

Vaccine or no vaccine: A critical analysis on how information on COVID-19 vaccine is communicated in Namibia

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Abstract

The current paper analysed articles on the COVID-19 vaccine as reported and communicated by selected Namibian newspapers to understand the vocabulary, expressions and information sources used when covering and disseminating COVID-19 vaccine-related information. The purpose of this article was to analyze the COVID-19 vaccine information as reported and communicated by selected Namibian newspapers. The researchers compiled a database of newspaper articles mentioning the COVID-19 vaccine from two local newspapers, The Namibian and the New Era, between January and June 2021. In total, 14 articles from the two newspapers were purposefully selected. The articles were analyzed using content analysis. The study found that as much as it is a good thing to inform people correctly so that they take positive action, especially, to save their lives and those of their loved ones, too much infodemic has spread than wildfire, which could have made it challenging for the majority to make appropriate choices regarding their health. The findings of the current study contribute to the timely needed informed discussion on issues surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic and COVID-19 vaccines specifically. The study concludes that there is a need for the Ministry of Health and Social Services to be consistent in issuing hands-on statements proactively to the public at every step of the crisis/pandemic development. This should also be done in all local languages to ensure that the public is not confused or misinformed by conspiracies, propaganda, fake news, and unverified information.

Keywords: Vaccine, infodemic, verified/unverified information, COVID-19, pandemic, anti-vaccine propaganda, social media, conspiracies

Introduction

While the world battles the COVID-19 pandemic, the amount of information flowing about the COVID-19 vaccine is also overwhelming. While some information is accurate, the majority may not be true. This has resulted in an 'infodemic' in which waves of misleading information and rumors about the vaccine have harmed efforts to contain it (Mheidly & Fares, 2020). As a result, this creates doubt about the authenticity of the infodemic. Since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, numerous vaccine-related conspiracy theories have circulated, such as that pharmaceutical companies created the virus to sell a vaccine or that the inventors of the COVID-19 virus are attempting to develop a tracking device for use in a COVID-19 vaccine (Matamoros & Elias, 2020). Because of these conspiracy theories, health communication experts are battling to lay the groundwork for vaccine acceptance, as the flood of misinformation from anti-vaccine activists has already increased. As a result, it is vital to report the vaccine in a way that contributes to mitigating rather than exacerbating the risk of a crisis. Additionally, it is significant to mention that when a message is sent, it is not only what is said that is significant, but also how it is said and what is not said but could be said (Ogbodo, et al., 2020).

Consequently, the language used to disseminate information about the vaccine is fundamental for worsening or dispersing the pandemic's tension. In the era where social media has become one of the most used tools to pass on information, verified and unverified information has made its way to the wide populace. This is done in two main ways; firstly, information is directly passed on from person to person or group to group on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp and other social media site. Secondly, while they are sources of trusted daily news, daily newspapers are also found to get and publish information from social media platforms, specifically information on COVID-19 vaccines. The current paper thus analyzed articles on the COVID-19 vaccine as reported and communicated by Namibian newspapers to understand the vocabulary, expressions and information

sources used by the selected Namibian newspapers when covering and disseminating the COVID-19 vaccine-related information.

Literature review

Research studies usually comprise the literature review section. It is important to understand that scholars continually study situations and or phenomena to explore, analyse, examine, document, confirm, asses or to compare and contrast. In the case of this paper, the authors present the literature reviewed under the following sub-headings: The significance of vaccines, vaccines and COVID-19 and vaccines and the media infodemic. Maree and Van der Westhuizen (2011, p. 26) accentuate that your literature review will normally provide an overview of current, and sometimes not so current yet still sufficiently relevant, research appropriate to your research topic and salient facets of the topic. The current section, therefore, presents the reviewed literature for the present study.

The significance of vaccines

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019 has shaken the world and changed the world order in multiple ways. On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic (Nor & Zulcafli, 2020). Human behaviour and relationships were to be amended and changed. Fear of the unknown novel pandemic began to invade humanity. As the old Oshiwambo saying goes “fear causes flee or fight”, various sectors in the societies of the world began to seek to understand what this pandemic was, as well as how to combat its impacts. Having been identified as a virus, scientists and medical practitioners set out to seek means and ways to combat it and if it was possible, to stop its further devastating effects on the people. One such attempt is finding vaccine(s) to protect people from being infected with the virus or at least to reduce its impacts.

According to Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (2020, p. 1) the word vaccine originates from Latin *Varioae vaccinae* (cowpox), which Edward Jenner demonstrated in 1798 could prevent Smallpox in humans. Today the term “vaccine” applies to all biological preparations, produced from living organisms, that enhance immunity against diseases and either prevent (prophylactic vaccines) or in some cases, treat diseases (therapeutic vaccines). Catalan-Matamoros and Elias (2020, p. 3) explain that “vaccines constitute one of the main advances in history, as they have eliminated many infectious diseases. Thanks to vaccines there has been a decline in communicable diseases, and vaccines have been one of the greatest accomplishments in the prevention field”.

Vaccines and COVID-19

While there is no doubt that the introduction of COVID-19 vaccines has been a great success story, many efforts are still needed to build trust in the available vaccination programs. Since the start of the COVID-19 immunization campaign, an abundance of information has flooded the media, with practically every station covering the newest developments. Both traditional and social media are disseminating information about the COVID-19 vaccines and may have a significant impact on public opinion regarding whether or not members of the public wish to be vaccinated (Gehrauet et al., 2021).

Piltch-Loeb, et al. (2021) found that previously conducted studies established that the internet and social media have aided in the spread of vaccine hesitancy. Numerous scholars have studied how social media platforms contribute to vaccine hesitancy by emphasizing personal narratives over empirical data and by tying anti-vaccine concepts to broader belief systems about freedom of choice and public

rights (Casero-Ripolles, 2020; Wison & Wiysonge, 2020). The aforementioned indicates that social media has been a channel for the transmission of misinformation about the COVID-19 vaccine infodemic. Presently, little is known about the acceptability of prospective COVID-19 vaccines and the factors that determine the acceptability, even though such information is critical for developing measures to enhance vaccine acceptability before the vaccines become accessible (Piltch-Loeb et al., 2021). As a result, the current study attempted to examine how local newspapers disseminate information about COVID-19 to better understand and enlighten the public on the current affairs surrounding the COVID-19 vaccines. It is important to emphasize that the public is free to decide whether to take the vaccines or not. It is important to note that information dissemination and how this is done play a crucial role.

Vaccines and the media infodemic

The health situation triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic has become worrisome. In the history of humanity when outbreaks and viral infections break out healthcare professionals undertake studies and experiments to combat the spread and or development of the same. In the world advanced in technology, different people pass on information in so many ways. While media can be acceptably agreed to be a source of information daily, the use of technology through social media has also taken the world by storm. Messages are passed on from person to person through groups or individual contacts. According to Matamoros and Elias, (2020) the theme of vaccines has received large media coverage, mainly due to safety issues and controversies. The media are believed to be important tools for spreading vaccine-related information, improving awareness and preparing the public for well-informed decisions about health. The current study is essential to evaluate how information is passed on to the readers, especially in terms of whether the information released has been verified or is unverified. Communication is a very critical means to convince or to discourage depending on how it is done. Ogbodo, et al. (2020) clarify that “the media’s inclusion or exclusion of certain words in its coverage of the pandemic can be queried and often misinterpreted” (p. 258). Not only information about the actual virus can be misinterpreted, especially if the context, clarity, as well as originality of that information is not verified, but information about COVID-19 vaccines faced and still faces the same possibilities.

In Namibia, media releases and social media played and still play major roles in spreading information about COVID-19 vaccines. One reads the fear and the lack of trust in the vaccines as a result of how they were and are informed about them. This makes the current study more urgent, to scholarly study, the daily newspapers’ reports on COVID-19 vaccines, analyse the contents, especially in terms of how information about COVID-19 vaccines is communicated. Areas critical to the current study’s analysis are the fear phrases/vaccine refusers, the motivation phrases/vaccine acceptors, mythical information/vaccine hesitators, warning phrases, and convincing statements/showing proof of success. Moreover, it is critical to understand that the lack of timely studies in the era of evolving pandemics or uncertain situations may be detrimental. Ogbodo, et al. (2020), therefore, highlight that the emergence of COVID-19 has been shrouded in speculative literature with minimal empirical understanding of how the media framing of the health crisis would help in mitigating or escalating it. It is in this regard that the researchers for the current study undertook to study what other scholars did and are doing in terms of providing empirical evidence to assist in spreading the needed clarity on issues surrounding this pandemic; specific to this study is the clarity-needed about the COVID-19

vaccines' information. That is the communications' influence on the readers' decision to accept or refute taking the vaccines.

The need for empirical studies

Important to validate and contextualise the current study are the following studies; Nor and Zulcafi (2020) in Malaysia, titled Corpus driven analysis of News reports about COVID-19 in Malaysian online newspapers; Yang, et al. (2021) by Chinese, Switzerland and German scholars titled Media reports of the COVID-19 pandemic; Yoo, et al. (2020), A computational text analysis of English reports in China, the UK and the US and titled comparative analysis of COVID-10 guidelines from six countries: a qualitative study on the US, China, South Korea, the UK, Brazil and Haiti. These and many other studies consulted by the current researchers have demonstrated that the world's scholars have been busy studying and seeking for ways and mean to comprehend the developments and ways to curb and minimise the impacts of COVID-19 by ensuring that they bring about clarity in a more reliable manner. Researchers are also providing clarity on what might have been passed on to the people unverified. Following the above therefore, Namibia as a country equally hit by the COVID-19 pandemic needs empirical studies to aid in understanding the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Specific to the current study, however, is how information about COVID-19 vaccines is communicated to the wide populace. This study may also inform decision makers and or the ministry involved to do things differently to ensure the right/verified information is passed on timely and appropriately to avoid causing people to be misled or misinformed.

Lockyer, et al. (2021) sought to understand COVID-19 misinformation and vaccine hesitancy in the context of COVID-19 pandemic. They established that in the context of the COVID-19 vaccine infodemic, there is accumulating evidence that people's belief in disinformation about the virus, particularly their opinions on the virus's origin, will make them less likely to adopt a vaccine, even when it becomes widely available. Therefore, empirical studies are needed, particularly in Namibia, to ascertain the general population's insights about COVID-19 vaccination and to identify potential challenges such as exposure to disinformation. Lockyer et al. (2021) further applauded the need for empirical studies as they allow scholars to delve deeper into the relationship between the vaccinations' infodemic and public perceptions of and reactions to information communicated through the media.

Methodology

The purpose of this article was to analyse the COVID-19 vaccine information as reported and communicated by Namibian newspapers. The researchers compiled a database of newspaper articles mentioning the COVID-19 vaccine from two local newspapers, The Namibian and New Era, between January and June 2021. The two newspapers were chosen based on their mandates; New Era is a government-owned newspaper, while The Namibian is a privately owned newspaper.

In total, 14 articles from the two newspapers were purposefully selected. The articles were analysed using content analysis. Content analysis is defined as the method of studying data to establish specific characteristics within the data as relevant to the research (Shikalepo, 2021, p. 219). Additionally, Ogbodo et al. (2020), content analysis is a systematic and objective technique used to describe the apparent content of communication and, in some cases, to draw inferences. In their study, Ogbodo, et al. (2020) used content analysis to study communicating health crisis. With the foregoing in mind,

this study focused on two local newspapers that are popular in Namibia. The researchers compared the concepts and vocabulary employed by the two newspapers in their coverage of the COVID-19 vaccine information, which includes infodemics. Data were, thus, categorised into themes as emanated from the analysed data.

Because the purpose of this paper was to analyse articles that focused primarily on the COVID-19 vaccine information, the following procedures were used. The researchers examined sources, vocabulary and expressions used by newspaper reporters and article authors to cultivate or alleviate fear in readers regarding the COVID-19 vaccines. The current researchers sought to understand how the two newspapers informed the Namibian populace about the COVID-19 vaccines. The themes that were interpreted and discussed as ultimate answers for the current study were derived from the findings. The data were, thus, categorised into the following themes: Fear phrases/vaccine refusers (language expressions that may influence readers' decision not to take the COVID-19 vaccine). Mythical information/vaccine hesitators (language expressions that may influence readers' reservations about vaccination delaying, or refusing). Motivation phrases/vaccine acceptors (language expressions that may influence readers' decision to immediately take the vaccine) and warning phrases and convincing statements or showing proof of vaccine success.

Findings and discussion

The current study sought to analyse critically how The Namibian and New Era newspapers inform the public about the COVID-19 vaccine. The findings are presented according to the themes that were derived from studying the selected articles. Data are presented and discussed concurrently under the following themes: Fear phrase/vaccine refusers, motivation phrases/vaccine acceptors, mythical information/vaccine hesitators, warning phrases and convincing statements/showing proof of success. Most themes have two names because the authors, by going through data, realised that these phrases or statements represent either the same views or related views. For instance, the theme of fear phrases is found to accommodate data that are likely to be causes of or reasons why people may refuse to get vaccinated.

Fear phrases/Vaccine refusers

Under this theme, the authors looked for the phrases used in the analysed articles, which instigated fear of vaccination among the readers. In this section, the fear phrases are presented and discussed at the same time. The following are the fear phrases found from the analysed articles:

1. To what extent the vaccines play a role in slowing down or stopping transmission of the coronavirus from one person to the next is still under investigation (The Namibian, 18 June 2021).
2. With more than 800 Namibians already dead and a rapidly rising death and daily new infection rate, the country is facing its biggest health crisis since the start of the pandemic. Only about 74,000 people have received at least one vaccine shot, and the slow uptake is cause for great concern with a third wave of new infections looming large (The Namibian, 04 June 2021).
3. Vaccines were rushed, they are not safe (The Namibian, 8 January 2021).
4. Overall, I do not want to be vaccinated simply because I adhere to the current regulations and I have taken extra precautions at work (New Era, 24 March 2021).
5. ...to be clear, Covid-19 vaccines do not prevent the SARS-C2 virus from entering your body... (The Namibian, 18 June 2021).

6. Overall, 65% of adult Namibians do not trust the government....., more than half of these trust the government just a little, while nearly one quarter trust the government not at all... (The Namibian, 4 June 2021).

The fear phrases were found to have been used more frequently in The Namibian newspaper than in the New Era newspaper. The majority of fear expressions detected in the selected articles conveyed concern that vaccinations had been rushed through the approval process and may thus be hazardous due to inadequate testing (Ngatjiheue, 2021). Islam, et al. (2021) conducted a study on COVID-19 vaccination rumors and conspiracy theories and discovered that participants thought that the vaccine is unsafe because the virus continued to mutate and so the present vaccines will no longer work as they were produced before the current variants. Similarly, a study conducted by Thelwall, et al. (2021) indicates that statements expressing concerns about vaccination safety may have been triggered by the vaccine's fast development.

Numerous articles included in the analysis focused on whether or not people would take the COVID-19 vaccines. Surprisingly, most phrases were simple and direct statements by reporters that people would refuse vaccinations, with some citing personal reasons. In one of the analyzed articles, a health worker stated, I do not want to be vaccinated simply because I adhere to the current regulations and I have taken extra precautions at work (de Klerk, 2021). By reading such a phrase from a health worker, for example, one may misinterpret it and believe that something is motivating health workers to refuse vaccinations. The aforementioned, however, could be triggered by other phrases found in the articles regarding the effectiveness of the vaccines. One phrase reads to be clear, COVID-19 vaccines do not prevent the SARS-C2 virus from entering your body... (Links, 2021, p. 5) Such a phrase elicits personal fears, leading readers to believe that vaccine or no vaccine, the circumstances surrounding COVID-19 infection remain the same.

The findings of the Afrobarometer telephone survey, which was conducted to find out why Namibians are reluctant to be vaccinated, were presented in one of the analysed articles. Some of the noteworthy statistics are; overall, 65% of adult Namibians do not trust the government..., more than half of these trust the government just a little, while nearly one quarter trust the government not at all... (Keulder, 2021, p. 5) The data above demonstrate that people are fearful of vaccinations because they lack trust in the government. Thus, it is the government's responsibility to foster public trust by promoting confidence and safety via effective communication channels such as newspapers (OECD, 2021). By examining the fear phrases presented above, it is worth noting that the way newspapers report on vaccines influences public acceptance or repudiation. To alleviate these fears, local newspapers must collaborate with communities of interest, including the Ministry of Health and Social Services, and traditional and religious leaders, to develop a clear and simple language in which the COVID-19 vaccine verified information could be communicated.

Motivation phrases/vaccine acceptors

On motivation phrases, authors looked at the phrases that were at least instigating readers to accept vaccinations. The New Era newspaper was found to use motivational phrases more frequently than the Namibian newspaper. The following are some motivational quotes about the COVID-19 vaccines:

1. The benefit of vaccination is that it protects you from contracting the infection (The Namibian, 18 June 2021).

2. There actually appears to be something special about the vaccine (The Namibian, 18 June 2021).
3. In other words, no vaccine is 100% effective at preventing infections, so breakthrough infections do occur and it's not out of order (The Namibian, 10 June 2021).
4. Bank of Namibia governor Johannes! Gawaxeb is concerned about the reluctance of people in receiving the COVID-19 vaccination, saying the vaccine is the weapon to achieve a faster economic recovery (New Era, 29 April 2021).
5. People have been vaccinated for years, small children have been vaccinated people have been vaccinating animals (New Era, 23 March 2021).
6. It is not just to protect me but those around me should I get in contact with any COVID-19 contact. I hope Namibia can come and get vaccinated to have a strong immune (New Era, 23 March 2021).
7. ...encouraged the community to acquaint themselves with the necessary information on the vaccines and thereafter get vaccinated (New Era, 20 April 2021).
8. I prefer to get vaccinated than to be a COVID-19 patient and I don't want you to be a COVID-19 patient (New Era, 20 April 2021).
9. Their job is not to entice the public to get vaccinated but rather to educate the public on the vaccination and thereby allow them to make an informed decision, there is no coercion, therefore is no force, it is voluntary. But for your good, I urge you to get vaccinated (New Era, 20 May 2021).

The above-mentioned motivational phrases were identified in the articles that were analyzed. The majority of these quotes are from members of the public, particularly those who have already received vaccinations and are thus motivating others to do so. It is worth noting that because New Era is a government-owned newspaper, it is unsurprising that the majority of the motivational phrases appear there. Many, if not all, government representatives communicate with the public via the New Era newspaper. Bank of Namibia governor Johannes! Gawaxeb "is concerned about the reluctance of people in receiving the COVID-19 vaccination, saying the vaccine is the weapon to achieve a faster economic recovery" (New Era, 29 April 2021). Wang, Fang, Cao, Chen, Hu, Chen, Zhou, and Zhang (2021) demonstrate that receiving information about COVID-19 vaccination from government officials is associated with increased efficiency in obtaining vaccination and acceptance of vaccination's efficacy when compared to receiving information from the public. Additionally, Catalan-Matamoros and Elias (2020) explain that the sources with the loudest voices are those associated with the government. Shudson (2012), asserts that the public sources, in the case of the current study, the New Era and the Namibian newspapers, place a significant emphasis on news from government organisations simply because they are more likely to contain endorsed information, supporting these findings.

Reading phrases such as people have been vaccinated for years, small children have been vaccinated people have been vaccinating animals (New Era, 23 March 2021), might easily manipulate one's perception in favour of the COVID-19 vaccines. With the knowledge that vaccinations can prevent other diseases such as measles and polio, one may consider taking the COVID-19 vaccines after reading the previously mentioned expression. Nevertheless, Islam, et al. (2021) emphasize that negative vaccine claims have existed since those years. They further explain that what is happening now with the COVID-19 vaccines occurred in the past during the outbreak of polio, when rumours about Polio vaccination causing infertility spread. These rumours are said to have resulted in an increase in polio cases worldwide.

Statements such as 6 and 7 enhance an individual's acceptance of vaccinations, whereas statements such as 9 clearly indicate that the public still has the option of getting vaccinated or not. This is aligned with Wang, et al. (2021)'s argument that the media should report information that actively promotes the benefits of Covid-19 vaccines without instilling fear in the public. Based on the motivational phrases outlined above, health practitioners should prefer to use more of these types of statements regarding the COVID-19 information to enhance individual's acceptance of COVID-19 vaccination.

Mythical information/vaccine hesitators

In the era of highly enabled communication, especially through social networks/media, information sharing has become extensively easy and accessible to many. Obi-Ani, et al. (2020, p. 3) explain that "social media is an invaluable means of disseminating information to the citizenry, hence it is a powerful tool of propaganda". In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the fear, worries, and concerns caused by its worrying impacts allowed creators of both verified and unverified information to spread it. One observes with concern the amount of unverified information spread through social media, most of which the wide audience tends to believe. The American anti-vaccine campaigners and conspiracy theorists who have found captive audiences on social media around the world (The Namibian Newspaper, 17 June 2021, page 5) influence such information. Lockyer, et al. (2020, p. 6) reported that "though respondents knew that "conspiracy theories" and 'fake news' existed, it was difficult to separate if from legitimate information, especially if it was constantly repeated." In the analysis done for the current study, it appears evident that of the two newspapers' articles analysed, The Namibian Newspaper covered the more content with mythical information than the New Era Newspaper. The reason for these variations may likely be as mentioned earlier in the current section, that The Namibian newspaper is a privately owned newspaper, thus may incorporate content from all available sources, whereas New Era is government owned, hence may be selective in what is sent out. Here are selected phrases/expressions found in analysed articles that are mythical about COVID-19 vaccine:

1. Nothing is special about the vaccine (The Namibian, 18 June 2021).
2. Prayer is more effective than a vaccine would be in preventing COVID-19 (The Namibian, 04 June 2021).
3. COVID-19 vaccines are poison (The Namibian, 17 June 2021).
4. Thousands have died in some places including the US, after being vaccinated (The Namibian, 17 June 2021).
5. COVID-19 vaccines are experimental (The Namibian, 30 April 2021).
6. The vaccines did not undergo animal testing or go through all the trial phases (The Namibian, 30 April 2021).
7. COVID-19 vaccines are 'gene therapy' (The Namibian, 30 April, 2021).
8. Vaccines are rushed, they are not safe (The Namibian, 08 January 2021).
9. Vaccines will give me COVID-19 (The Namibian, 08 January 2021).
10. Vaccines will modify my DNA (The Namibian, 08 January 2021).
11. French Nobel prize winner, Luc Montagnier, said the COVID-19 vaccines and their wide use were causing the emergence of coronavirus variants (The Namibian, 10 June 2021).
12. An unsafe vaccine will be tested on Namibian citizens (The Namibian, 25 June 2021).

The gathered corpus of mythical phrases above appeared in various analysed articles several times. What stands out, however, is that most mythical statements the newspaper reporters wrote about as indicated in the reviewed articles are those extracted from social media, or opinions the journalists

gathered from asking members of the public randomly, who in most cases, are also influenced by social media. Important to mention is that the reasons the newspapers collect this information is to alert the public about these existing myths and so demystify these widely shared infodemic. The foregoing is evident in the article published in The Namibian Newspaper, dated 30 April 2020, on page 5, by Links (2020). This article is titled 'Rampart Lies Cloud Vaccine Acceptance' and the author presents the "myths" that he calls "anti-vaccine propaganda". Alongside them, Links (2020) provides clarity and factual information to clarify issues around the myths about COVID-19 vaccines.

One method used by Links (2020) is that of explaining and clarifying using sources such as WHO, the US National Library of Medicine and others from the updates from the Ministry of Health and Social Services in Namibia. Similarly, Mheidly and Fares (2020) reported that there has been a notable and global response to the COVID-19 infodemic by international organization, governments, social media technology companies, and major science bodies. For example, the United Nations responded to the infodemic by providing a UN Coronavirus (CPOVID-19) portal for public access to reliable and up-to-date information.

Statements such as the vaccines did not undergo animal testing or go through all the trials (The Namibian, 30 April 2021) can easily be believed, since under normal circumstances vaccines are developed over an elongated period and are tested several times before being rolled out. Gehrau et al. (2020), explain that because of the high transmission rate of the coronavirus without specific treatment, scientists have been working on the development of COVID-19 vaccines. Gehrau et al. (2020) report that around February 2020, more than 200 vaccines had been developed, yet only a few were safe for use. What can be derived here is that the vaccines currently being administered are those that are 'safe for use'. In addition, the WHO did not refute or stop the inoculation of such vaccines, which means that they should be safe for use, and this should be a point of departure for many people to decide whether to receive the vaccines or not. When the public is exposed to multiple mythical information (infodemics) than verified information, the outcome may likely be twofold: firstly, most people may opt not to get the vaccine; secondly, it might take a long time before they decide to eventually be inoculated.

The two options above may likely bring about the following outcomes. Firstly, it is common that human beings tend to stick to what they learned first, so myths, fake news, propaganda and conspiracies usually easily spread everywhere rather than verified correct information. Secondly, those who might eventually get inoculated might do so late, that is, after they have already contracted and suffered the pain, or in adverse situations, some might lose their lives before they could get vaccinated, which could have saved them if they did. It can thus be concluded that individual members of the public should first learn to examine their sources of information among the many sources before they make a decision. Again, the ministries and departments responsible for health should be proactive in communicating correct information timeously so that the public can receive correct information first before unverified mythical information.

Warning phrases

During outbreaks, there are various categories of communicators. In the case of the current analysis, the authors identified the various categories of information shared, indeed, all for consumption by a single audience. One set of phrases found in the articles analysed is warning phrases. Cautionary

phrases, as is in the name, are accentuations of phrases, statements and expressions used that hold in them the element of warning. In the context of the current study such phrases are those that might be sending positive and negative alarms to readers. Such statements cause readers to stay away from vaccines, stay away from untrue or unverified information, or from anything as long as such statements send caution. Here are some selected warning phrases found in the articles scrutinized for this study:

1. Most information and comments being made show many people are largely engaging on the topic from a position of ignorance about COVID-19 vaccines (The Namibian, 18 June 2021).
2. The hard reality is that without vaccines, we have little chance of economic recovery and almost no means to protect those whom we hold dear (The Namibian, 4 June 2021).
3. A review of available clinical information, including death certificates, autopsies, and medical reports, has not established a causal link to the COVID-19 vaccine (The Namibian, 17 June 2021).
4. It is clear that lies about widespread vaccine-related deaths are exactly that – lies (The Namibian, 17 June 2021).
5. Of late it has become clear that many Namibians have been exposed to and been sharing a lot of anti-vaccine propaganda via social media platforms and more traditional media (The Namibian, 30 April 2021).
6. Vaccines do not interact with or influence human genes (The Namibian, 30 April 2021).
7. Concerns were raised by travelers who tested positive for COVID-19 after being vaccinated with the COVID-19 vaccine. Neither PCR nor antigen diagnostic tests can produce a positive result due to vaccination (The Namibian, 10 June 2021).
8. Delay in vaccine roll-out will delay the number of tourists coming to Namibia and will hinder businesses to be fully operational to help revive the domestic economy (New Era, 19 April 2021).
9. The Dr cautioned the community that the vaccination does not treat COVID-19. The vaccination reduces the chances of being infected. We are protecting ourselves and those around us (New Era, 20 April 2021).
10. What we are saying is that it will reduce your chance of contracting it and it will reduce your chance of being hospitalised or getting to the intensive care unit (ICU) (new Era, 20 May 2021).
11. Anyone who has contracted COVID-19 before can also vaccinated but only after 60 days (New Era, 24 March 2021).

The warning statements above indicate that health experts and community leaders in Namibia saw the need to sound alarmed against and about possible myths, or misunderstandings, which have likely resulted from the fast-spreading infodemic. It is thus, no surprise that many people are still indecisive as to whether they should be inoculated or not. This is based on fake news, conspiracy and unverified information, which are spread by those who deliberately took and are taking chances of the existing fear caused by this unknown pandemic. This is confirmed by Lockyer et al. (2020, p. 8) who accentuate that “we know from previous research that misinformation thrives in times of stress and uncertainty, and COVID-19 has provided a perfect breeding ground for, on both a global and local scale.”

Warning statements 1, 3, and 5 are cautionary statements that make readers aware that they should be warned about the type of information they get and the ones to believe. Other statements such as 2 and 8 are appealing kinds of warning statements. They are appealing in a way that they put a situation forward (economic) which is almost worsening but can be improved should people be inoculated. The opposite is thus true, that failure to do as appealed might worsen the situation.

Statements 9 and 10 on the other hand warn the readers against buying into conspiracy and unverified infodemics. When one is warned, chances are that you are likely to research and ask questions more for a better understanding. In the case of the COVID-19 infodemic, warnings may cause readers to seek information from valid sources before they can decide to get their doses or stay away from inoculations.

Convincing statements/showing proof of success

To ensure that verified information is correctly received communication experts employ various mechanisms to this effect. In newspaper articles reviewed for the current study, researchers found that authors employed the use of showing proof that the vaccines are safe, that they are beneficial and that important and renowned organizations support their use. Due to the widely spread amount of infodemics, organisations and ministries responsible for health must bring about correct information to (in a way) counterpropaganda, infodemic, and unverified information that the masses are already exposed to, through social media. The researchers for the current study selected statements 1-7 below and evidence of vaccine success stories. Notable to mention is that there is a substantial amount of convincing information and proof of success in the articles reviewed. Because of this, the researchers selected convincing statements under the following category, 'the use of trusted sources.' Though other categories are also evident in the studied articles, for the current paper they are not discussed.

1. On 11 June, the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the International Coalition of Medicines Regulatory Authorities stated: "Vaccine clinical trials for a new candidate vaccine showed that vaccines very significantly reduced COVID-19 in people who were vaccinated, compared to a control group of people who did not receive a vaccine, through a reduction in numbers of laboratory-confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infections (The Namibian, 18 June 2021).
2. On 10 May the WHO stated: We cannot compare the vaccines head-to-head with the different approaches taken in designing the respective studies, but overall, all the vaccines that have achieved WHO emergency use listing are highly effective in preventing severe disease and hospitalization due to COVID-19 (The Namibian, 18 June 2021).
3. The WHO states: As of 19 April 2021, the AstraZeneca vaccine is safe and effective at protecting people from extremely serious risks of COVID-19, including death, hospitalisation and severe disease (The Namibian, 18 June 2021).
4. The US Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on 11 June posted on their website: that more than 302 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines were administered in the United States from 14 December 2010 to 7 June 2021 (The Namibian, 17 June 2021).
5. On June 11 the World Health Organization issued a joint statement with the International Coalition of Medicine Regulatory Authorities – comprising regulators from around the world (The Namibian, 17 June 2021).
6. Frontline workers welcome the COVID-19 vaccine (New Era, 23 March 2021).
7. The Namibian Minister of Health and Social Services Kalumbi Shangula on the 16th of June stated: The benefit of vaccination is that it protects you from contracting the infection. If one contracts the infection, it will hardly lead to hospitalisation and death (The Namibian, 18 June 2021).

The use of trusted sources is instrumental in convincing those who are knowledgeable about the cited sources. For others, whose knowledge and understanding are not similar, this might just be another source, hence becoming less impactful. In the statements listed above, one notices repeated references made to the World Health Organisation, the International Coalition of Medicine Regulatory

Authorities, followed by The US Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and eventually the Minister of Health and Social Services. This technique can be instrumental in convincing and easily making the audience believe what is being communicated. The sad reality is that due to procedures through which the information produced by such valid sources undergo, the information they send out becomes last to reach a wide audience, compared to information sent out by unverified/invalid sources (Nor & Zulcafli, 2020). Against the latter, it can be stated that verified information dissemination will remain a challenge in the world of social media's easy access. Regulatory bodies and ministries may simply do well in being proactive in communicating to the people, especially, about what they are busy with and the type of information they prefer to be given out every time. This will likely help the masses to know that whatever else they receive would not be from them and might be part of fake news, conspiracy or propaganda. Another point of importance, especially in developing multilingual countries such as Namibia is for the Ministry of Health and Social Services to ensure that whatever information they release is translated in all local languages immediately, to ensure that even the grassroots people receive the message as it is.

Conclusions and recommendations

In conclusion, the findings of the current study contribute to the timely needed informed discussion on issues surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic and COVID-19 vaccines specifically. We found that as much as it is a good thing to inform people correctly so that they take positive action, especially, to save their lives and those of their loved ones, too much infodemic has spread than wildfire, which might have made it challenging for the majority to make appropriate choices regarding their health. The study concludes that there is (urgent) need for the Ministry of Health and Social Services to issue immediate statements proactively to the public at every step of the crisis development, this should also be done in local languages to ensure that the public is not confused by conspiracies, propaganda, fake news and unverified information.

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