a delicate balance in ensuring that the publications' apex functions of delivering local content and advertising for readers. Van Der Spuy (2020) points out the concern for everyone of ensuring the sustainability of community newspapers through advertising due to declining circulation figures. Van Der Spuy (*ibid*., 94) adds that:

> "Journalists becoming more involved with their publications' advertisements is a clear indication that everyone is expected to contribute towards the generation of income. Most of the journalists seem to accept this because they understand that the income generated through their publications' advertisements is the lifeblood of a print newspaper and ultimately the thing that pays their salaries and keep their doors open".

Petrova (2008) posits that advertising goes a long way in creating and ensuring a truly independent media, thereby enabling it to execute editorial duties without fear or favour, free of any political influence or bias. Howley (2010) postulates that community media gives voice to the ordinary people to have their views heard, not only just being a platform for the powerful or elite in society. Howley (*ibid*., 9) adds that, "Community media provide opportunities and resources for local publics to reassert journalism's place in the conversation of democracy".

6.3.3 Lack of diverse local content (and negative portrayal of rural and township areas)

While respondents – who are regular readers of the newspaper – admit they are drawn to the paper due to its local content, they are clear in saying that their preferred local newspaper lacks diversity in terms of news when it comes to its

editorial content or stories. The majority of the participants feel that the newspaper is systematically focusing on suburban news while neglecting stories or content from rural and township areas. Furthermore, the results indicate that respondents believe that the newspaper harbours an intentional agenda to report only negative or bad stories, mostly related to crime, about rural places and Gamalakhe, the only township on the South Coast. It is a narrative which they feel has been in perpetual existence, without any attempt by the newspaper to try and address it or correct it.

A Gamalakhe respondent strongly felt that:

> "They simply don't care about African people and their challenges unless it's a narrative that suits their agenda e.g. publishing good deeds done by Africans who work for white people. They will never deal with real issues e.g. Racism in the South Coast, Apartheid elements in the South Coast. They don't care about addressing issues of racial profiling, racial divisions, and social cohesion. It is interesting to note that there are local people from the White, Indian and Coloured community who live less than 15km from Gamalakhe but they have never been there. Newspapers like *South Coast Herald* would never even make an attempt to profile Gamalakhe as a tourist destination instead they would go all out to profile it as a hub of criminality thus ensuring that they keep tourists within the coastal belt where white people enjoy dominance. They would never give maximum attention to issues such as domestic, garden employees and farm workers challenges instead they would rather publish a story about white pensioners having tea".

Another Gamalakhe participant stated:

> "The content focuses more on urban areas, it does not cover the rural and townships. I understand that the argument might be that the newspaper institution has *Eyethu* (an Isizulu medium local newspaper owned by Caxton) to accommodate those (rural and township) places, but we need to understand that majority of South Africans (especially the youth) are familiar in the content that is provided in English, therefore, they can read, speak and understand clearly what is being written. Most of the schools are now English medium, so it is backward thinking to say, "We have *Eyethu* for those areas".

Another Gamalakhe respondent had this to say:

> "I feel like the paper still has a bigger task to do in promoting the black culture in the South Coast, be more vocal on the issues of race and political affairs. These are grey arears which I believe the paper has been lacking on and requires more improvement. The paper has to be "pro-poor" – majority of the people who would like to engage with the paper are the disadvantaged and less privileged and they can't associate themselves with the paper because it is portrayed as the 'elite' kind of a newspaper. They must re-think their model and channel it accordingly, to speak to the greater masses".

A respondent from Margate urged the newspaper:

> "To be more inclusive in terms of demographics, not to focus more on urban areas matters".

A Murchison participant urged the *South Coast Herald* to:

> "Try and balance race coverage, acknowledges work done people who are developing the community, kind of find out from locals if they are happy with ward councillors eg filling what has been achieved by ward committees".

The perceived lack of diversity of news by the *South Coast Herald* is an antithesis of what a local newspaper/media ought to be, in relation to the watershed Institute for the Advancement of Journalism (2005) workshop, as mentioned in Chapter 2 (Literature Review), which was crucial in assisting in coming up with a widely accepted convergence point regarding the comprehensive definition of community media and the concomitant attributes thereof. Of particular significance is the requirement for the community media to espouse and promote diversity when it comes to its content. Swanepoel (2012, 152) posits that, "Geographically defined community newspapers have an important task to reflect the diversity of the community as a whole". Furthermore, Swanepoel (2012, 153) avers that, "Quality community newspapers provide micro news that respects the morals and values and integrates the diverse nature of the community". Mwangi (2007) stresses that South Africa is full of diverse communities whose needs for local or specific information could be met through the services of community media or newspapers. Daniels (2020, 161) contends that, "The community newspaper

sector in South Africa has been quietly gathering strength as a force for diversity in terms of the representation of local voices".

In terms of the perceived intentional negative portrayal of rural, township areas and government, this finding seems to corroborate Govenden's (2019, 260) inquiry/study which,

> "Found that the press content display negative stereotypes of blackness in the coverage of service delivery protests, labour protests and government. The press display subtle racial stereotypes that are based on racist assumptions founded in colonialism and apartheid times".

Furthermore, Raymond (2013, 110) submits that:

> "The media play a central role in marginalising people and places through a process which involves the demonisation of marginalised groups. However, this process of demonising groups has a strongly political and historical foundation in South African where the recent history of the country involved the systematic and legalised demonising of a group of people based on nothing more concrete than their appearance".

6.3.4 Newsroom representation

According to some respondents, one of the ways to remedy the perennial challenge of the *South Coast Herald* being unable to offer content which adequately caters for its diverse readers who reside in rural, township and suburban areas is to ensure that the editorial staff or the newsroom has team members, in particular black journalists, who reflect the demographics of the Republic of South Africa. This, they feel, would be a step in the right direction towards inculcating the culture of diverse content offering. They emphasise that staff diversity must also be reflected the newspaper's top management.

A participant from Gamalakhe township opined that:

> "The management, the newspaper looks as if it has hit the ceiling, therefore, a new management is needed in order to bring a fresh perspective and a new approach. To align the newspaper not only to a

> certain grouping, but all members across racial, age and demarcation groups".

Two more Gamalakhe respondents urged the newspaper, respectively:

> "To hire more black journalists and cover stories of the previous disadvantaged areas like Madlala, Mvutshini, Gcilima, Izingolweni, Murchison, Gamalakhe and KwaNzimakwe".

> "It helps me think that there is a chance for this newspaper to turn a corner and change the way of reporting. Also it will help if black reporters are introduced and nurtured".

The contentious issue of transformation of the South African press, especially print media, has, since the advent of democracy, elicited robust debate, which still rages on today (Govenden, 2019). Govenden (*ibid*., 6) further asserts that, "The attainment of true transformation in the press is critical to reverse the injustices of the past and to ensure today's print media is reflective of South African society and its many axes of diversity". The author posits that:

> "In the South African context, ownership diversity and content diversity are the key measures of transformation. Press transformation in the first twenty years of democracy to a great extent resembles token transformation. Tokenism in the regard that black people have replaced white people in some ownership and staffing aspects, but not in a meaningful way that disrupts elite class continuities, "inferential racism" of negative stereotypes of the black race, and white racial power at the top of the hierarchy of press institutions. Print media transformation is also significantly tainted by the overly neo-liberal nature of the press in a number of areas found by the study. The study also finds that transformation is a point of politisation of the press. A deeper race transformation strategy for the press is needed that disrupts and dismantles the racist ideologies rooted in colonial and apartheid notions of blackness" (2019, 6, 7&259)

Kolbe (2005, 228) argues that "The race card still cuts deep into South African journalism. It remains a black and white, us-and-them issue". Kolbe (*ibid*.) points out that:

> "The English-language press has moved cautiously to promote black people to senior staff positions and increased training facilities for staff from a disadvantaged background. The complaint from black journalists remain that these efforts are too slow. As a way of speeding up the process of integration in the newsrooms and to facilitate a speedier transformation, it seems reasonable that employment hiring guidelines for the national press be posted. A more racially balanced newspaper is an important pre-requisite for meaningful change. A more racially mixed newspaper in South Africa will be better prepared to reflect the life experiences and diversity of the society that they will serve. It must be remembered that during the apartheid years, racial groups were kept firmly apart and it will be a learning experience for all concerned as well as bringing a wider perspective to the debate. A more racially balanced newsroom will go some way to correcting claims of bias. Otherwise the implications for curbs on freedom of the press loom ominously large" (2005, 229)

Leshin (2010, 51) asserts that, "For centuries, English-language newspapers in South Africa were written by whites for whites. Thus, in the post-1994 age of transformation, these papers now attempt to diversify both their staff and their readership". Leshin's (*ibid*.) inquiry explored the utilisation of affirmative action at *The Durban Post* newspaper to bring about transformation. The author posits that, "Yet while the paper's staff racial profile has changed dramatically, the extent to which this change has led to similar transformation of the newspaper's coverage and readership is contested among staff members" (2010, 57). Leshin (*ibid*.) points out that:

> "The majority of African staff members felt that the newspaper had not done nearly enough to transform its content, while many Indians and whites lauded the newspaper for its efforts towards diversification of coverage. Most people, however, noted that the newspaper had made substantial progress in broadening its coverage. The sub-editors and those in charge of making final copy decisions try to make sure there are black as well as white faces in the newspaper. Many noted that political coverage was a particularly strong point for the newspaper, because its Zulu-speaking reporters were able to speak to politicians and local leaders in their own language. This also allows the paper to cover rural politics, as

> constituents in Zululand often don't speak English. In general, the newspaper's coverage has broadened in this way, integrating African-based stories into the fold. Many noted that the paper's diverse staff brings in diverse ideas for articles to meetings, thus allowing the paper to cover issues across all South African communities" (2010, 60)

Berger (1999) stresses that representativity in the media is essentially important in order for transformation to occur. Berger (*ibid*., 102) further states:

> "For media to play a properly democratic and/or developmentalist role, it needs to be staffed and managed by people with a sensitivity to this role and who are also in a position to communicate with the bulk of the electorate. In South African conditions, this requires tipping the imbalances in media staffing towards demographic representativity - particularly racial, but also along gender lines".

The scholar points out that between 1994 and 1994 the rate of newsroom representativity in print media (compared to other platforms such as broadcast), in particular, had started off slowly initially. Berger (1999, 104) maintains that "The calibre of journalists has implications for the role of the media in democracy and socio-economic transformation". The author asseverates that:

> "Changes in ownership and staffing do not in and of themselves imply or determine changes in content or role of media, although they make these possible - and in some cases, necessary. But while ownership and staffing can be established fairly easily, this is less the case with content and role. South Africa's new black and/or worker ownership did not automatically change the nature of media businesses that were bought. That black mineworkers are significant co-owners of *Business Day* newspaper does not mean their voices and perspectives hold sway over the paper in terms of content. In fact, this particular publication remains one of the only two dailies with a majority white readership, and its contents are pitched towards the interests of that readership" (1999, 105)

Berger (1999, 113) asserts that the five-year period from 1994 to 1999 had been characterised by the,

> "Mammoth change in South African media in the first five years of the country's democracy; in legal context, ownership and staffing, in race, and even gender and class. There have been changes in audiences and in the quantity and quality of media. Some of these changes accorded with transformation, some contributed to transformation, some ran counter to transformation and many counted directly as transformation".

Meanwhile, April *et al* (2019, 15) submit that:

> "Print media organisations should employ effective internal communication strategies to include employees in transformation and change programmes and obtain buy-in. In an increasingly competitive media industry, print media organisations need to stay relevant and competitive to retain media audiences".

Commenting on the importance of the editorial personnel, Swanepoel (2012, 152) asserts that:

> "Newsroom size is also linked directly to quality. Research shows that a higher staff ratio often indicates higher quality. Community newspapers generally employ fewer people, but employees need to be multi-skilled, because they often perform a variety of tasks. The high staff turnover community newspapers experience, adds pressure on the organisation as a system".

6.3.5 Investigative journalism

A recurring concern among the respondents is what they see as the newspaper's inability to feature or publish probing articles which are a result of muckraking or in-depth investigative journalism, which exposes wrongdoings or corruption, especially on the part of local government or municipalities. The inquiry finds that participants strongly submit that the *South Coast Herald* has a tendency of regurgitating stories or information which is already in the public domain, instead of delving deeper to find the story behind the story.

A participant from Margate observed that:

> "To be realistic, the paper shares the information that we already know. Like they rely from 1 source. To make an example, there is a water problem and the Mayor has kept on saying people are sabotaging the water supply. So, the paper takes that as is, instead they should be interviewing operational employees and those who are suspected. They must hunt the news from all corners of the South Coast. They must do investigative journalism and do follow-ups on issues. E.g, I have seen people complaining about their water bills, but I haven't seen an article on such. Municipality has not sorted the problem because it is not brought to them. They (newspaper/journalists) must know that they are our mouthpiece".

A Murchison respondent also decried lack of probing journalism on the part of the newspaper:

> "I just read the paper because it is easy to access otherwise I need investigative journalism".

A participant from Gamalakhe also echoed the investigative journalism sentiment, saying there must be:

> "Exposing of corrupt government officials".

This finding is in line with existing literary texts which point to the general decline of investigative journalism in the media as a whole, which could be attributed to factors such as insufficient financial resources (in the main), which have an adverse domino effect on human capital or staffing, a situation which results in alarmingly dwindling number of journalists, who in turn have no room to specialise in particular beats, but have to cover all types of stories due to increasingly understaffed newsrooms (Karadimitriou *et al*, 2022; Houston, 2010; Abdenour, 2015).

Karadimitriou *et al* (2022, 104) point out that:

> "Journalists, as watchdogs and investigators, perform similar – but not identical – tasks when trying to detect and describe corruption and abuse of power. The watchdog function of journalism was already present when the concept of a more thorough examination of facts – investigative reporting – began to evolve in the beginning of the twentieth century".

Karadimitriou *et al* (*ibid*.) add that:

> "In today's legacy media organisations, the watchdog role played by investigative journalism is challenged by the declining revenues (e.g., in Australia, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Finland, Germany, Greece, Iceland, and Italy) coupled with a shrinking number of journalists working within newsrooms (e.g., in Canada). Financial strain and staff shortage detract journalists from conducting investigative reporting; on the other hand, investigative reporting seems to be prioritised by media organisations in a context where democratic, professional, and commercial values converge" (2022, 114)

Houston (2010, 45 and 54) posits that:

> "Because of its adversarial qualities, investigative journalism is always under threat or attack–physically, legally, or financially. Now, with enormous losses in advertising revenue and ensuing layoffs at news organisations, the worries about the future are constant. Whatever the funding strategies, the future of valuable investigative journalism appears to rest in the paradoxical ability to do hyper-local reporting and/ or international reporting, sometimes in the same story. For example, a detailed investigation into soybean production in central Illinois could easily include information and reporting from Brazil since soybean production can affect prices in Illinois".

Abdenour (2015) argues that although investigative journalism has been hailed for its role, it has experienced a downward trajectory due to economic difficulties. Juarez (2019,1) states that:

> "Investigative journalism has had a long and rich history in the United States, but has been negatively affected over the years by downsizing at news organisations and the overall time and cost it takes to produce investigative pieces".

Turkel *et al* (2021, 1) point out that:

> "Ownership restructuring, layoffs, and a reorientation away from print advertising—have become commonplace in the last few decades. However, there have been few systematic attempts to characterise the impact of these changes on the types of reporting that local newsrooms produce".

Based on empirical evidence, Mokoena (2020) argues that the non-profit model, as opposite to the commercial one, offers a conducive environment or a stimulus or works as a catalyst to produce good investigative journalism. However, Mokoena (*ibid*., 202) points out that, "The commercial funding model hindered investigative journalism". Mokoena (2020, 204) explains why the non-profit route is good for credible investigative journalism:

> "The reason is embedded in the characteristics that make up this model, such as journalists not having deadline pressures, a funding policy that ensures editorial independence and quality control through donor transparency, not depending on corporation or government funding, and limitations on the donations supporters can contribute".

However, MacIntyre (2011) believes the future of investigative journalism is bright. MacIntyre (*ibid*.) asseverates that:

> "Reports of the death of investigative journalism have been greatly exaggerated. With apologies to Mark Twain, the obituaries have been written and its demise long foretold – and it was ever thus. This strand of journalism 'far from dying a death' is, in fact, in very robust shape indeed. The RTS Journalism Awards judges said that this year's nominations were 'among the strongest that anyone could remember'. It is my view that the sector is strong and those pessimistic of investigative journalism's future have an overly restricted sense of what such journalism constitutes and secondly, overplay the role of money in such output. It is important that journalists are open to new ways of telling stories using new technology, embracing new movements (such as citizen journalism) rather than offer the all-too-familiar, knee-jerk rants, that 'it was better in the old days'. That is not to deny that cash and time are not key issues: they are; but they do not and should not exclusively rein back excellence in

> investigative journalism. It is an easy cop out – a get out of jail card" (2011, 1, 2&5)

Carson and Farhall (2018) submit that collaborations among media outlets and the utilisation of digital platforms are crucial for the sustainability of investigative journalism. They emphasise that, "The press' role this century in producing investigative journalism remains important, notwithstanding significant newsroom cost-cutting and masthead closures" (2018, 1902). Carson and Farhall (*ibid*., 1909) state that:

> "The shifts from single newsroom investigative journalism to collaborations, to the use of multimedia, data and crowd-sourcing in storytelling suggest that despite challenging economic conditions that have triggered significant industrial restructures in newsrooms, quality investigative journalism continues in the digital age. There are obvious benefits to working collaboratively and digitally. These include sharing costs and information; increased story reach and a strengthened ability to set the news agenda. It also allows for more comprehensive or complex reporting on a global scale, like the Panama Papers. In this way, investigative collaborations and digital approaches are powerful antidotes to declining revenues and falling journalist numbers as we move deeper into the twenty-first century. Moreover, while decades of scholarship have established the important watchdog role played by investigative journalism as it seeks to uncover wrongdoing in the public interest, in an era of 'fake news' and declining public trust in media, comprehensive investigative work that seeks to serve the public may be increasingly vital to preserve both public trust and editorial quality. Collaborations and the use of digital media exemplify ways to sustain this vital role".

6.3.6 Developmental journalism

The results demonstrate that some participants submit that the *South Coast Herald* should pay more attention to issues pertaining to development and publish such articles, especially for the benefit of the historically disadvantaged communities located in rural and township areas. They feel that the coverage of community development is neglected or overlooked by the newspapers in favour of bad news, especially crime-related news items. Interestingly, respondents who

insisted on the newspaper covering community development issue are all in the employ of government or entities which close ties to government.

A respondent from Margate suggested that the newspaper:

> "It must focus more on community development issues, especially opportunities that are available in the South Coast for designated groups".

Another Margate respondent urged the publication to increase its coverage of development issues in the region by:

> "Covering and promoting more of youth developmental issues, promote education in our society in general maybe by having a different career-oriented column in every week publication".

A Gamalakhe participant submitted that:

> "There are so many African people doing great things around the South Coast, instead of profiling Africans as criminals, can they at least promote positive messages and profile good stories from African communities. There are great projects and initiatives that local government institutions contribute with, can they at least promote positive contributions by government instead of always painting government as corrupt and useless".

A respondent from Murchison suggested that the newspaper endeavour to ensure:

> "Coverage of educational stories mostly that have interest to the youth. Information in that regard, TVET colleges around and they assist marginalised students to achieve in life".

Another Murchison participant added:

> "I believe not all is bad about our town/coast. More coverage on positive news about ordinary citizens and institutions, private and government, would be appreciated too. More coverage on local rising stars across different fields in order to mobilise community support towards their pursuit for greatness. Charity begins at home".

Banda (2006, 1) argues that, "The concept of 'development journalism' has, over time, become possessed by demons of all sorts of confusion". Banda (*ibid*.) adds that developmental journalism fosters participatory communication with

the intended or target audience. De Beer *et al* (2016) postulate that the role of the media as a watchdog and espousing developmental journalism is not mutually exclusive. The scholars conducted:

> "The South African leg of the Worlds of Journalism Study (WJS). The WJS study, conducted in 50 countries around the world, provides a research tool to understand on a comparative basis how journalists in South Africa (SA) and elsewhere in the world perceive their role in the current media environment" (2016, 36)

De Beer *et al* (*ibid*.) posit that:

> "While theorists and government often regard the roles of the media as binary opposites and believe the media adopt one role to the detriment of another, the results show a potential new trend in the way that South African journalists see their role. The extreme contradiction between acting as watchdog of the government for the purpose of informing the public at the cost of providing support for national development and criticizing the government unnecessarily is in fact regarded by journalists surveyed as not contradictory. Although journalists in both surveys considered the media's role as a watchdog (i.e., a traditional libertarian model of the role of the media) as important, the results showed that journalists also believe it is important (though moderately so) to support national development and government policy (i.e., a developmental model of the role of the media)" (2016, 48)

Wimmer and Wolf (2005, 10-11) aver that, "Development journalism nowadays seems to have a firm position in African journalism education. This development does not take place on a big scale, but it definitely happens in niches". However, Tshabangu (2013, 312) argues that:

> "Development journalism lacks appeal and vigour and is almost impracticable in contemporary journalism practice. Operational environment factors such as tabloidisation; cut-throat inter-media competition; profit motives of shareholders; lack of specialised training in development journalism; Westernisation and juniorisation of the

> journalism profession; and the development slump undermine the practice of development journalism in Zimbabwe".

It must be noted though that Tshabangu (*ibid*.) does argue that developmental journalism still remains a need for the country's administration and journalists with regards to advocating and advancing national development goal agenda. The scholar adds that:

> "Development journalism should be uniquely practiced to suit particular contexts. This may necessitate that Zimbabwe develops its unique form of development journalism that will be standardised and agreed upon by journalists from both the private and public media. The Zimbabwean development journalism model will be responsible for advancing commonly agreed goals for national development. Such a development journalism model will be taught at the country's journalism schools while short courses will have to be organised for already practising journalists. In addition a responsible body such as the Zimbabwe Media Commission will regulate the operations of the media to ensure that development is practiced without overstepping the bounds to become partisan" (2013, 326)

Skjerdal (2011, 58) states that, "Development journalism became popular with African governments in the 1970s and 1980s as a way to utilise the media for national growth". Skjerdal (*ibid*.) further posits that developmental journalism has received sharp criticism for its propensity to push political agendas, especially that of the ruling or those in power, at the expense of ordinary people's interests, adding that:

> "The strong dependency on the state, especially in African versions of development journalism, has roused worries from press freedom organisations. Redefined versions of development journalism, however, claim to promote national interests while at the same time safeguarding independent reporting" (2011, 59)

Skjerdal (*ibid*.) stresses the importance of having safeguards in place to prevent political interference in what is supposed to be independent editorial processes. The author cites an Ethiopian case:

> "In 2008, Ethiopian authorities presented a draft policy document which established development journalism as the official reporting style for the state media. The policy prescribes that the media and journalists should play an active role in the country's development scheme. Assigning such a role to the media is controversial, however, not the least since it is seen to be at odds with media independence and press freedom. The journalists are favourable towards development journalism as a professional framework, but they are challenged when they try to convert the framework into actual media practice. The problems are threefold: ambiguity of development journalism as concept and practice; political inclination of the state media; and lack of participation by the public" (2011, 1)

However, Odhiambo (1991, 17), avers that:

> "Development journalism, though a welcome departure from Western mass media paradigms, lacks organic relevance to make it a legitimate professional pursuit for sub-Saharan African journalists. This is because 'development' no longer evoke patriotism in the present socio-political environment of the region".

Odhiambo (*ibid*.) explains thus:

> "This is not because it is no longer relevant, nor is it because there is no philosophical basis for it. This discussion has also surveyed the constraints of journalism in Africa with its unstable political and economic realities. It has postulated that historical factors, political mismanagement, and international economic and ideological interests have all played major roles in stunting Africa's development thereby limiting the capacity of African journalists to play any meaningful role in their societies" (1991, 28)

Elsewhere in the world, Xiaoge (2009, 357) points out that:

> "Development journalism debuted in Asia in the late 1960s when the idea of communication for development was garnering support academically

> and politically, especially among the newly independent nations. Theoretically equipped with the proliferating development communication paradigm, journalism was believed and expected to play a key role in facilitating and fostering national development".

The author admits though that the dynamics have changed, and with that the evolution of developmental journalism, thereby needing a rethink in terms of its relevance and applicability to today's society. Xiaoge (*ibid*.) observes that:

> "There is always a gap between what the press is expected to be and do in society, and what it actually is and does. This gap is vulnerable to changes in social, economic, cultural, and political conditions and situations. How do social, economic, cultural and political factors influence and shape the way development journalism is expected to operate and the way it actually operates? How should the narrowing or widening of the normative-empirical gap in practicing development journalism be measured and explained. As development has its economic, cultural and political dimensions, further research should cover these different dimensions instead of focusing on the economic aspects only. Development journalism is practiced differently in different countries. Journalism studies needs to explain the different practices and develop models to describe, explain and predict the way development journalism operates" (2009, 367)

6.3.7 Behavioural influence

In the process, which is not linear in nature, of interpreting the newspaper's messages or deriving meanings from the media texts or content carried by the *South Coast Herald*, respondents posit that their background such as culture, ideology, worldviews and other factors play a significant role to make their own independent determination. This finding speaks to the dynamic processes involved in the application of the pioneering Hall's Encoding/Decoding Model. Pratiwi and Vera (2023, 2702) point out that, "Stuart Hall's Reception Analysis Theory (Encoding-Decoding) has a model with three categories: Dominant Position, Negotiated Position, and Oppositional Position". Pratiwi and Vera (*ibid*.) describes the media as the encoder whose texts or messages are decoded by the audiences – in the case of community newspapers, this will refer to

editors and readers respectively. In this instance, there are readings which amount to vehement oppositional scenario, and those which have a symmetry with texts produced by the media – a case of dominant reading. Pratiwi and Vera (2023, 2705) describe the oppositional reading as:

> "The final option audiences might use to decode media messages. It happens when critical audience substitutes or modifies the messages or codes that the media can communicate with different messages or codes. The intended messages or media preferences get rejection by audiences, who substitute their ideas with their way of thinking about the topics the media conveys".

One participant from Gamalakhe township was unambiguous in his response:

> "My cultural, racial and political background has assisted me a lot in being able to spot the narrative that this newspaper is directing. I can safely say that evidence is there that *South Coast Herald* is mostly concerned about white people and their businesses and nothing else. I grew up during the apartheid era and the things I experienced growing up and stories told by elders back then are sometimes still a reality in how this newspaper selects it stories. They simply don't care about African people and their challenges unless it's a narrative that suits their agenda e.g. publishing good deeds done by Africans who work for white people. They will never deal with real issues e.g. Racism in the South Coast, Apartheid elements in the South Coast. They don't care about addressing issues of racial profiling, racial divisions, and social cohesion".

A participant from Margate (suburb) stated that:

> "Most definitely, we most interpret every statement differently and like I said above, if I interpret the particular statement in a way I feel it is being biased say to certain racial group or political group. I tend to associate the editors with that group, to an extent I racialise the paper itself."

However, another respondent from the same Margate (suburb) held a different view:

> "For me the articles published are fine they do not pose any offense to my cultural background and religion in anyway".

The dichotomy in a manner in which study participants interpret media texts demonstrates or provides empirical evidence of the existence of diversity in deriving meanings due to several factors applicable to particular people or individuals including location, culture, ideological orientation, religion and others. As stated in Chapter 3 (Theoretical Framework), Xie *et al* (2022) stress that the Hall Encoding/Decoding Model is not only limited to television programmes, but also applicable to other media discourse issues where it can be used as a theoretical framework/tool for analysis. Glasspool (2020) argues that the processes of encoding and decoding by text producers and receivers are a complex matter wherein issues such as, among others, culture and power relations form part of the equation.

6.4 Explicating the editor's themes

As shown in the preceding chapter, the following themes were derived from the response of the editor of the *South Coast Herald*, David Rush:

- Experienced management
- Willingness to transform
- Hyper local content
- Diverse digital platforms
- Importance of adverts

In the explication process of the editor themes, they will be also coalesced in terms of convergence and similarity, as was the case with the readers' themes.

6.4.1 Perceived racial bias (and willingness to transform)

Rush (2021) is aware of the existence of the serious allegations that the newspaper harbours racial bias in favour of white readers, to an extent Indian readers, while neglecting black readers. Furthermore, since he took over the editorship of the *South Coast Herald* four years ago, he has embarked on a mission to change that negative perception, Rush (*ibid*., e-mail) explains:

> "In the past, there has been a perception that the paper only catered for whites and to a lesser extent, Indians. We have worked really hard to get the balance right, and shed any perception that it might still be that way. Since becoming editor I have been involved in some deep, open and honest discussions with staff at all levels as to where we get it wrong and where we get it right. It's an ongoing process and about listening and learning all the time. Our paper has traditionally catered for a large(ly) retired population, plus a large school going population".

6.4.2 Hyper local content and adverts (importance of advertising)

Rush (2021) emphasises that his newspaper's main goal is to have hyper local content and advertising. However, he does admit, that there is an exigent need to diversify the hyper local content due to the diverse nature of his readership. He points out that:

> "Our goal is always to be as hyper-local as possible, and I'm keenly aware of the changing demographics of our region and country and we try to cater for a readership that may be very different in the future to what it looks like now, but which is definitely changing, without it being forced. I can say that we have made a big effort to ensure our paper is balanced in terms of news about people of all race groups. To an extent, *Eyethu* (an IsiZulu-medium weekly Caxton-owned community newspaper) covers much of the really rural news – the type of news that caters for non-English reading/speaking readers. However, there is overlap. I would say our advertising caters for readers of all backgrounds."

6.4.3 Management credentials and newsroom representivity

As started above, the editor has been in his position now for four years. Prior to assuming the editorship of the award-winning regional newspaper, he was with the *South Coast Herald* for years, having "started as a junior reporter, then went on to become sports editor. Following that, senior journalist, then deputy editor". In terms of staffing, Rush (2021) reveals that the publication has five reporters – two Indian, two black and one white. He adds that:

> "In our newsroom we have two Indian journalists, two black journalists and one white journalist. I've found that they tend to produce news from their communities and their interests. However, this does not mean it

follows a demographic line, as all have reported on stories on people of all race groups."

Rush (2021) acknowledges the need to groom young journalists in a bid to ensure the newspaper has a succession planning in place, and ensuring the crucial issue of sufficiently diverse content for its readers. He stresses that:

> "On an editorial level, we are aware of the need to groom all the journalists to be able to run the paper, if necessary. And explained to the younger ones the importance of the role they play now, and the role they will need to play in the future. Once Covid is over (hopefully sooner rather than later) the plan is for a nicely balanced newsroom to continue making inroads and forming relationships with the community at large and their specific areas as well. For example, each journo gets a turn to write a blog for our Opinion page. Two are brand new, so it's about getting them out there and becoming better known. So far, they have made a great start, even in these difficult times. I've also found that our community is becoming increasingly blended, in the sense that to an increasing degree, the balance is becoming more natural".

6.4.4 Digital platforms and diverse content

In the digital era which has seen the proliferation of social media platforms being used as primary source of dissemination of information, thereby prompting a discussion around the role of journalism in the epoch of instantaneous interactivity and communication, Rush (2021) believes his newspaper has done well in terms of delivering diverse content on its social media platforms. Rush (*ibid*.) does emphasise though that the print media, especially community newspapers, still have a bright future and will not wilt in an era of increased digitisation. He posits that:

> "Our website has shown that we have many readers of all backgrounds. Many inbox with stories and things they would like us to follow up, or do, and they are from all backgrounds, in reasonably equal measure. However, I do believe there is a place for print, especially when it comes to hyper-local news and hyper-local advertising. I can see an obvious increasing combination-deal when it comes to advertising, including video and such".

6.5 Conclusion

Flowing from Chapter 5, which identified themes constructed from raw data using thematic analysis, this penultimate chapter of the thesis has been mainly about presenting findings and interpreting their meanings thereof. The write-up, which is the last stage of the thematic process, assists the inquiry to find answers to the critical research questions, which in turn moves us closer to fully understanding and unpacking the phenomenon under the microscope – chiefly, the reception of the regional newspaper in rural, township and suburban areas on the South Coast of KwaZulu-Natal. Also importantly, having put the theoretical framework, the encoding/decoding communications model, to the test or practice, the emergent empirical evidence has assisted the investigation to understand the actions of the encoders and decoders in relation to the navigation of media texts. The major findings of the study pertain to matters related to perceived racial bias, lack of diverse local news content and the incontrovertible importance of adverts in a community newspaper setting, which by extension, applies to the mainstream media. Equipped with this pivotal information and findings, the researcher is now in a position to draw conclusion regarding the study, and make recommendations to the *South Coast Herald*, which is by far the most preferred regional newspaper in that part of the KwaZulu-Natal and enjoys diverse readership found in distinct locations such as rural villages, suburbs and township in the region. The next and final chapter intends to do just that – seeking to provide a detailed conclusion and offer pertinent recommendations.

Chapter 7: Conclusion and reflections

7.1 Introduction

The inquiry's focus has been on regional newspapers and their diverse readers, utilising the *South Coast Herald* newspaper, located south of KwaZulu-Natal province, as a case study to investigate its reception in rural, township and suburban areas of Murchison, Gamalakhe and Margate. South Africa is a diverse country with people from different walks of life. It is a nation teeming with citizens of various backgrounds, cultures, languages, traditions, religions, races, tribes and classes. It is a heterogeneous society. Since the advent of democracy in 1994, the principle of embracing diversity has been gaining traction from various sectors of society. The community media is regarded as a critical communication platform to advance the principles of diversity.

7.2 Community newspapers, diverse content, inquiry and research questions

As alluded to in Chapter 2 (Literature Review), the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism (2005) meeting/workshop stressed the importance of the community media which promotes diversity. In addition, in the preceding chapter, Swanepoel (2012, 152) posits that, "Geographically defined community newspapers have an important task to reflect the diversity of the community as a whole". Furthermore, Swanepoel (2012, 153) avers that, "Quality community newspapers provide micro news that respects the morals and values and integrates the diverse nature of the community". Hence, the inquiry sought to probe the newspaper's approach to its news coverage and the consequent or resultant reception by its diverse readers. The following research questions were critical to the inquiry:

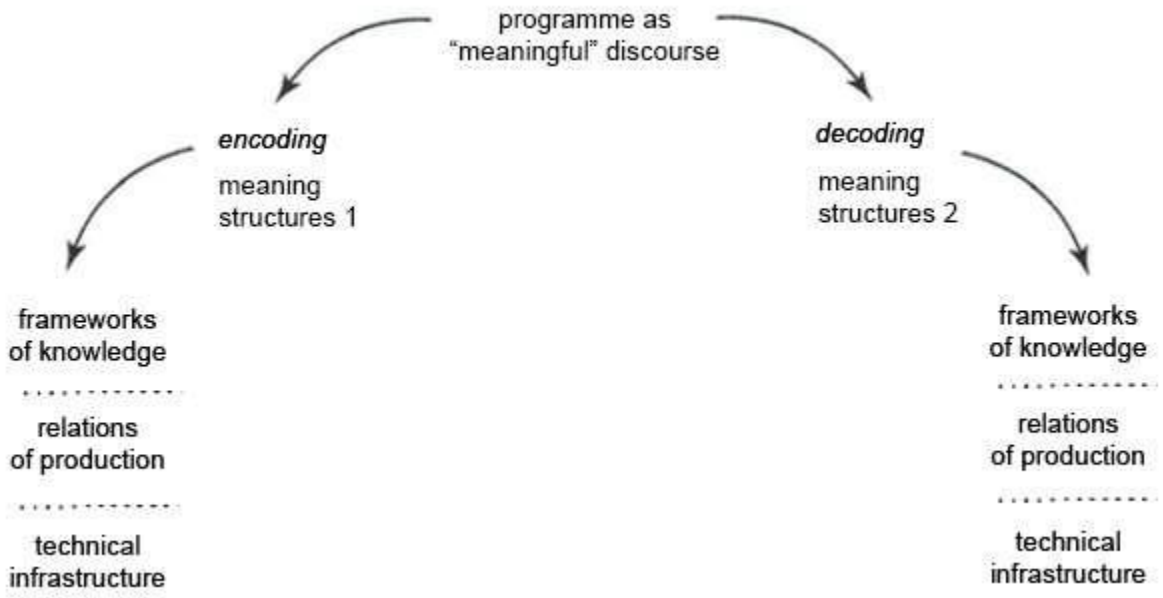
- How does the newspaper approach the coverage of news or events?
- How does the newspaper cater for the multiplicity of its readers?
- How is the newspaper received by its diverse readers?

A total of 30 participants from Margate, Gamalakhe and Murchison were e-mailed questionnaires after agreeing to take part in the study. A total of 16 questions, mainly open-ended in design/nature were dispatched to the 30 participants. Each identified area was allocated a total of 10 participants, making it an envisaged combined total of 30 respondents from the three areas. There was a 100% (10/10) response rate from Gamalakhe while Margate stood at 90%

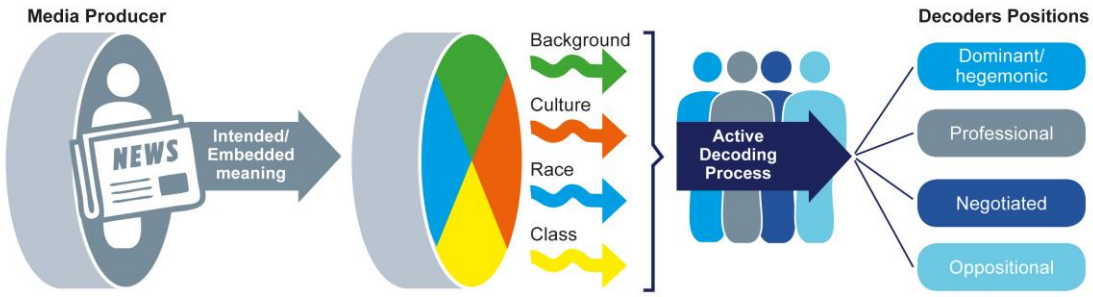
(9/10) and six out of 10 (60%) of Murchison's participants returned responses. Overall, this puts the response rate at 83.3% (25/30). A questionnaire – comprising 19 questions – was sent to the Editor of the *South Coast Herald*, David Rush, and he furnished the researcher with answers to all the inquiry questions.

7.3 The Stuart Hall reception theory and inquiry

Central to unpacking the phenomenon and to the objectives of the inquiry was the utilisation of Hall's ground-breaking Encoding/Decoding Communication Model, which he first introduced in September 1973 in his paper titled, "Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse". The diagram and infographic below explain sand summarises the Stuart Hall encoding/decoding process:



Hall's encoding/decoding model reproduced from (Hall, 1999, 510)



Xie *et al* (2022, 190) explain encoding and decoding concepts as follows:

> "Encoding refers to that the information disseminator transforming the conveyed message, meaning, intention or viewpoint, through verbal or non-verbal form, into a symbolic code or information form that has specific rules and is easy to understand and translate. Decoding meant the process that the recipient of the information interprets the code, and/or recreates the conveyed ideology. The decoding or interpretation activities of the decoders reflected the complexity of the communication process and the diversity of society".

7.4 Synopsis of key findings

While Rush (2021) submits that the newspaper's approach to news is driven and underpinned by the newspaper's mission to be "leaders of local news" with "hyper-local" content, two thirds of the study participants or respondents posit that the news content is unmistakably pro-suburban areas, with the content focusing on issues which are mostly relevant to the white, to an extent Indian, populations in the region. Based on the responses of the study participants, it is clear beyond any scintilla of doubt, that there is a deliberate and intentional agenda/drive on the part of the newspaper to exclude the content relevant or pertinent to readers in rural and township areas. The manner in which they (readers) decode the media texts or messages embedded in the stories or articles or editorial content points to an oppositional reading with regards to their

interpretation and understanding. Explaining the significance of content diversity, Reid and Malila (2020, 32) posit that:

> "Media content diversity also involves the diversity of representation. There are a range of socio-cultural indicators which have been identified as pertinent in measuring content diversity within the media for the South African context. As a result of the diverse language, cultural, ethnic and religious groups within South Africa the measurement model must identify the manner in which different racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, linguistic minorities (and majorities) are represented in the media. Diverse content would ensure that these groups are satisfactorily and distinctly represented in the media. It is also important to gauge whether these groups feel that they are fairly represented in the media".

Proffering his views on the concept of Ubuntu and the "Rainbow Nation" mantra, coined by the later Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu and repeatedly supported by the late revered statesman Nelson Mandela, Buqa (2015, 6) asserts that:

> "Reflecting on unity in diversity and diversity in unity is a vitally critical need in the post-1994 South Africa where leadership is looking for approaches to move towards building a new South Africa. Given the fact that South Africa has always been a multi-cultural society, one would have expected a rich and strong tradition of philosophical reflection on diversity. However, it is not a case, due to the past discourse of apartheid and colonial rule. We appear to be scared of diversity in ethnicities, in religious faiths and in political and ideological points of view. The heart of the problem is that race and colour seem to remain the principal axes of consciousness: people think of themselves as either black or white people. We are impatient with anything and anyone that suggests that there might just be another option worth exploring".

Rush (2021) admits that the newspaper has for a long time been perceived as pro-white. In addressing the concern or perception, Rush (*ibid*.) states the paper has embarked on a process of introspection to ensure that its coverage or content is indicative or reflective of the diverse population it serves. The only clearcut point of absolute convergence between the newspaper and readers, which results in downright dominant reading or symmetry, is the importance of adverts, with both parties putting a high premium on advertisements.

7.5 Methodology and limitations

As stated in Chapter 4 (Methodology), with regards to the limitations of the study, when listing disadvantages of purposive sampling, which was employed for the purposes of this inquiry, Rai and Thapa, 2015, point out issues pertaining to non-probability, (sometimes) lack of thorough knowledge of the population by researchers and their inherent bias. However, Basch (1987, 412) argues that, "Small group discussion and group process has played a central role in behavioural science". Fortunately, the researcher in this inquiry is *au fait* with the study topic (community media) and the area where the investigation was conducted. Furthermore, although the initial or preferred data collection technique was using focus groups in trying to find answers to the phenomenon under scrutiny, the inquiry resorted to utilising the questionnaire method due to the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions. The researcher concedes that some few responses would have had the benefit of focus groups in terms of providing more information to open-ended questions which were met with short or inadequate answers. However, Rathi and Ronald (2022, 7698) remind us that, when it comes to employing the questionnaire technique:

> "Perceptions, views and opinions of the researcher/interviewer do not get reflected in the respondent's responses. In the interview, the response may be prompted by the interviewer/researcher. In the interview and observation tool of data collection, there is a possibility of reflection of the opinion, perception or biases of the researcher/interviewer. In this sense, the data collected through the questionnaire tool is more reliable".

7.6 Scholarly lacuna and opportunities for further exploration

All things considered, the inquiry findings present crucial information for regional community newspapers to ensure that they do not only offer hyper-local news, but the content must speak to and cater for all their readers in their diversity. It is time for hyper-diverse local content! Furthermore, the community media needs to forge closer relationships with their audiences in order to deliver relevant content and services to them. For scholars or researchers, the findings present an opportunity, as there exists a scholarly lacuna, for further studies, with regards to the role of community newspapers, especially those owned by big companies or conglomerates, vis-à-vis the interests of the communities they serve or cover, taking into consideration the very diverse and heterogeneous nature of these communities. Furthermore, it would be interesting if researchers could look into the community or individually owned community newspapers/media and establish their reception, using the encoding/decoding communications model among their readers in geographically defined areas. Such inquiry would be pivotal in terms of shedding light on the dynamics or defining characteristics that exist between community or individually owned community press and conglomerate-owned community newspapers. As

Swanepoel (2012, 204) points out, “Very little research has been done about community newspapers in general, and in South Africa in particular”.

7.7 Reflections on identified shortcomings

Having investigated the phenomenon, which is the subject of the inquiry, the researcher is in a position to proffer some reflections which hopefully might serve as a catalyst to address the newspaper’s challenges that have been identified through the study findings. In addition, these suggestions could give rise to the possibility of assisting the establishment to eliminate or overcome factors which could be construed as being currently inimical to ensuring the *South Coast Herald* becomes a truly transformed newspaper, the one characterised by, among others, hyper-diverse local content. The suggestions are two-fold: First, in relation to the *South Coast Herald* newsroom staff and the newspaper itself, and, second, the (editorial) management initiating an intentional reader engagement drive/campaign aimed at bettering and enhancing the quality of its relationship with its diverse readers.

7.7.1 Diversity workshop

A diversity workshop for the editorial staff facilitated by an external transformation expert. This process is aimed at achieving a holistic approach to the oft sensitive topic or issue of diversity. This would create a conducive environment for a frank and robust discussion around diversity or transformation to take place. Here, members of the newsroom would be allowed to speak freely and candidly about diversity (without fear of reprisals), accorded an opportunity to suggest or propose solutions for the benefit of the newspaper and readers at large. Participants in the workshop will map a way forward and assign roles with regards to advancing the content diversity agenda. Everyone takes ownership of the process out of their own volition. This is likely to have more buy-in from all staff members because of its consultative nature, which seeks to ensure that the process is embraced and supported by all editorial employees. The process must put an emphasis on promoting and appreciating diversity while rooting out the “us against them” mentality. It is a process in which everyone moves in the same direction, with the same objectives and goals.

7.7.2 Reporters assigned demographic areas

Similar to the constituency system which applies to Members of Parliament – belonging in the National Assembly and the National Council of Provinces – Members of provincial legislatures and Councillors at local government level, the newspaper’s journalists must have places or areas (constituencies) which are

assigned to them by the editor in order to increase coverage of such designated locations. These areas (be it rural, township or suburban in character) must be clustered in relation to their proximity. For example, Margate (town) can be clustered with Gamalakhe (township) and other nearby areas… Gcilima (rural place) could be in the same cluster with neighbouring Southbroom (suburb) and so forth and Ramsgate (suburb) with Mvutshini (rural place). In this way, reporters of different races will get to experience diversity firsthand. It is about taking journalists out of their comfort zone and learning about other cultures and acquiring new perspectives. It must be emphasised that this system will not stop journalists from covering news or events which are out of areas of their primary focus, whenever the need arises.

7.7.3 Picture bylines and contact details on page 2 or 3

Journalists, especially those who operate in the community media space, are the ambassadors and faces of their newspapers. In fact, they become more like public figures. As such, it would make sense to have a dedicated space on either page two or three where their pictures and contact details, including e-mail addresses and cellphone numbers, are published on a weekly basis. This helps the journalist-reader bond which characterises community media. It is advisable that the newspaper should purchase cellphones for their journalists and furnish them with data as well. It is unthinkable that, especially in this digital era, journalists have to utilise their own personal phones for work purposes. Cellphones are a necessary resource or non-negotiable imperative for reporters to be able to carry out their journalistic duties properly. Cellphones are at the very heart of the communication process in this dispensation.

7.7.4 Caxton Content Diversity Ombud

Caxton, a company with a multi-billion-rand market capitalisation, owns many community newspapers all over South Africa. According to Caxton (2023, online), “The group now has more than 140 newspapers with a combined weekly print order exceeding 3.7 million copies, with representation in the large majority of provinces across the country”. Therefore, it would be progressive of Caxton to appoint its own Group Content Diversity Ombud who, among other matters, might be mandated with ensure that its community newspapers across South Africa carry hyper-diverse local content. The content diversity champion will be there to investigate lack-of-diversity complaints and expedite the process of addressing shortcomings wherever they are identified in the stable’s community newspapers.

7.7.5 Reader engagements/roadshows/town hall meetings

The media is not called the Fourth Estate for nothing, it is sort of accorded the same status as the official three Arms (Government, Parliament and Judiciary) of the State because of its well-known "watchdog" role… holding to account those in power and exposing malfeasance whenever it rears its ugly head. However, accountability must start with the media itself. In this case, the *South Coast Herald* has to go to the people and listen to them to hear what they want to see and read in their newspaper. These consultative reader engagements or town hall meetings would provide a crucial platform for grassroots people's voices to be heard unfiltered, with a view to enhancing the paper's capacity to create and publish content which caters for the diverse readership located in rural, township and suburban areas. Put simply, it would be hearing from the actual readers themselves without the possibility of the message being distorted through the usage of intermediaries or intercessors.

7.7.6 Establishment of reader forums

One of the defining elements or features, as shown in preceding chapters, especially Chapter 2 (Literature Review), of the community press is their ability to be the true voice of their communities, enabling meaningful community participation in their community newspapers. The creation and sustaining of reader forums in diverse communities would be beneficial to the newspaper's efforts aimed at achieving hyper-diverse local content. In addition, this will instill the culture of ownership among readers, who will feel important enough that they are actively included and involved in determining the content direction of their local newspaper. It is envisaged that for this recommendation to be efficient and effective, journalists would be in constant communication, on a weekly basis, with reader forums or news champions, who will indicate if there is something to be considered for publication – it is more like an extended weekly news diary, but in this case, it would involve news champions, who actually live in those communities, that are avid readers of the newspaper.

However, it must be stressed that not everything suggested by reader forums will be published, the newspaper's editor still has the prerogative to have the final say. The reader forums would be instrumental in enhancing content diversity.

Furthermore, in the world of breaking news and digital platforms, those reader forums or news champions would be able to confirm or corroborate breaking stories, thereby amplifying and ensuring accuracy and veracity of news being disseminated on the *South Coast Herald* online or social media platforms. Credible and reliable sources on the ground are particularly important for the media in general.

7.7.7 Sponsoring of events

The newspaper, in conjunction with advertisers, must endeavour to play an active role by supporting and providing funding or sponsorships, whenever possible and feasible, to community events in the regions, especially those events which contribute positively towards racial or cultural or religious harmony or cohesion. For example, providing sponsorships for rugby, football and cricket tournaments as well as dance, singing, art and school debate competitions in Port Shepstone. One of the distinguishing factors between the community press and the mainstream media is that they (community media or community newspaper) ought to care deeply about the communities they serve, meaning issues of development and related areas are more important to them. Therefore, sponsoring community events helps to foster and nurture that community spirit. Sporting events, in particular, continue to be an indispensable part of communities across the racial spectrum and promote social cohesion.

7.7.8 Community noticeboard

Dedicated space on a particular page to publish essential information about community meetings, events and so forth. The aforementioned reader forums or news champions would be of great assistance in ensuring that the community noticeboard is truly representative, not only just focus on certain areas, especially those located within suburban communities. Tribal authorities would also be accorded an opportunity to make important announcements using this platform. Readers will always look forward to reading what is happening in their respective communities. If properly implemented, just like the preceding proposals, it is likely to result in an upward trajectory for the newspaper's readership.

7.7.9 Weekly hero/role model feature

Matshabane (2016, 128) asserts that, "Role models do in fact play a direct and indirect role in motivating and inspiring the career and life decisions of adolescents". Matshabane (*ibid*.) further posits that:

> "Causative factors which put young people at risk are numerous. But, the lack of visible positive role models in low-income communities may be a significant contribution to the problem. Addressing these challenges through mobilising of positive role models may counter impede on this disturbing cycle, the absence of positive role models may contribute or impede adolescents from developing viable post school career options as it further escalates high rates of poverty in these communities" (2016, 22)

The *South Coast Herald* should consider running a weekly feature which will shine the spotlight on community heroes/heroines and role models who are making their respective communities better places to live in as well as profiling people from the region who have made it in their careers or professions in order to serve as an inspiration or role models to school going children or learners, especially those from rural and township areas who are often faced with serious challenges and poverty. A feature of that nature would contribute greatly to community development and encourage young people to dream big, study and work hard in order to achieve success. Children or young people from impoverished or disadvantaged backgrounds need real (community) heroes and role models if they are to genuinely believe that people who were once in their situation have made it in life. The *South Coast Herald* is in a great position to inspire them to greatness.

Reference List

Abdenour, J. (2015) *The face of investigative news: a mixed-method analysis of local television investigative journalism content, perceptions, and Influences.* PhD. University of North Carolina.

Caxton (2023) *About South Coast Herald*. [online] Port Shepstone: Caxton. Available from: https://www.citizen.co.za/south-coast-herald/port-shepstone-news-team/ [Accessed 1 April 2023]

Acharya, A. S., Prakash, A., Saxena, P. and Nigam, A. (2013) Sampling: why and how of it? *Indian Journal of Medical Specialities*, 4(2) 330-333.

Adjoteye, E. A., Saragih, M. Y. and Ridwan, M. (2021) Methodological approaches to reception analysis research in Ghanaian media studies. *Budapest International Research and Critics Institute-Journal (BIRCI-Journal)*, 4(1) 545-1551.

Adom, D., Osei, M. and Adu-Agyem, J. (2020) Covid-19 lockdown: A review of an alternative to the traditional approach to research. *Research Journal in Advanced Social Sciences*, 1 1-9.

Akbayrak, B. (2000) A comparison of two data collecting methods: interviews and questionnaires. *Hacettepe Univ J Educ*, 18 1-10.

Alase, A. (2017) The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA): a guide to a good qualitative research approach. *International Journal of Education & Literacy Studies*, 5(2) 9-19.

Albright, J. (2017) Welcome to the era of fake news. *Media and Communication*, 5(2) 87-89.

Alhojailan, M. I. (2012) Thematic analysis: a critical review of its process and evaluation. *Academic Conference Proceedings*, Zagreb October 14-17, Zagreb, Croatia: WEI International European, 8-21.

Aligwe, H. N., Nwafor, K. A., and Alegu, J. C. (2018) Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding model: a critique. *World Applied Sciences Journal*, 36(9) 1019-1023.

Anney, V. N. (2014) Ensuring the quality of the findings of qualitative research: looking at trustworthiness criteria. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies*, 5 272-281.

April, A., Maubane, P. M. and Odendaal, L. (2019) Exploring key areas of transformation in a South African media organisation. *Communitas*, 24 1-17.

Azeem, M. and Salfi, N. A. (2012) usage of NVivo software for qualitative data analysis. *Academic Research International*, 2(1) 262-266.

Banda, F. (2006) An appraisal of the applicability of development journalism in the context of public service broadcasting (PSB*). News Content Planning workshop*, Boksburg, 21 October, Boksburg, South Africa: The South African Broadcasting Corporation, 1-18.

Baofo, S. T. K. (ed.) 2000 Introduction in *Promoting Community Media in Africa.* The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

Baptiste, I. (2001) Qualitative data analysis: common phases, strategic differences. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 2(3) Art 22.

Basch, C. E. (1987) Focus group interview: an underutilised research technique for improving theory and practice in health education. *Health Education Quarterly*, 14(4) 411-448.

Basdogan, M., Ozdogan, Z., and Bonk, C. J. (2020) Understanding the diverse field of "educational technology" as revealed in Twitter job postings: encoding/decoding approach. *The Qualitative Report*, 25(8) 2044-2066.

Basit, T. N. (2003) Manual or electronic? The role of coding in qualitative data analysis. *Educational Research*, 45(2) 143–154.

Berger, G. (1996) What is community media? *Community Voices Conference*, 6 – 11 October, Club Makokola, Mangochi, Malawi: Media Institute of Southern Africa, 1-11.

Berger, G. (1999) Towards an analysis of the South African media and transformation, 1994-99. *Transformation*, 38 82-116.

Bergin, M. (2011) NVivo 8 and consistency in data analysis: reflecting on the use of a qualitative data analysis program. *Nurse Researcher*, 18(3) 6-12.

Bødker, H. (2016) Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model and the circulation of journalism in the digital landscape. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 33(5) 409-423.

Bosch, T. (2014) Social media and community radio journalism in South Africa. *Digital Journalism*, 2(1) 29-43.

Bradley, E. H., Curry, L. A. and Devers, K. J. (2007) Qualitative data analysis for health services research: developing taxonomy, themes, and theory. *Health Services Research*, 42(4) 1758-1772.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2022) Conceptual and design thinking for thematic analysis. *Qualitative Psychology*, 9(1) 3-26.

Buqa, W. (2015) Storying Ubuntu as a rainbow nation. *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 36(2) 1-8.

Burnard, P., Gill, P., Stewart, K., Treasure, E. and Chadwick, B. (2008) Analysing and presenting qualitative data. *British Dental Journal*, 204 429-432.

Carpentier, N., Lie, R. and Servaes, J. (2003) Community media: muting the democratic discourse? *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, 17(1) 51-68.

Carson, A. and Farhall, K. (2018) Understanding collaborative investigative journalism in a "post-truth" age. *Journalism Studies*, 19(13) 1899-1911.

Castleberry, G. (2016) Understanding Stuart Hall's "encoding/decoding" model through TV's Breaking Bad. In: Kathleen Glenister Roberts (ed.) *Communication Theory and Millennial Popular Culture: Essays and Applications*. Media and Communication, 84-95.

Caulfield, J. (2019) *How to do thematic analysis: step-by-step guide and examples*. [online] Scribbr. Available from: https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/thematic-analysis/ [Accessed 12 July 2023]

Clark, V. and Braun, V. (2016) Thematic analysis. *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 12(3) 1-2.

Chenail, R. J. (2012) Conducting qualitative data analysis: qualitative data analysis as a metaphoric process. *The Qualitative Report*, 17(1) 248-253.

Chung, D.S (2009) How readers perceive journalists' functions at online community newspapers. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 30(1) 72-80.

Cleave, P. (2023) *Advantages of questionnaires in online research*. [blog entry] 26 January. Smart Survey. Available from: https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/blog/advantages-of-questionnaires-in-online-research [Accessed 21 July 2023].

Coetzee, D. (2016) *Newspapers and the Fourth Estate: Why a free press is important for brands*. [online] South Africa: The MediaOnline. Available from: https://themediaonline.co.za/2016/10/newspapers-and-the-fourth-estate-the- importance-of-a-free-press-and-what-this-means-for-brands/ [Accessed 3 April 2020].

Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996).

Cresswell, J. W. (2009) *Research design: qualitative, quantitative and mixed approaches methods*. 3rd edition. Sage Publications.

Cresswell, J. W. (2013) *Qualitative inquiry: choosing among five approaches*. 3rd edition. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

Crosley, J. (2021) *What exactly is thematic analysis*? [online] Gradcoach. Available from: https://gradcoach.com/what-is-thematic-analysis/ [Accessed 25 July 2023]

Cutcliffe, J. R. and McKenna, H. P. (1999) Establishing the credibility of qualitative research findings: the plot thickens. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 30(2) 374-380.

Dalati, S. and Marx Gómez, J. (2018). Surveys and Questionnaires. In: Gómez, J. and Mouselli, S. (eds.) *Modernizing the Academic Teaching and Research Environment*. Springer, Cham 175-186.

Daniels, G. (2020) Community newspaper voices: local and black, but the glaring gap is women: In: Julie Reid (ed.) *New concepts for media diversity: a view from South Africa*. 1st edition. Pretoria: Unisa Press, 161-177.

Dawadi, S. (2020) Thematic analysis approach: A step-by-step guide for ELT research practitioners. *Journal of NELTA*, 25(1-2) 62-71.

De Beer, A. S., Malila, V., Beckett, S. and Wasserman, H. (2016) Binary opposites – can south African journalists be both watchdogs and developmental journalists? *Journal of African Media Studies*, 8(1) 35–53.

De Casterle´, B. D., Gastmans, C., Bryon, E. and Denier, Y. (2012) Quagol: A guide for qualitative data analysis. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 49(3) 360-371.

De Wet, C. (2001) A media discourse analysis of racism in South African schools. *International Education Journal*, 2(5) 98-112.

Dey, I. (1993) *Qualitative data analysis: A User-friendly guide for social scientists*. 1st edition. London: Routledge.

Dinabantu, K. S. (2022) *The normative role of the corporately owned community newspapers in the digital era: District Mail, Northern News and Eikestad Nuus in South Africa*. Master's. University of Stellenbosch.

Doody, O., Slevin, E. and Taggart, L. (2013) Focus group interviews in nursing research: part 1. *British Journal of Nursing*, 22(1) 16-19.

Drury, R., Homewood, K. and Randall, S. (2010) Less is more: the potential of qualitative approaches in conservation research. *Animal Conservation*, 14 18–24.

Duncan, J. (2015) Rethinking media diversity policy on the community press in South Africa. *Communication*, 41(4) 423-443.

During, S. (1999) Stuart Hall – encoding, decoding. In: Simon During (ed.) *The Cultural Studies Reader*. 2nd edition. London: Routledge, 507-517.

Durrheim, K., Quayle, M and Whitehead, K (2005) Denying racism: discursive strategies used by the South African media. *Critical Arts*, 19(1-2) 1-26.

Du Toit, P. and Rau, A. (2008) *When commercial can also be community*. [online] South African: Sabinet African Journals. Available from: https://journals.co.za/doi/pdf/10.10520/EJC140094 [Accessed 5 April 2023].

Espiritu, B. F. (2011) Transnational audience reception as a theater of struggle: young Filipino women's reception of Korean television dramas. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 21(4) 355-372.

Etikan, I. and Bala, K (2017) Sampling and sampling methods. *Biometrics & Biostatistics International Journal*, 5(6) 215-217.

Finlay, L. (2021) Thematic analysis: the 'good', the 'bad' and the 'ugly'. *European Journal Qualitative Research in Psychotherapy*, 11 103-116.

Flick, U. (2014) Mapping the field. In: Uwe Flick (ed.) *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data analysis*. London: Sage Publications, 3-18.

Francke, W. (1995) The evolving watchdog: The media's role in government ethics. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 537(1) 109-121.

Franklin, B. (2008) The future of newspapers. *Journalism Practice*, 2(3) 306-317.

Friese, S., Soratto, J. and Pires, D (2018) Carrying out a computer-aided thematic content analysis with Atlas.ti. Gottingen: MMG Working Paper.

Froggatt, K. A. (2001) The analysis of qualitative data: processes and Pitfalls. *Issues in Research*, 15 433–438.

Froneman, J. and Pretorius, K. (2000) Towards a common-sense typology and democratic philosophy for South Africa's 'community media'. *Communication*, 26(2) 60-64.

Genzuk, M. (1999) Tapping Into Community Funds of Knowledge. *In Effective Strategies for English Language Acquisition: Curriculum Guide for Professional Development of Teachers*. Los Angeles: Laamp/Arco.

Gibbs, A. (1997) Focus groups. *Social research update*, 19 1-7.

Gilbert, L. S., Jackson, K. and Di Gregorio, S. (2014) Tools for analysing qualitative data: the history and relevance of qualitative data analysis software. In: Spector, J. M. *et al* (eds.) *Handbook of Research on Educational Communications and Technology*. New York: Springer Science+Business Media, 221-236.

Gill, P., Stewart, K., Treasure, E. and Chadwick, B (2008) Methods of data collection in qualitative research: interviews and focus groups. *British Dental Journal*, 204(6) 291-295.

Glasspool, L. (2020) Encoding/decoding. [blog entry] 3 April. University of Tokyo. Available from: https://jmpc-utokyo.com/keyword/encoding-decoding/ [Accessed 11 June 2023].

Goldblatt, H., Karnieli-Miller, O. and Neumann, M. (2011) Sharing qualitative research findings with participants: study experiences of methodological and ethical dilemmas. *Patient Education and Counseling*, 82 389–395.

Govenden, P. (2019) *Token transformation? A critical political economy of the media analysis of ownership and content diversity in South Africa's print media*. PhD. University of Witwatersrand.

Graue, C (2015) Qualitative data analysis. *International Journal of Sales, Retailing and Marketing*, 4(9) 5-14.

Guest, G., Namey, E. and McKenna, K. (2017) How many focus groups are enough? Building an evidence base for non-probability sample sizes. *Field Methods*, 29(1) 3-22.

Gustafsson, K. E. (2006) Advertising and the development of media: the forgotten connection. *Journal of Media Business Studies*, 3(1) 19-31.

Hall, S. (1973) Encoding and decoding in the television discourse. *Training In The Critical Reading of Televisual Language Colloquy*, September 1973, University of Leicester, England: Council of Europe.

Hammersley, M. (2006) Ethnography: problems and prospects. *Ethnography and Education*, 1(1) 3-14.

Heary, C. M. and Hennessy, E. (2002) The use of focus group interviews in pediatric healthcare research. *Journal of Pediatric Psychology*, 27(1) 47-57.

Herzog, C., Handke, C. and Hitters, E. (2019) Analyzing talk and text II: thematic analysis. In: Van den Bulck, H., Puppis, M., Donders, K. and Van Audenhove, L. (eds.) *The Palgrave Handbook of Methods for Media Policy Research*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hesse-Biber, S. (2010) Qualitative approaches to mixed methods practice. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(6) 455–468.

Ho, D (2006) The focus group interview: Rising to the challenge in qualitative research methodology. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*, 29(1) 05.1-05.19.

Houston, B. (2010) The future of investigative journalism. *Daedalus*, 139(2) 45-56.

Howley, K. (2010) Understanding community media. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Hwang, S. (2008) Utilising qualitative data analysis software: a review of Atlas.ti. *Social Science Computer Review*, 26(4) 19-527.

Hyde, A., Howlett, E., Brady, D. and Drennan, J (2005) The focus group method: insights from focus group interviews on sexual health with adolescents. *Social Science & Medicine*, 61 2588-2599.

Ishak, N. M and Abu Bakar, A. Y. (2014) Developing sampling frame for case study: challenges and conditions. *World Journal of Education*, 4(3) 29-35.

Jacelon, C. S. and O'Dell, K. K. (2005) Analysing qualitative data. *Urologic Nursing*, 25(3) 217-220.

Jacks, N. and Wottrich, L. H. (2016) The legacy of Stuart Hall for reception studies in Brazil. *Matrizes*, 10(3) 159-172.

Javadi, M. and Zarea, K (2016) Understanding thematic analysis and its pitfall. *Journal of Client Care*, 1(1) 34-40.

Joffe, H. and Yardley, L. (2004). Content and thematic analysis. *Research methods for clinical and health psychology*, 56-68.

Joseph, R. (2005) Better training for community print media. *MediaNews*. August 2005, 1-2.

Jowett, A (2020) *Carrying out qualitative research under lockdown – practical and ethical considerations*. [blog entry] 20 April. London: LSE Blogs. Available from https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2020/04/20/carrying-out-qualitative-research-under-lockdown-practical-and-ethical-considerations/ [Accessed 10 July 2023].

Kaniss, P. (1991) *Making local news*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Karadimitriou, A., Von Krogh, T., Ruggiero, C., Biancalana, C., Bomba, M., and Lo, W. H. (2022) Investigative journalism and the watchdog role of news media: Between acute challenges and exceptional counterbalances. In: Trappel,

J. and Tomaz, T. (eds.), *Success and failure in news media performance: Comparative analysis in the Media for Democracy Monitor* 2021. Nordicom: University of Gothenburg, 101-125.

Khadpekar, N. R. (2012) *Media and democracy*. Tripura: The Icfai University Press.

Khan, M. E., Anker, M., Patel, B. C., Barge, S., Sadhwani, H. and Kohle, R. (1991) The use of focus groups in social and behavioural research: some methodological issues. *World Health Stat Q*, 44(3) 145-149.

Kinoshita, Y. (2004) Reception theory. University of California Santa Barbara.

Kirkpatrick, R. (2001) Are community newspapers really different? *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, 10(3) 16-21.

Kolbe, H. R. (2005) *The South African print media: From apartheid to transformation*. PhD. University of Wollongong.

Kulaszewicz, K. E. (2015) *Racism and the media: a textual analysis*. Master's. St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas.

La Pelle, N. R. (2004) Simplifying Qualitative data analysis using general purpose software tools. *Field Methods*, 16(1) 85-108.

Lacey, A. and Luff, D. (2007) Qualitative research analysis. *The NIHR RDS for the East Midlands/Yorkshire & the Humber*, 2-46.

Landsheer, J. A. and Boeije, H. R. (2010) In search of content validity: Facet analysis as a qualitative method to improve questionnaire design: An application in health research. *Quality & Quantity: International Journal of Methodology*, 44(1) 59–69.

Larkin, E. F. (1979) Consumer Perceptions of the Media and Their Advertising Content. *Journal of Advertising*, 8(2) 5-7 and 48.

Lebuso, S. (2022) *A look back at the past two years of lockdown*. [online] Johannesburg: City Press. Available from: https://www.news24.com/citypress/news/timeline-a-look-back-at-the-past-two-years-of-lockdown-20220323 [Accessed 5 May 2023].

LeCompte, M. D and Schensul, J. J. (2010) *Designing & conducting ethnographic research*. 2nd edition. London: AltaMira Press.

Leech, N. L and Anthony J. Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2007) An array of qualitative data analysis tools: a call for data analysis triangulation. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 22(4) 557-584.

Leshin, M. (2010) Writing change: affirmative action as a tool for newspaper transformation at the Durban Post. *Global Media Journal*, 4(1) 51-72.

Lewis, S. C., Kaufhold, K., and Lasorsa, D. L. (2010). Thinking about citizen journalism: the philosophical and practical challenges of user-generated content for community newspapers. *Journalism Practice*, 4(2) 163-179.

Liamputtong, P (2009) Qualitative data analysis: conceptual and practical considerations. *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*, 20(2) 133.

Lindemann, N. (2023) *12 advantages and disadvantages of questionnaires*. [blog entry] 7 June. Pointerpro. Available from: https://pointerpro.com/blog/questionnaire-pros-and-cons/ [Accessed 21 July 2023]

Lochmiller, C. R. (2021) Conducting thematic analysis with qualitative data. *The Qualitative Report*, 26(6) 2029-2044.

Lowrey, W., Brozana, A. and Mackay, J.B. (2008) Toward a measure of community journalism. *Mass Communication and Society*, 11(3) 275–299.

Lu, Z. (2021) A response to Stuart Hall: towards a creative decoding. [online] Brill. Available from: https://brill.com/view/journals/sime/2/1-2/article-p23_2.xml?language=en [Accessed 11 June 2023].

Lunt, P. and Livingstone, S. (1996) *Rethinking the focus group in media and communications research*. [online] London: LSE Research Online. Available from: http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/archive/00000409 [Accessed 25 June 2023].

Mabweazara, H. M. (2006) *An investigation into the popularity of the Zimbabwean tabloid newspaper, uMthunywa: A reception study of Bulawayo readers*. Master's. Rhodes University.

MacIntyre, D. (2011) Rumours of the death of investigative journalism are greatly exaggerated. In: John Mair and Richard Lance Keeble (eds.) *Investigative journalism: dead or alive?* London: Abramis, 1-7.

Maguire, M. and Delahunt, B. (2017) Doing a thematic analysis: a practical, step-by-step guide for learning and teaching scholars. *All Ireland Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 8(3) 3351-33514.

Makwambeni, B. (2013) *Re-appraising entertainment-education praxis and reception in subaltern spaces: The case of Tsha Tsha in South Africa*. PhD. University of Fort Hare.

Makwambeni, B. and Sibiya, A. P. (2022) Accounting for the popularity of *Black Panther* among Black South African women in Soweto township. *Image & Text*, 36(1) 1-20.

Male, T. (2016) Analysing qualitative data. In: Palaiologou, I., Needham, D. and Male, T. (eds.) *Doing Research in Education: Theory and Practice*. London: SAGE, 177-191.

Mambrol, N. (2016) *Reception theory: a brief note*. [blog entry] 2 November. Available from: https://literariness.org/2016/11/02/reception-theory-a-brief-note/ [accessed 9 June 2023].

Mambrol, N. (2020) *Analysis of Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding*. [blog entry] 10 June 2023. Available from: https://literariness.org/2020/11/07/analysis-of-stuart-halls-encoding-decoding/ [accessed 10 June 2023].

Maphiri, N. (2012) A case for community media. In: Seery, U. and Seeber, M. (eds.) *Media Landscape: Reflections on South Africa's Media Environment*. Pretoria: Government Communication and Information System, 61-75.

Marais, W. and Linström, (2011) All politics is local: suggestions for an editorial policy on political news for community media. *Communitas*, 16 33-52.

Martin, N. (2018) *How social media has changed how we consume news*. [online] Forbes. Available from https://www.forbes.com/sites/nicolemartin1/2018/11/30/how-social-media-has-changed-how-we-consume-news/?sh=4a0a3de03c3c [Accessed 10 April 2021].

Mathers, N., Fox, N. and Hunn, A. (2007) Surveys and Questionnaires. Trent RDSU.

Matshabane, O. (2016) *Exploring the influence of role models on the career development process of school-going adolescents from a low-income community in South Africa*. Master's. University of Stellenbosch.

Matthews, R. (2016) The Ideological Challenge for the Regional Press; Reappraising the Community Value of Local Newspapers. *Journal of Applied Journalism and Media Studies*, 6(1) 37-56.

McGonagle, T. and Van Eijk, N. (2014) The role of regional media as a tool for building participatory democracy. Institute for Information Law, University of Amsterdam.

McGuirk and O'Neill (2016) *Using questionnaires in qualitative human geography*. University of Wollongong, Faculty of Social Sciences - Papers. 2518.

McLafferty, I. (2004) Focus group interviews as a data collecting strategy. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 48(2) 187-94.

Mcleod, S. (2023) Questionnaire: definition, examples, design and types. [online] SimplyPsychology. Available from: https://www.simplypsychology.org/questionnaires.htm [Accessed 21 July 2023].

Meadows, S. (2017) *Local papers are vital to our democracy. Now section 40 threatens their future*. [online] London: The Gurdian. Available from: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jan/09/local-papers-democracy-section-40-hillsborough [Accessed 8 April 2020].

MDDA (2020) *Mandate and objectives*. [online] South Africa: MDDA. Available from: https://www.mdda.org.za/mandate-and-objective [Accessed 10 March 2020].

Meltwater (2023) *General 2023 social media statistics for South Africa*. [online] South Africa: Meltwater. Available from https://www.meltwater.com/en/blog/social-media-statistics-south-africa [Accessed 1 October 2023].

Metula, N. T. and Osunkunle, O. O. (2019) Community newspaper as a tool for community development: a readers' perception study of *Idikelethu* newspaper in Alice, Eastern Cape, South Africa. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 54(6) 930-944.

Milan, S. (2009) Four steps to community media as a development tool. *Development in Practice*, 19(4-5) 598-609.

Milne, C., Rau, A., Du Toit, P. and Mdlongwa, F. (2006) Key editorial and business strategies: A case study of six independent community newspapers. Grahamstown: Sol Plaatje Institute for Media Leadership, Rhodes University.

Mohsin, A (2016) A Manual for selecting sampling techniques in research. [online]. Available from https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/70218/1/ [Accessed 28 June 2023].

Mokoena, L, (2020) *Commercial and Non-profit Investigative Journalism as Means to Achieve Journalistic Excellence: comparing the Sunday Times and amaBhungane Centre for Investigative Journalism*. Master's. University of Johannesburg.

Moriarty, J. (2011) *Qualitative methods overview*. [online] London: National Institute for Health Research School for Social Care. Available from: http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/41199/1/SSCR_Methods_Review_1-1.pdf [Accessed 25 June 2023].

Morley, D. (1992) *Television, audiences and cultural studies*. 1st edition. London: Routledge.

Moyo, C.N. (2020) *Structure and agency in community media: a comparative case study of Alex News and greater Alex Today*. Master's. University of South Africa.

Mwangi, S.W. (2007) *The impact of commercialisation of the media on the content of the conglomerate-owned community newspapers in South Africa: A study of four community newspapers from the Caxton CTP Publishers stable*. Master's. University of Witwatersrand.

Nassanga, G. L. (2009) An assessment of the changing community media parameters in East Africa. *Ecquid Novi*, 30(1) 42-57.

Ngulube, P. (2015) Qualitative data analysis and interpretation: systematic search for meaning. In: Mathipa, E. R. and Gumbo, M. T. (eds) *Addressing research challenges: making headway for developing researchers*. Mosala-Masedi Publishers & Booksellers: Noordywk, 131-156.

Nielsen, R. K., Cornia, A. and Kalogeropoulos, A. (2016*) Challenges and opportunities for news media and journalism in an increasingly digital, mobile, and social media environment*. [online] Europe: Council of Europe Steering Committee on Media and Information Society. Available from: https://rm.coe.int/16806c0385#:~:text=Legacy%20media%20like%20broadcaste

rs%20and,of%20revenue%20decline%20or%20stagnate. [Accessed 15 April 2023]

Noble, H. and Smith, J. (2015) Issues of validity and reliability in qualitative research. *Evidence-Based Nursing*, 18(2) 34-35.

Obilor, E. I. (2023) Convenience and purposive sampling techniques: Are they the same? *International Journal of Innovative Social & Science Education Research*, 11(1) 1-7.

Odendaal, L. (2002) *The role of strategic management in the success of local community newspapers*. Master's. University of Johannesburg/University of Wales.

Odhiambo, L. O. (1991) Development journalism in Africa: capitulation of the Fourth Estate? *Africa Media Review*, 5(2) 17-30.

Onyenankeya, O., Onyenankeya, K. and Osunkunle, O. (2020) Stereotyping and essentialism: the representation of indigenous African cultures in the soap opera *Generations: The Legacy. Communication*, 47(4) 48-71.

Palys, T. (2008) Purposive sampling. In: Lisa M. Given (ed.) *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods.* Volume 2. Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 697-698.

Patel, M. and Patel, N. (2019) Exploring research methodology: review article. *International Journal of Research and Review*, 6(3) 48-55.

Peters, V. and Wester, F. (2007) How qualitative data analysis software may support the qualitative analysis process. *Quality & Quantity*, 41 635-659.

Petrova, M. (2008) Newspapers and parties: how advertising revenues created an independent press. *The American Political Science Review*, 105(4) 790-808.

Phellas, C. N., Bloch, A. and Seale, C. (2011) Structured methods: interviews, questionnaires and observation. In: Clive Seale (ed.), *Researching Society & Culture.* 3rd edition. Sage Publications, 182-202.

Pityana, B. N. (2002) South Africa's inquiry into racism in the media: the role of national institutions in the promotion and protection of human rights. *African Affair*s, 99 525–532.

Potter, D. A. (2016) *An exploration of a community's expectations of a community newspaper: A case study of Fourways Review*. Master's. University of South Africa.

Pratiwi, A. I. and Vera, N. (2023) The myth of Maghrib prohibition in "Sandekala" film: reception analysis toward Indonesian audiences. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Analysis*, 6(6) 2702-2709.

Rabiee, F. (2004) Focus group interview and data analysis. *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society*, 63 655-660.

Rai, N. and Thapa, B. (2015) *A study on purposive sampling method in research*. [online] Academia.edu. Available from https://www.academia.edu/28087388/A_STUDY_ON_PURPOSIVE_SAMPLING_METHOD_IN_RESEARCH [Accessed 27 June 2023].

Ramos, S. (2021) *Covid-19's impact felt by researchers: scientists, graduate students talk about conducting research during a pandemic*. [online] American Psychological Association. Available from: https://www.apa.org/science/leadership/students/COVID-19-impact-researchers [Accessed 15 June 2023].

Rathi, T. and Ronald, B. (2022) Questionnaire as a tool of data collection in empirical research. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 6(5) 7697–7699.

Raymond, L. A. (2013). *Dangerous people and places: A community newspaper's constructions of crime*. Master's. Rhodes University.

Reid, J. and Malila, V. (2021) Measuring media diversity in South Africa: a model for measuring media diversity and the audience centred approach. In: Julie Reid (ed.) *Media Diversity in South Africa*. 1st edition. Routledge, 23-41.

Rockhill, P. H. (1996) *The reception theory of Hans Robert Jauss: theory and application*. Master's. Portland State University.

Rogers, P. J. and Goodrick, D. (2015) Qualitative data analysis. In: Joseph S. Wholey, Harry P. Hatry and Kathryn E. Newcomer (eds.) *Handbook of practical program evaluation*. 3rd edition. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 429-453.

Roopa, S. and Rani, M.S. (2012) Questionnaire designing for a survey. *J Ind Orthod Soc*, 46(4) 273-277.

Ross, S. (2011), The encoding/decoding model revisited, the ICA Conference. "Communication @ the Center", May 2011, Boston, USA: Philosophy of Communication Division International Communication Association.

Rush, D. (2021) *Herald*. [email] Sent to Cedric Mboyisa, 28 January.

Seers, K. (2012) Qualitative data analysis. *Evidence-Based Nursing*, 15(1) 2.

Shaheen, M., Pradhan, S. and Ranajee, R. (2019) Sampling in a qualitative research. *Qualitative Techniques for Workplace Data Analysis*, 25-51.

Shaker, L. (2011) Community newspapers play Significant Role in election. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 32(1) 6-18.

Sharma, G. (2017) Pros and cons of different sampling techniques. *International Journal of Applied Research*, 3(7) 749-752.

Shufutinsky, A (2020) Employing use of self for transparency, rigor, trustworthiness, and credibility in qualitative organizational research methods. *Organization Development Review*, 52(1) 50-58.

Sibona, C. and Walczak, S (2012) Purposive sampling on Twitter: A case study. *45th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*. Maui 4-7 January, Hawaii, USA: IEEE Computer Society.

Singh, A. S. (2017) Common procedures for development, validity and reliability of a questionnaire. *International Journal of Economics, Commerce and Management*, V(5) 790-801.

Singh, A. S. and Masuku, B. M. (2013) Fundamentals of applied research and sampling techniques. International Journal of Medical and Applied Sciences, 2(4) 124-132.

Skjerdal, T. S. (2011) Development journalism revived: The case of Ethiopia. *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies*, 32(2) 58–74.

Smit, B. (2002) Atlas.ti for qualitative data analysis. *Perspectives in Education*, 20(3) 65-76.

Smith, J. and Firth, J. (2011) Qualitative data analysis: the framework approach. *Nurse Researcher*, 18(2) 52-62.

Sofaer, S. (1999) Qualitative methods: what are they and why use them? *Health Services Research*, 34 1101-1118.

Soroka, C. (2020) *Active spectatorship: Stuart Hall's reception theory*. [blog entry] 3 February. Available from: https://caitlinsorokasfilmstudiesblog.wordpress.com/2020/02/03/active-spectatorship-stuart-halls-reception-theory/ [accessed 11 June 2023]

Sotiriadou, P., Brouwers, J. and Le, TA. (2014) Choosing a qualitative data analysis tool: a comparison of NVivo and Leximancer. *Annals of Leisure Research*, 17(2) 218-234.

St. Pierre, E. A. and Jackson, A. Y. (2014) Qualitative data analysis after coding. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 20(6) 715-719.

Stahl, N. A. and King, J. R. (2020) Expanding approaches for research: understanding and using trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Journal of Developmental Education*, 44(1) 26-28.

Statistics South Africa 2016 population figures for Murchison, Gamalakhe and Margate. [online] Port Shepstone: Ray Nkonyeni Municipality. Available from: https://www.rnm.gov.za/images/docs/IDP/RNM%202022-23%202026-27%20FINAL%20IDP.pdf [Accessed May 2023]

Swanepoel, T. (2012) *A comprehensive quality management model for community newspapers*. PhD. University of the North West.

Swanepoel, T., Van Der Waldt, G. and Steyn, E. (2015): A quality management model for community newspapers: the case of developing countries. *Total Quality Management & Business Excellence*, 27(9) 1191-1209.

Taherdoost, H. (2016) How to design and create an effective Survey/questionnaire: a step-by-step guide. *International Journal of Academic Research in Management*, 5(4) 37-41.

Talanquer, V. (2014) Using qualitative analysis software to facilitate qualitative data analysis. In: Bunce, D. *et al* (eds.) *Tools of chemistry education research: ACS symposium series*. Washington: American Chemical Society, 83-95.

Tang, K. H. D. (2023) Impacts of Covid-19 on primary, secondary and tertiary education: a comprehensive review and recommendations for educational practices. *Educational Research for Policy and Practice*, 22 23–61.

Teel, A. (2017) *The application of Stuart Hall's audience reception theory to help us understand #WhichLivesMatter*? [online] Available from: https://medium.com/@ateel/the-application-of-stuart-halls-audience-reception-theory-to-help-us-understand-whichlivesmatter-3d4e9e10dae5 [Accessed 10 June 2023].

Terry, G., Hayfield, N., Clarke, V. and Braun, V Thematic analysis (2017). In: Carla Willig and Wendy Stainton Rogers (eds.) *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research in psychology*. Sage Publications, 17-37.

Thorne, S. (2000) Data analysis in qualitative research. *Evidence-Based Nursing*, 3 68-70.

Tomaselli, K. (2016) Encoding/decoding, the transmission model and a court of law. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 19(1) 59-70.

Tongco, M. D. C (2007) Purposive sampling as a tool for informant selection. *Ethnobotany Research and Applications*, 5 147–158.

Touwen, C. J. (2011) *The legacy of the alternative press in South Africa's media landscape*. [blog entry] January. Available from: https://carienjtouwen.wordpress.com/essays/resistance-press-in-south-africa/ [Accessed 7 March 2023].

Tshabangu, T. (2013) Development journalism in Zimbabwe: practice, problems, and prospects. *Journal of Development and Communication Studies*, 2(2/3) 312-328.

Turkel, E., Saha, A., Owen, R. C., Martin, G. J. and Vasserman, S. (2021) A method for measuring investigative journalism in local newspapers. *PNAS (Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences)*, 118(30) 1-3.

Van Der Spuy, M. (2020*) Changes and challenges in the face of digital disruptions at community print newspapers of Boland Media and WP Media: Perspectives from the newsroom*. Master's. University of Stellenbosch.

Vorhaus, M. (2020) *People increasingly turn to social media for news*. [online] Forbes. Available from https://www.forbes.com/sites/mikevorhaus/2020/06/24/people-increasingly-turn-to-social-media-for-news/?sh=24beccff3bcc [Accessed 6 April 2021].

Wang, M., Chen, X., Sun, Y., Wang, Q. and Liu, G. (2023) Functions, advantages and challenges facing private healthcare organisations in China's

healthcare system: a qualitative analysis through open-ended questionnaires, *BMJ Open*, 13 1-9.

Wasserman, H. (2008) Attack of killer newspapers. *Journalism Studies*, 9(5) 786-797.

Wasserman, H. (2020) The state of South African media: a space to contest democracy. *Publizistik*, 65 451-465.

Weinberg, M. (2011) *Prospects for enhancing media diversity: the State and fate of community media in South Africa*. [online] South Africa: PMG. Available from http://pmg-assets.s3-website-eu-west-amazonaws.com/docs/110922r2kpresentation3_0.pdf [Accessed 8 April 2023).

Willis, I. (2021) Local newspapers and a regional setting in New South Wales. *Media History*, 27(2) 197-209.

Wimmer, J. and Wolf, S (2005) Development journalism out of date? An analysis of its significance in journalism education at African universities. Munich Contributions to Communication 3.

Wolf, S., Aurino, E., Brown, A., Tsinigo, E. and Edro, R. M. (2022) *Remote data-collection during Covid-19: Thing of the past or the way of the future*? [blog entry] 29 March. Word Bank Blogs. Available https://blogs.worldbank.org/education/remote-data-collection-during-covid-19-thing-past-or-way-future [Accessed 10 July 2023]

Xiaoge, X. (2009) Development journalism. In: Karin Wahl-Jorgensen and Thomas Hanitzsch (eds.) *The handbook of journalism studies*. New York: Routledge, 357-370.

Xie, Y., Megat Al Imran Bin Yasin, Syed Agil Bin Shekh Alsagoff, Lay Hoon Ang (2022) An overview of Stuart Hall's encoding and decoding theory with film communication. *Multicultural Education*, 8(1) 190-198.

Young, T. J. (2016). Questionnaires and Surveys. In: Zhu Hua (ed.) *Research Methods in Intercultural Communication: A Practical Guide*. Oxford: Wiley, 165-180.

Ytre-Arne, B. (2011) 'I want to hold it in my hands': readers' experiences of the phenomenological differences between women's magazines online and in print. *Media, Culture & Society*, 33(3) 467–477.

Yushar, N.I., Sonni, A. F. and Farid, M. (2021) Covid-19 and netizen: encoding-decoding by YouTube comment space. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, 596 108-111.

Zaid, B. (2014) Audience reception analysis of Moroccan public service broadcasting. *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, 7(3) 284-309.

Zazini, N. (2002) *The impact of diversity in reporting on the editorial independence of small-scale regional community newspapers based in the Eastern Cape*. Master's. University of Stellenbosch.

Zigomo, M (2009) *Investigating the commercial community press: The influence of commercial factors in audience selection by Caxton Community Newspapers*. Master's. University of Witwatersrand.