

Representation of Emerging COVID-19 in Bangladeshi Newspapers

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Abstract

This study explains how Bangladeshi media responded during the coronavirus crisis focusing on the issues of news related to COVID-19. The study analyzes the content of a total of 744 articles in the ProthomAlo The Daily Star, the country's most-read newspapers in-between the timeline from 8th March 2020 to 4th April 2020. It investigates how the COVID-19 presented as 'furious?' and 'deadly?' virus among the readers. In particular, this study explores the representation pattern of the phenomena of 'emerging deadly infectious diseases' in the newspapers. Using Social Representation Theory (SRT), the study investigates the collective meaning sharing focus on the news coverage during the early stage of the COVID-19 outbreak in Bangladesh. The study also finds out how the newspapers sideline the representation of this pandemic as a 'health crisis' to 'national economic crisis.' Thus the representation covers up the government irresponsibility by focusing more on 'unconscious mass' and 'limitations' of a developing country. Therefore, the 'panic' increases and the solution of this pandemic muffled under it. Also, this study provides some tentative explanations for this linguistic representation by editorial sections of these newspapers.

Index terms— COVID-19, pandemic, social representation theory, Bangladesh, newspaper coverage.

1 Introduction

he world was shut down for months in 2020 for the cause of the global pandemic, which was first identified in China. The earliest case was detected on 17 November, weeks before the COVID-19 was emerged as a new virus, according to the Chinese press (The Guardian, 2020). Since that (COVID- 19) outbreak in Wuhan, China, the global media started showing interest in this, and it increased far more after the declaration of a pandemic by WHO. And the media tries to draw mass consideration through its coverage of any pandemic and try to influence public opinion (Atasoy, 2020). Therefore, after this outbreak, the mass media of Bangladesh also started to disseminate information about the coronavirus after its outbreak in china. On March 7, the country confirmed the first COVID-19 case in its territory (Anwar et al., 2020). The first three known cases were reported on 8th march 2020 by the country's epidemiology institute, IEDCR (IEDCR, 2020). On March 25, through Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's address to the nation, Bangladesh declared the enforcement of lockdown for ten days from the next day. Her speech of 25 th March 2020 is considered to be the main policy framework of her government incorporating social, health, and security measures in this battle with COVID-19. The idea of this study emerged from the coverage given by the media after taking the very first step by the government after the declaration of the official corona case.

2 II.

3 Research Background

With an increasing number of affected people, the pandemic of COVID-19 has spread day by day over the whole nation. It was then easy to assume that the country would struggle to combat the spread of the disease, as it has got one of the world's most densely populated. The government then took some immediate measures to fight against the pandemic by declaring to go for lockdown and also prepared some needy steps of creating awareness, keeping this syndrome away from the people. As media started to portrait the issue through their content, newspapers in Bangladesh had also put their attention to highlight the effects, and it was then the top talked issue over the country. Millions of readers were involved through the language that reflects the opinions of the particular newspapers than what people think about related to the virus. Some of the selected topics like social distancing, lockdown, isolation, travel bans, economic crisis, and deaths were started to narrate by the newspapers repeatedly. People became curious, and coverage of the outbreak has consumed much of the news media's attention as people look for information in time for high anxiety and uncertainty. People started to move towards fear, panic, and uncertainty at their subconscious mind, and no doubt newspapers had set the image over their content.

1. What is the rate of presenting the COVID-19 in mainstream newspapers, and what type of news are being focused?

The research tries to answer the following questions-Throughout the world, researchers tend to identify the language of media most that represents the pandemic. Recent studies show the way like how the media intends to represent the COVID-19 virus as a global health crisis or to understand the public perception. None of them tend to analyze the tone of the newspaper on this emerging virus yet. In this study, we will investigate the way on how the popular dailies in Bangladesh presented COVID-19.

Abstract-This study explains how Bangladeshi media responded during the coronavirus crisis focusing on the issues of news related to COVID-19. The study analyzes the content of a total of 744 articles in the ProthomAlo & The Daily Star, the country's most-read newspapers in-between the timeline from 8 th March 2020 to 4 th April 2020. It investigates how the COVID-19 presented as 'furious' and 'deadly' virus among the readers. In particular, this study explores the representation pattern of the phenomena of 'emerging deadly infectious diseases' in the newspapers. Using Social Representation Theory (SRT), the study investigates the collective meaning sharing focus on the news coverage during the early stage of the COVID-19 outbreak in Bangladesh. The study also finds out how the newspapers sideline the representation of this pandemic as a 'health crisis' to 'national economic crisis.' Thus the representation covers up the government irresponsibility by focusing more on 'unconscious mass' and 'limitations' of a developing country. Therefore, the 'panic' increases and the solution of this pandemic muffled under it. Also, this study provides some tentative explanations for this linguistic representation by editorial sections of these newspapers.

2. What are the key issues used in the newspapers? 3. Is there any intention to frame the COVID-19 as a threat to the national crisis?

This research is necessary to identify the news tone of Bangladeshi newspapers and will find the answer if they have the intention to play a proper watchdog role by showcasing the limitations taken by the authorities.

4 III.

5 Literature Review

Since 1980 metaphorical framing was widely used to analyze the infectious disease in the social context, especially in the case of HIV/AIDS. Many have focused on the militaristic language used to report and explain this illness, a type of language that has permeated discourses of immunology, bacteriology, and infection for at least a century (Wallis & Nerlich, 2005).

Like this, in 2003, another epidemic named 'SARS' spread across several parts of the world. It (SARS) was an important news story at that time. But the main source of the news was 'WHO,' and the angle was 'human interest.' And the WHO was setting the news agenda and giving importance to scientific successes: this was a key area that involved major contributions from the UK and the US. The media's combined emphasis on human interest and medical research and responses appears in the early coverage of this epidemic (Kinsella, 1989;Donovan, 1992).

In another article, 'Disease metaphors in new epidemics: the UK media framing of the 2003 SARS epidemic' examines how language and metaphor were used in the UK media's coverage of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). By analyzing the news on SARS of five major national dailies during the epidemic of spring 2003, the researcher did not found any militaristic language; rather, the key metaphor was 'SARS: a killer.' SARS, as a killer, was an entity, not a force. It was a new interpretation of disease after HIV/AIDS (Wallis & Nerlich, 2005).

'Representations of SARS in the British Newspapers' was another study that analyzes the representation of SARS as a 'dangerous threat' to the UK public, using the mechanism of 'othering' as the Chinese were so different to 'us' (European). In this way, the SARS scare was disseminated in the international media. Yet this study also shows the difference in the coverage of SARS with earlier epidemics. In particular, this study examines the

99 phenomena of 'emerging, and re-emerging infectious diseases' over the past 30 years and that impacted the faith
100 that Western biomedicine could 'conquer' infectious disease ??Washer, 2004) According to Pew Research Center's
101 (2020) survey conducted from March 10-16, 2020, Americans give the news media good marks for their coverage
102 of COVID-19, though most think their reporting has exaggerated the risks. Misinformation has also found its
103 way into the information stream. The findings come from a survey of 8,914 U.S. adults who are members of the
104 Center's American Trends Panel.

105 On the other hand, UK tabloids Daily Mail and The Sun shared conspiracy theories and they introduced
106 hatred toward Chinese people, implying that the Chinese people are to blame for the outbreak for eating bats
107 and other animals (Daily Mail Online, 2020). Ayesha Siddika & Md. Didarul Islam (2020) attempt to understand
108 the public perception in Bangladesh regarding the measures taken by the government. The study has found that
109 the measures taken by the Bangladesh government should have been taken earlier and more robust measures
110 are necessary to stop this pandemic. The study also shows that government authorities partially failed to
111 communicate the measures of the government to the wider public audience. Moreover, this research finds that
112 proper

113 The epidemics are always global as they always travel around the world with people. And the spread of
114 COVID-19 was facilitated by the modern availability of travel and by economic globalization. So the whole world
115 was affected at a time, so to Bangladesh. But the Bangladesh government has taken steps to reduce its effect just
116 after the first case was detected. However few government ministers, including the health minister, said that the
117 government is ready to tackle the crisis. Therefore, some of the cabinet ministers' remarks on COVID-19 have
118 made the government uncomfortable (The Daily Star, 2020). coordination among all the agencies would help to
119 contain the disease with a continuous lockdown and social distancing policy.

120 In this situation, it is the primary duty of media to play a watchdog role. The main objective of this research
121 is to explore the representation of COVID-19 in the most circulated newspapers in Bangladesh, whereas the
122 researchers have selected the 'ProthomAlo' and 'The Daily Star' as the sample to investigate the trends. So
123 through investigating the framing of an emergent disease in these newspapers, researchers can also contribute to
124 theorizing it.

125 6 IV.

126 7 Methodology & Theoretical Background

127 According to IEDCR, the first cases were confirmed in the country on 8 March, and the lockdown began in
128 Bangladesh on 26 March. The research considered the first four weeks after 8 March 2020 to understand the
129 news coverage pattern of COVID-19 in the ProthomAlo and The Daily Star.

130 To conduct the study, researchers have chosen the ProthomAlo, the most read vernacular daily with 6.6
131 million circulations in a day (ProthomAlo, 2018) and The Daily Star, the largest circulated English daily as the
132 sample. These newspapers were selected based on highest readership; therefore, researchers acknowledge that
133 these findings would not be able to generalize to all newspapers of the country.

134 'Social Representation Theory' is used to portrait the representation of COVID-19 as an emerging threat in
135 Bangladeshi newspapers. The SRT refers to the process of collective meaning sharing focus on phenomena. As
136 a theory of communication, it links society and individual, media, and public. Hoijer (2011) describes, 'the
137 theory is relevant for media-and communication representing how media texts deal with and present national,
138 regional and social issues and events to the audience.' According to Bauer & Gaskell (1999), 'Representations
139 are embodied in communication and individual minds, shared in a way similar to language.' In this research,
140 researchers attempt to focus on the media representations rather than measure what the public generalize or
141 even think in the way that a 'media effects' approach would.

142 The researchers have analyzed the content of a total of 744 news in both newspapers. All the news has been
143 taken from the online version of the two most circulated newspapers in this country. The researchers have used
144 the timeline from 8 th March 2020 from 4 th April 2020, the first month of the outbreak in Bangladesh. The
145 researchers found that the ProthomAlo published 387 news (52%), and The Daily Star published 357(48%) news
146 within the timeline. To analyze the data, researchers have constructed a coding schedule with different categories
147 such as publication date, headline, news types, issues of the news, page number to monitor, and analyze. All
148 the contents were then analyzed using Statistical analysis Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), with the selected
149 coding schedule.

150 V.

151 8 Discussion a) Headline Analysis

152 Before starting to read any news, readers always glance over the headline, as the headlines always showcase the
153 keywords of the news, which makes the readers easy to understand the key issues of the news. This study finds
154 that around 16% of total news On the other hand, The Daily Star had an intention to give more importance to
155 'new knowledge'

156 In another case, both newspapers paid less attention to the headline related to 'corruption' to the COVID-19;
157 the ProthomAlo 1.3% & The Daily Star 1.1%.

158 This study also finds that there was a marked shift to use the idea 'fear' within the timeline. In the beginning,
159 the newspapers did not use any words that Representation of Emerging COVID-19 in Bangladeshi Newspapers
160 has used the concept of 'fear' in the headline. The ProthomAlo used the concept of 'fear' in 77 headlines, and
161 The Daily Star used it in 44 headlines. Among other issues, the threat (8.2%), deadly virus (5.8%), the effect on
162 the economy (7.4%), safety precautions (7.8%), optimism (6.2%), unconscious mass (4.6%) & steps taken by the
163 government (4.2%) are mostly used during the sample period. In this representation, only the headlines related
164 to step taken by the government 4.2%(31 headlines), optimism 6.2% (46 headlines) and safety precautions 7.8%
165 (58 headlines) were giving the way out from this crisis; rest of the news highlighted this virus as furious one.

166 (The Daily Star 3.1%) about coronavirus than that of the ProthomAlo (1.3%). The same goes for the headlines
167 related to the country's capability (ProthomAlo 0.5% & The Daily Star 1.1%) and the future prospect of COVID-
168 19 (ProthomAlo 0.3% & The Daily Star 1.4%). These indicate that The Daily Star was trying to represent
169 COVID-19 as a less furious disease than that of the ProthomAlo. Moreover, the ProthomAlo tried to create fear
170 among the unconscious mass (6.5%), images of deadly virus (8.5%) & threat (8.3%) in its headline.

171 **9 Chart 2: Summary of the key issues of news headlines tagged** 172 **with COVID-19**

173 On an Individual newspaper assessment, this study finds that the ProthomAlo gave the highest preference to
174 'fear' (19.9%) in the headline while the Daily Star used fear (12.2%) and threat (8.2%) respectively. Analyzing
175 this, researchers find the ProthomAlo giving more importance in creating 'fear' among its readers. But, both
176 newspapers were giving equal importance on the economic effect of coronavirus, where researchers see the
177 ProthomAlo mentioned this matter for 7.5% on its headline, and the percentage rate of The Daily Star was 7.3%.
178 In addition, both newspapers had an intention to avoid the term 'blame game' (0.7% in both of the newspapers)
179 and 'political affiliation' (0.9% in both of the newspapers) in their headlines. created 'fear' very much, but after
180 the declaration of the official locked down on March 25, when COVID-19 spread all over Bangladesh, these ideas
181 of creating fear pop up more frequently on the headlines of the news. (Chart 3)

182 **10 b) Timeline Analysis**

183 According to Chart-4, the study finds that both dailies started to publish more COVID-19 related news from
184 mid-March, just before the declaration of locked-down by the government.

185 To analyze the timeline of the most popular vernacular daily ProthomAlo, researchers found that the daily
186 always had an intention to present the national news related to COVID-19 most. But during late-mid March
187 (18 March-24 March), the national news about COVID-19 was given higher preference, but the news related to
188 the world was also On the other side, The Daily Star was giving the highest preference to national news during
189 the first phase of the declaration of locked-down, other than that international news got good treatment in this
190 newspaper.

191 As per chart 7, researchers found that during locked down declaration time and just after the declaration,
192 The Daily Star published more national news than the ProthomAlo. Among total 347 national news, we see the
193 highest issues were related to 'fear' (22%), unconscious mass (8.1%), threat (6.3%), safety precautions (12.4%),
194 limitations (7.2%), and government steps (8.1%). It proves that the dailies are creating a culture of fear among
195 the unconscious mass of Bangladesh, and try to deliver them the knowledge of safety precautions and the steps
196 taken by the government to fight with COVID-19. On the other hand, the main issues related to economic news
197 were the effect of COVID-19 on the economy (74.5%).

198 © 2020 Global Journals Among total 176 international news, the issues that focused, again and again, were fear
199 (17.6%), deadly virus (13.1%), threat (14.2%), world update (11.1%) & optimism (13.1%), that reinforced the
200 idea of pandemic crisis all over the world. According to the table 3 and chart 10, the ProthomAlo gave importance
201 to the news with 'human interest' 4.1%, that talked about the struggle of less wealthy people, garments worker,
202 slum dwellers (total 16 stories) and The Daily Star published only two news about the struggle of lower-income
203 people and slum dwellers rather its preference was to highlight the economic news 11.8% (42 stories). It proved
204 that the mass people of Bangladesh are the reader of Prothom Alo, but The Daily Star is not a daily of mass
205 people of Bangladesh as it acts as the mouthpiece of the higher class.

206 **11 d) Editorial & Opinion Analysis**

207 After analyzing the editorial pages of both newspapers, researchers found that the Daily Star published more
208 editorial and opinion 21,3% (total 76) than the ProthomAlo 10.3% (total 40). The study also found that,
209 after the detection of the very first affected case in Bangladesh, The Daily Star started to set the tone
210 on this emerging virus on its editorial section on a regular basis, highlighting 'crisis situation,' 'limitation,'
211 'mass awareness,' 'unconsciousness,' 'struggle,' 'government steps,' 'economic aspects,' 'human interest,' 'local
212 corruption,' 'strategy,' 'opportunity' and the terms 'fear' and 'panic' as well. On the other hand, the ProthomAlo
213 was eager to put attention on government activities on its editorial most, while we see 'human interest' story,
214 'limitation', and 'mass awareness' in its editorial section. Analyzing the editorials, both the national dailies
215 focused the words 'fear' and 'panic' most but not to disseminate the fear among the people but repeatedly urging

216 the government to take proper steps to minimize the harms. By the first week, indicating the 'crisis situation'
217 The Daily Star on its editorial (10 March 2020), repeatedly remembered the role of government during this kind
218 of pandemic and questioned on healthcare facilities over PM's assurance that we are well prepared to protect the
219 transmission.

220 In the same week, researchers see ProthomAlo giving less preference over the issue on its editorial. On March
221 10, the very first editorial was set by the dailies after the first confirmed case. On that editorial, it has set the
222 tone by analyzing the government's initiative to overcome the situation. The newspaper questioned government's
223 activities as the government was repeatedly saying that they are well prepared to protect the transmission but yet
224 to see any precautionary measures. Indicating the term 'limitation,' the daily expressed its concern over averting
225 the virus among the public setting the tone like: 'Needs to formulate guidelines, especially for the educational
226 institutions and the public transport' and repeatedly asked the authorities for taking steps to reduce the blast
227 of COVID-19 pandemic on its next editorial on 14 that month.

228 There was a marked shift in the coverage of COVID-19 in the editorial section of ProthomAlo, by the third
229 week. On March 22, the daily set the editorial, mentioning the authorities to protect our frontline healthcare
230 worker on priority base by supplying personal protective equipment (PPE) and other protective equipment.
231 Indicating the term 'limitation,' the editorial also focused on the careless motive of the authorities. The daily
232 also mentioned that actual information needs to provide among the mass people to create 'mass awareness' on its
233 following editorial. On March 23, the ProthomAlo had set its editorial mentioning the term 'war', as we need to
234 initiate a proper formula to face the war and also mentioned that the government had a lot to do wining against
235 the war. On that week, the ProthomAlo again urged the government to take proper VI.

236 12 Findings

237 Volume XX Issue XII Version I This study has explained the role of Bangladeshi newspaper to cover the issues
238 tagged with COVID-19 in the coronavirus crisis. It revealed that all the published articles during sample time
239 were more national focused. Therefore, both newspapers initiative by creating awareness, supplying medical
240 equipment, and assuring social distancing.

241 By last week on March 29, The Daily Star on its editorial identified the term 'local corruption,' marking the
242 medicine businessman as 'unscrupulous.' Urging the authorities to take urgent measures, the tone was, 'Stop
243 hiking prices of medicines.' On another editorial, it thanked the government for taking timely steps of going
244 for the shutdown. In another editorial, the daily had praised the government's initiative to save the economy,
245 highlighting the term 'government steps to save the economy.' On April 4, the daily established the headline
246 as, 'Covid-19 crisis warrants a comprehensive, strategic rescue plan,' and described that PM's stimulus package
247 would create 'far-reaching effects.'

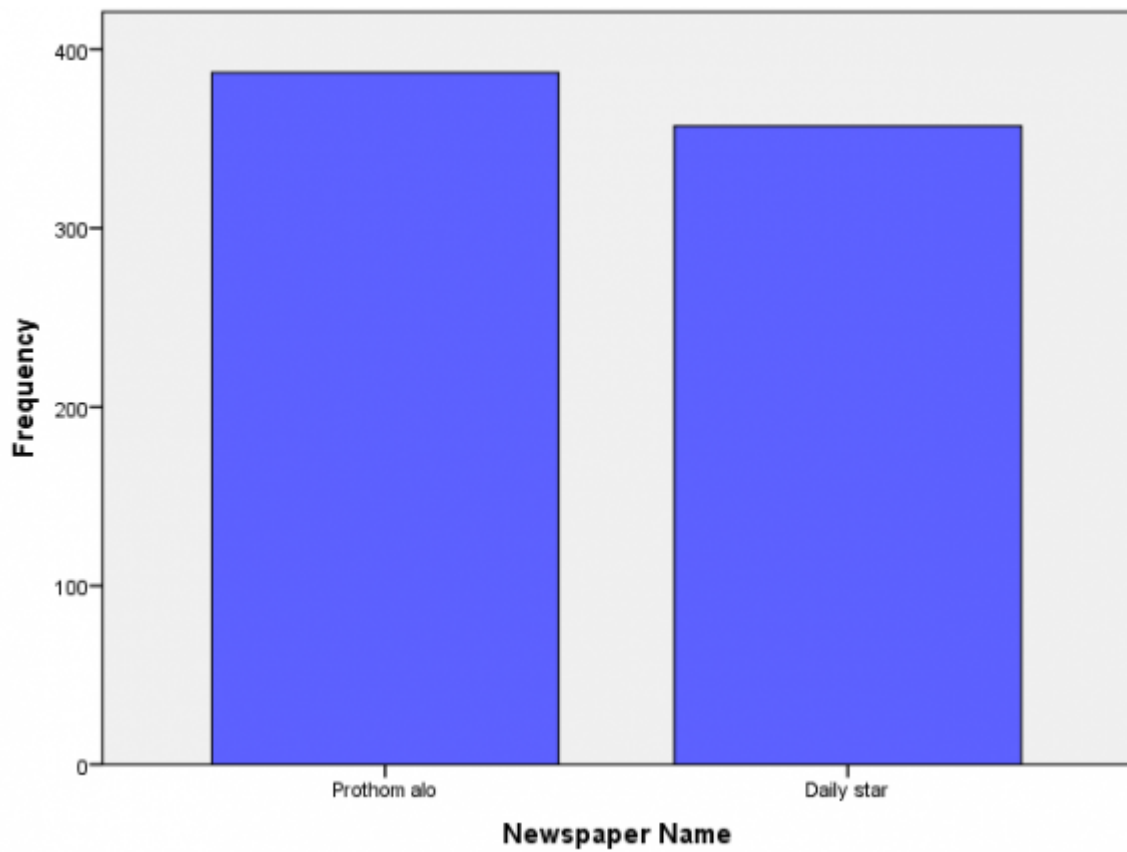
248 In the last week, the ProthomAlo had set the tone on its editorial highlighting the treatment facilities, the
249 limitation as well as the government and private actions regarding that. On those editorials, the daily urged to
250 set up more dedicated COVID hospitals, to ensure proper medical facilities and asked to increase the testing as
251 much as possible. On April 2, the ProthomAlo solicited the government to ensure foods to the indigent, as we
252 faced scarcity of food due to the lockdown. Here we see the element 'human story', which may arise a tension
253 over the situation, but the daily had presented it showing a solution to overcome the tackles.

254 13 VII.

255 14 Conclusion

256 Volume XX Issue XII Version I presented COVID-19 as a 'furious' virus. The dailies focused on 'fear' and
257 'threat', urging the government to take proper steps to minimize the harms. Media portrays of this pandemic as
258 a dangerous disease to death increases during the declaration of 'shut-down' by the prime minister of Bangladesh.
259 When journalists write an article on corona as a fearful one, they always focus on the death ratio and the
260 unconscious mass of Bangladesh. That increases an unknown fear among reader as they got to know that the
261 people around them are not conscious of this deadly virus. Along with this, the fear of livelihood emerges when
262 the newspaper gives more importance to deliver news about the corona virus's economic impact. Throughout
263 the sample period, dailies especially The Daily Star, discussed the economic crisis due to this global pandemic.
264 In some cases, newspapers mostly the ProthomAlo, tend to highlight human stories related to the novel virus.
265 Precisely the study proves that both newspapers intend to frame the COVID-19 as a national crisis.

266 But as we are living in a pandemic situation, it's quite natural that the newspaper is publishing this type
267 of news every day. Taking all the measures into account, it can be said that the selected newspapers had an
268 intension to present the novel coronavirus as a threat to the nation, and in this regard, most of the articles are
269 national focused. To minimize that risk, the government had tried to take actions, but the media did highlight
270 more on limitations and unconscious mass of the country, which got people more feared. So it will be tough to
271 conclude on this issue rather the newspapers can stop making catchy headlines representing deadly virus, which
272 might get the newspapers some extra clicks, but it actually increases 'panic' among the general mass. Thus this
273 article suggests that journalists should be more careful when they cover any specific issue related to the pandemic



11

Figure 1: Table 1 :Chart 1 :

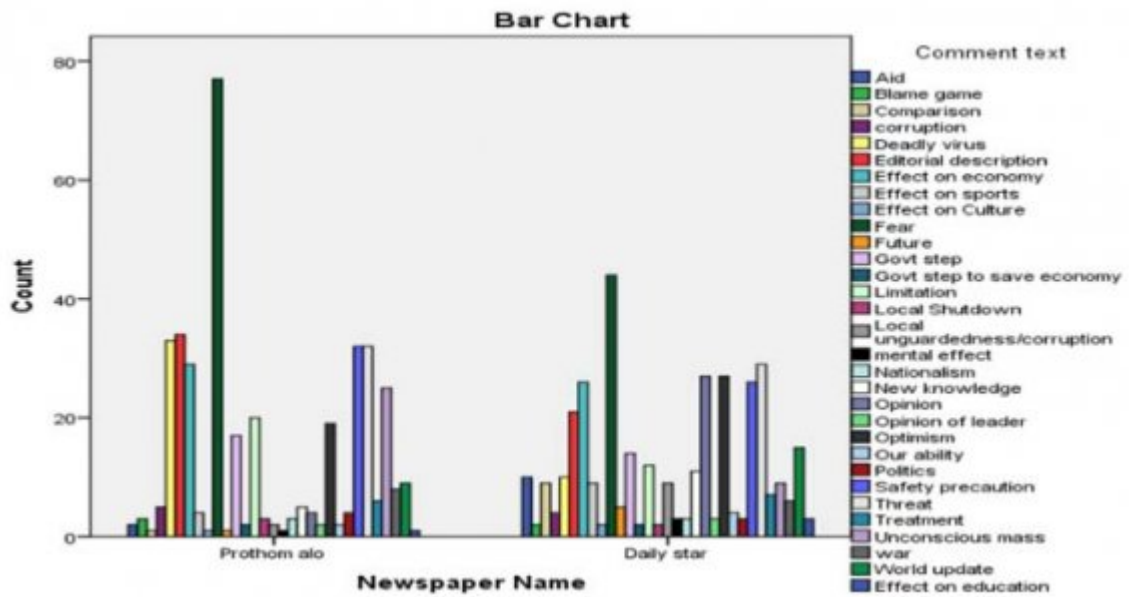
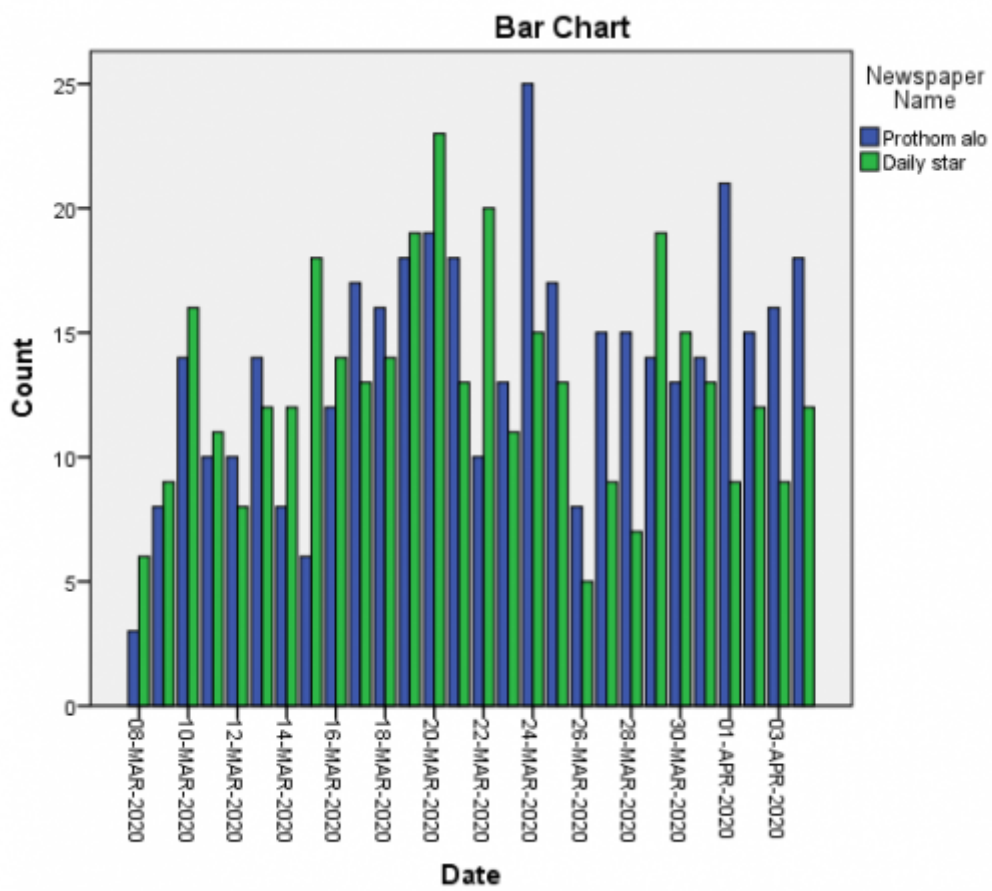


Figure 2:



7

Figure 3: Chart 7 :

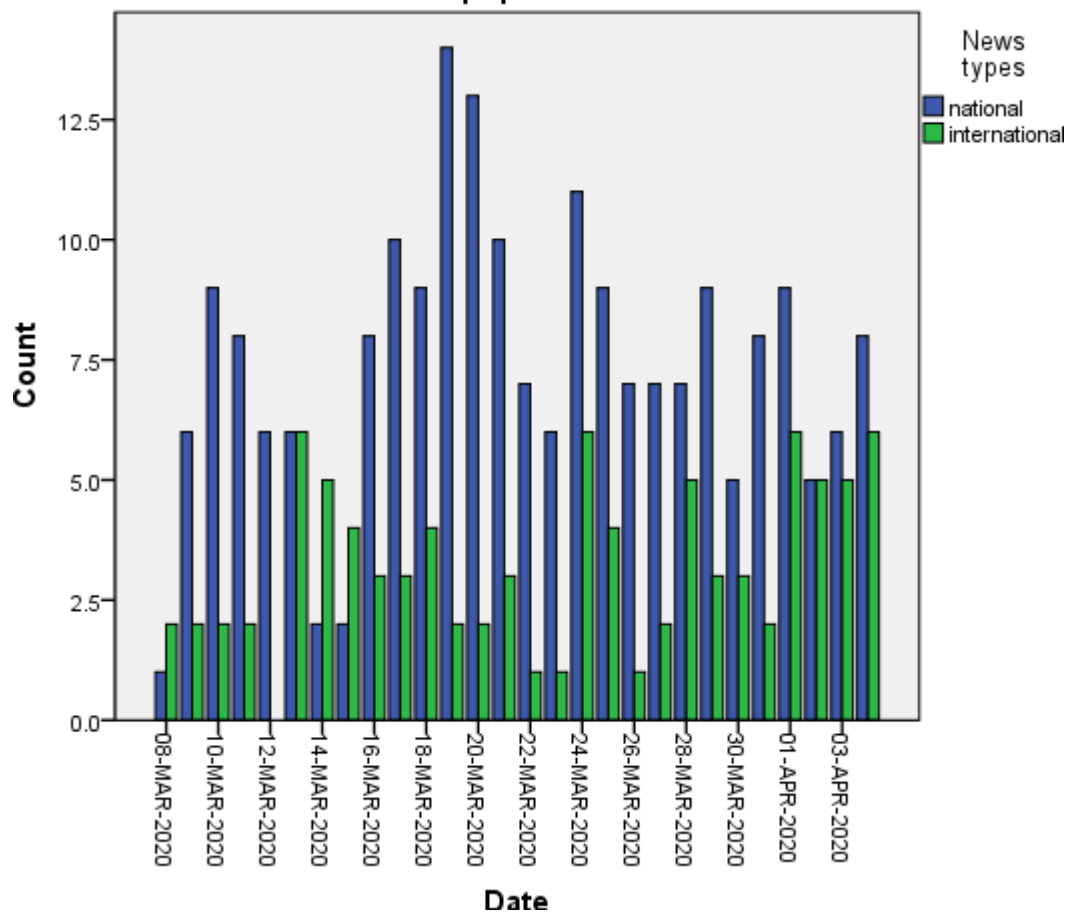
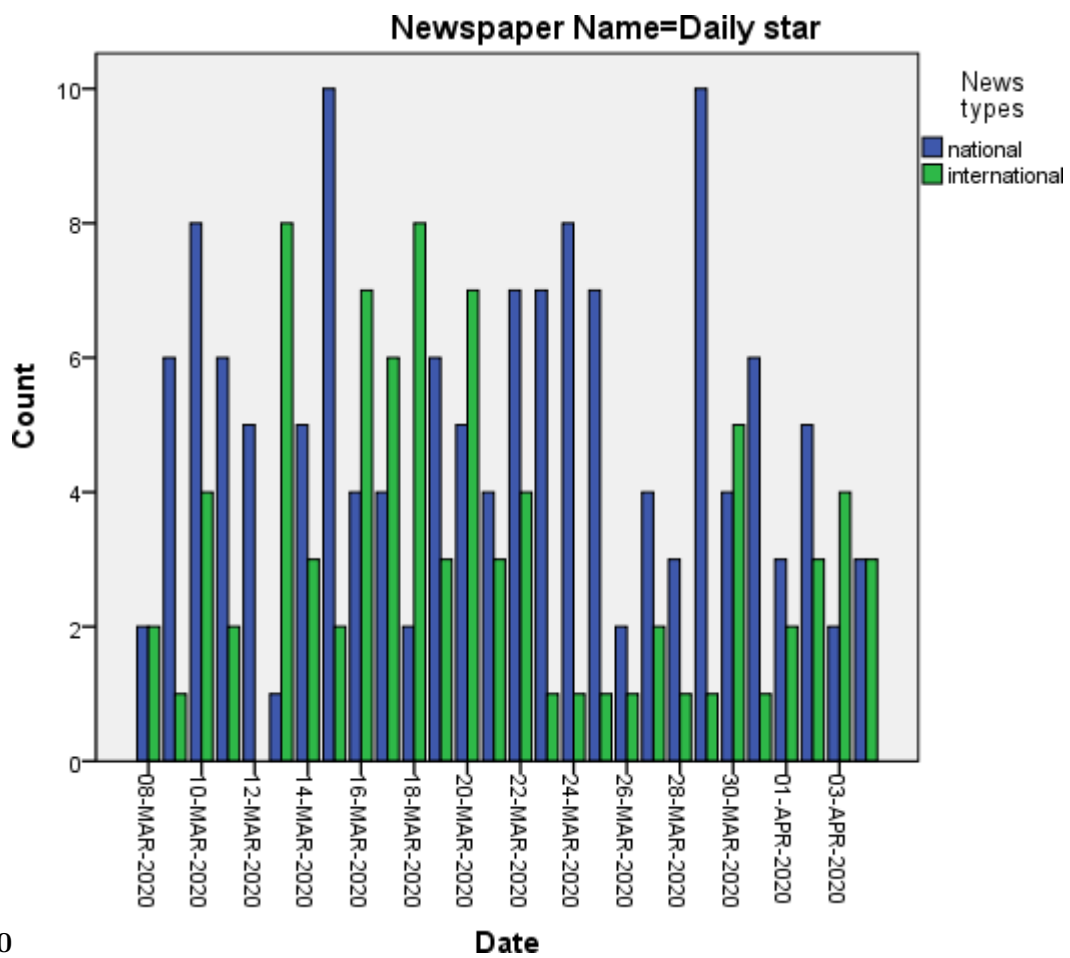


Figure 4:



10

Figure 5: Chart 10 :

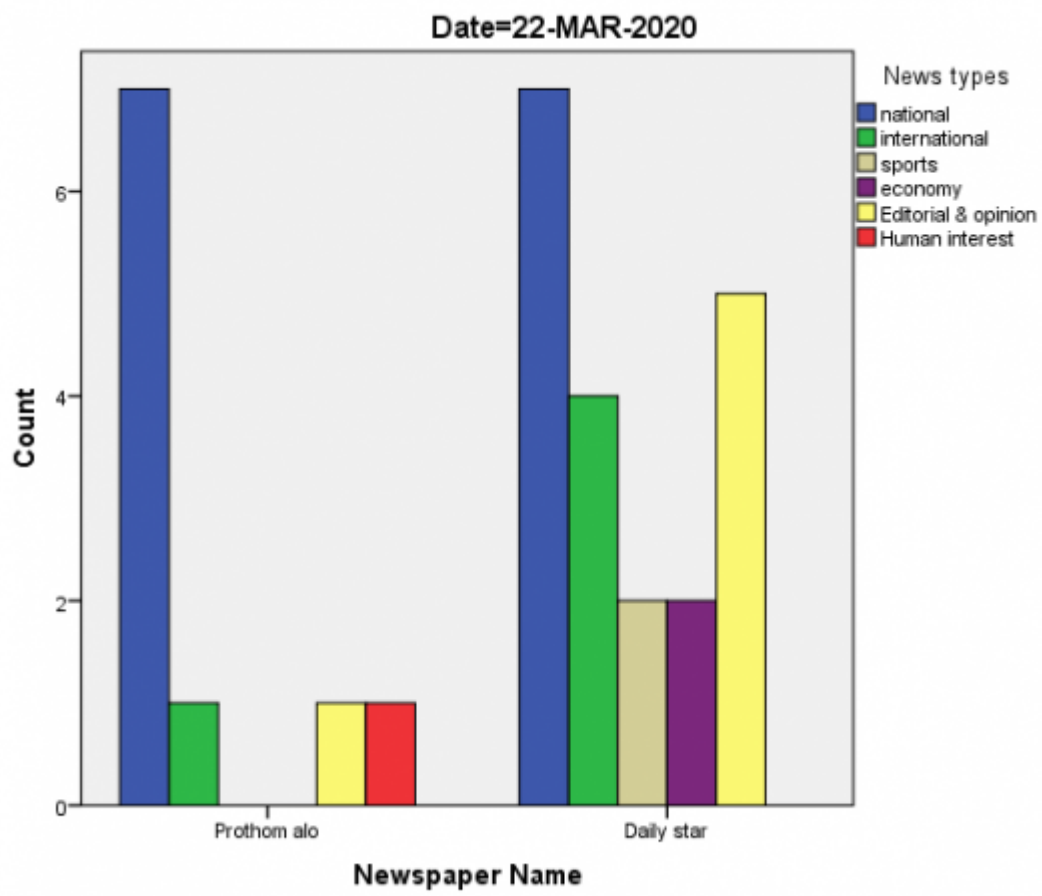


Figure 6:

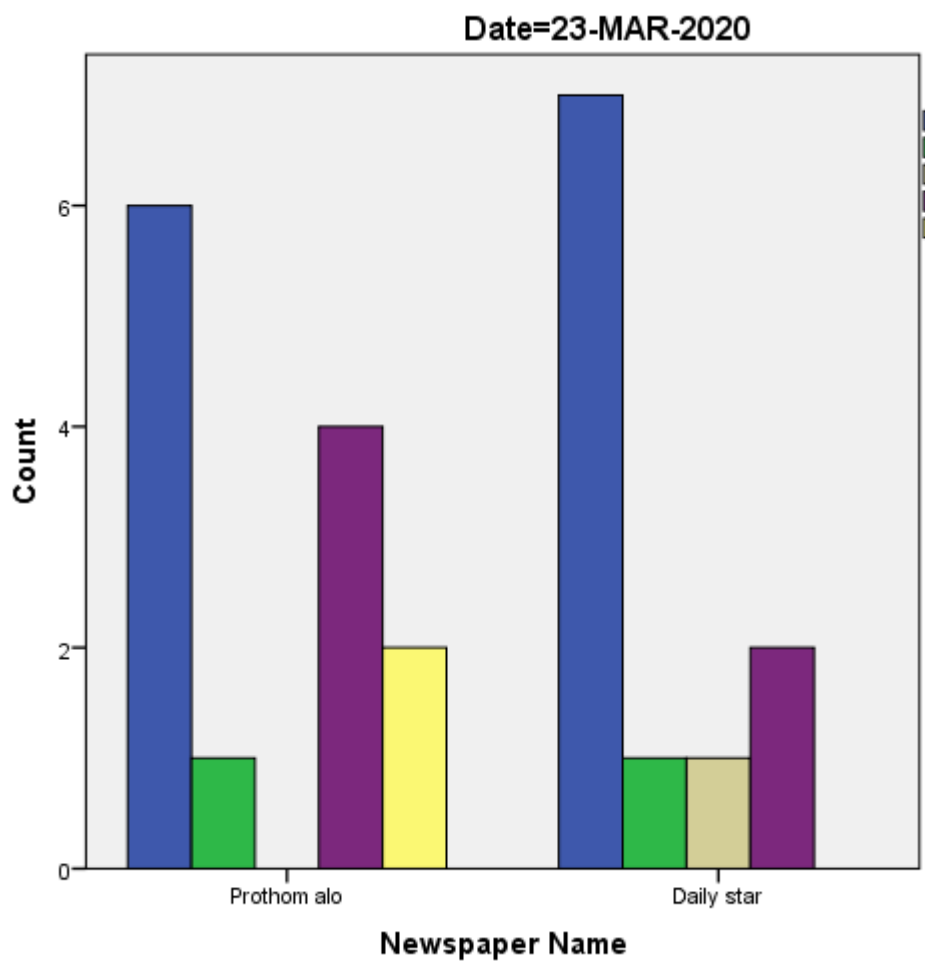


Figure 7:

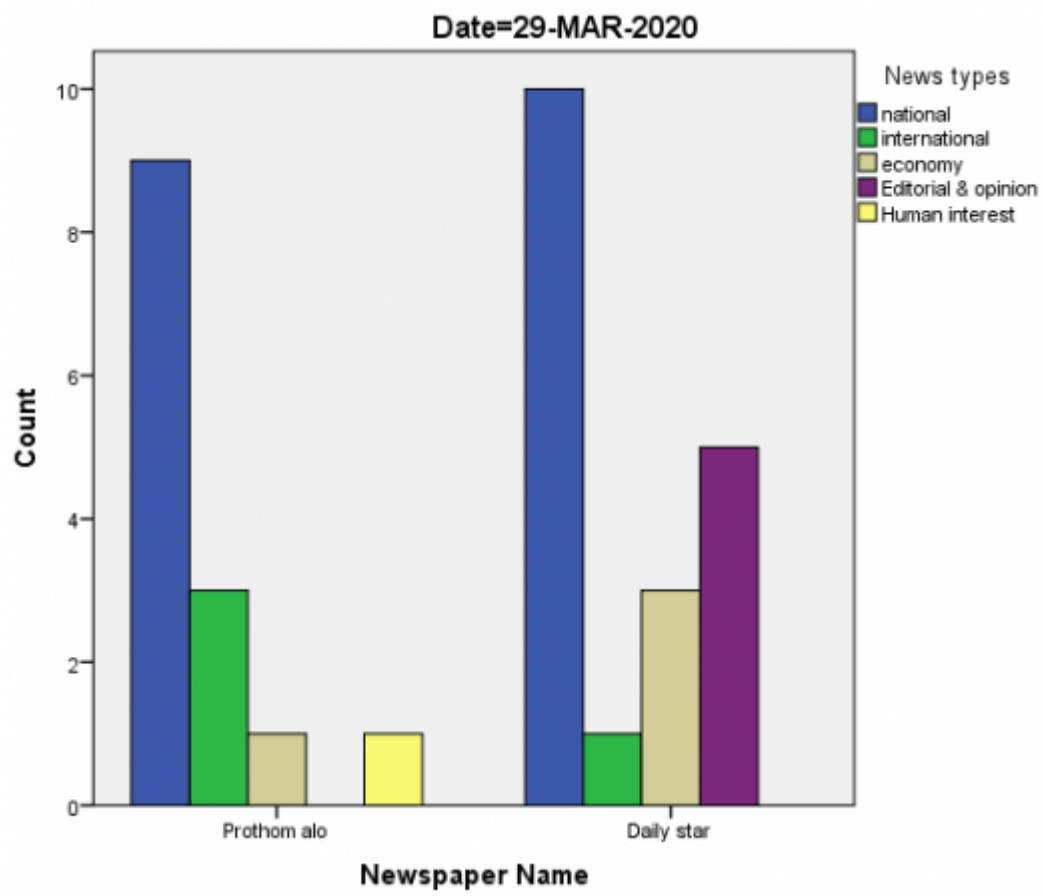


Figure 8:

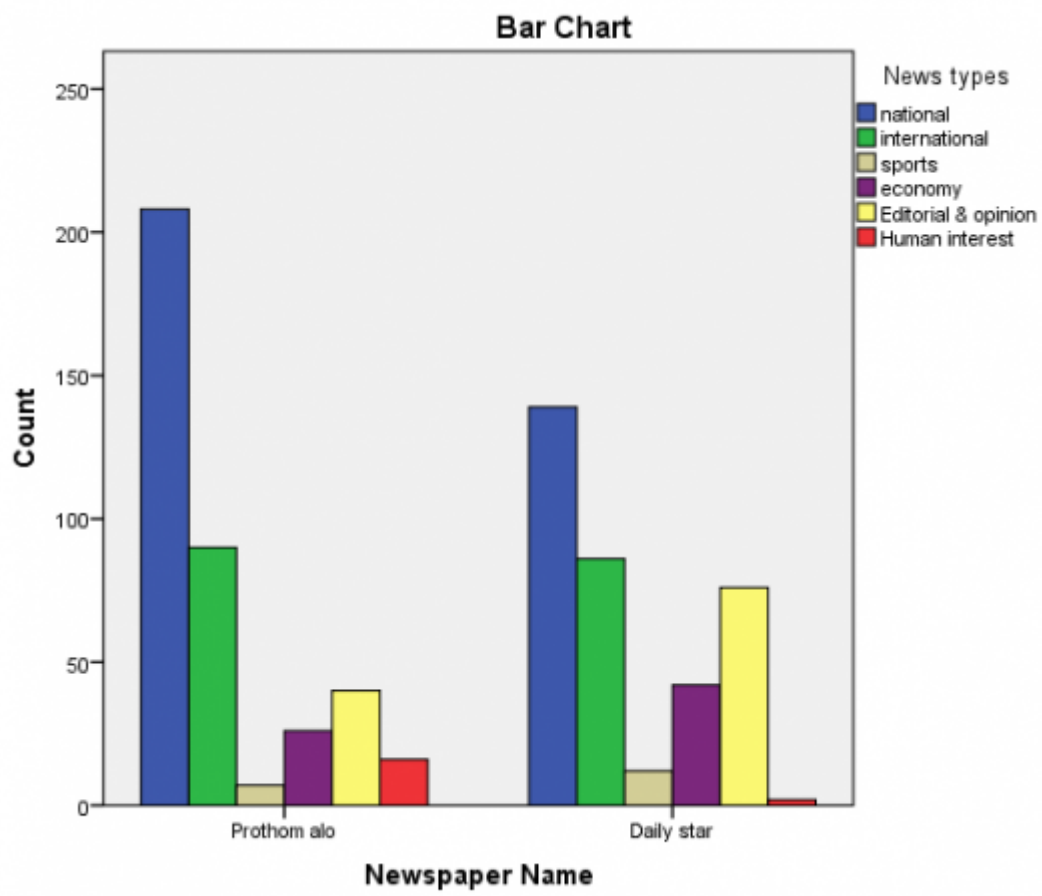


Figure 9:

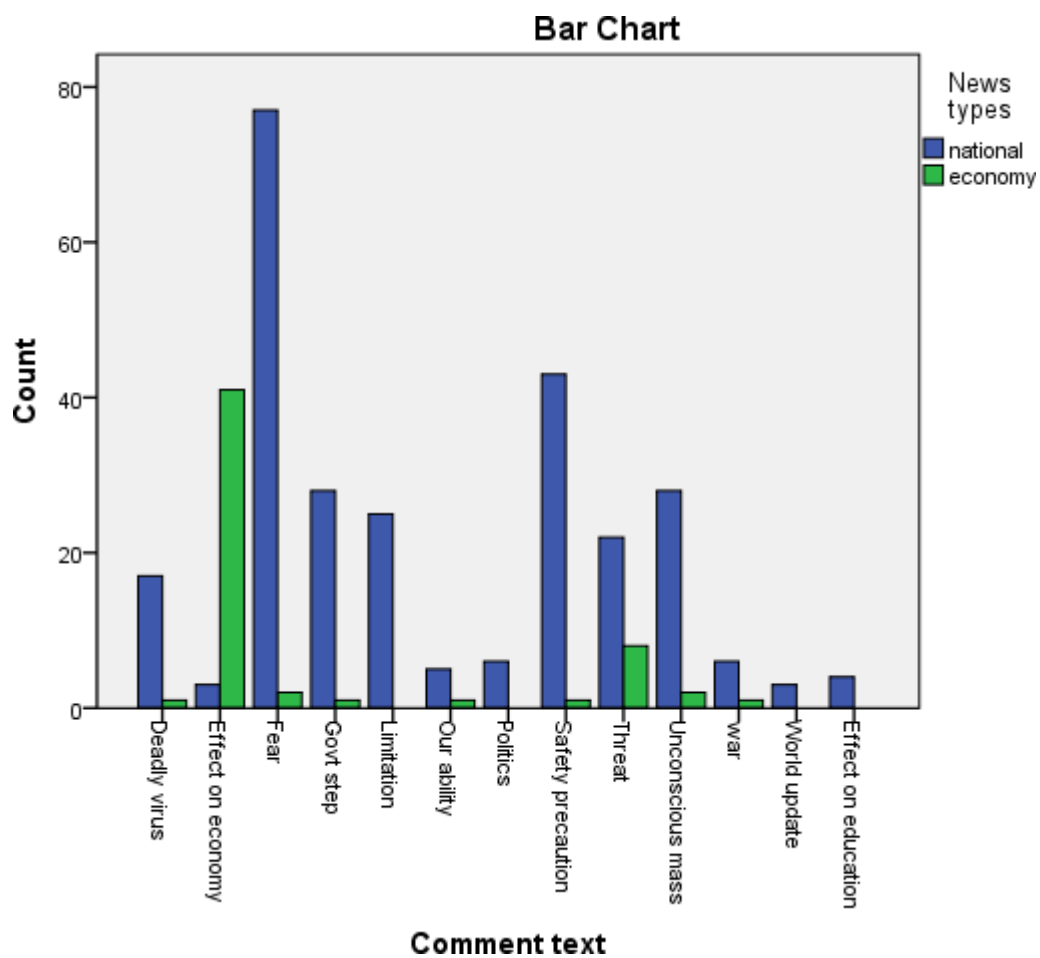


Figure 10:

Atasoy

(2020), in his study,

Year 2020

(A)

Global Journal of Human Social Science -

Figure 11:

Newspaper Name	News types						Total
	National	International	Sports	Economy	Editorial & Opinion	Human interest	
Prothom Alo	90	7	26	40	16	387	
Star 1	53.7%	23.3%	1.8%	6.7%	10.3%	100.0%	
Daily Star	59.9%	51.1%	36.8%	38.2%	34.5%	52.0%	
Prothom Alo	139	86	12	42	76	357	
Star 1	38.9%	24.1%	3.4%	11.8%	21.3%	100.0%	
Daily Star	40.1%	48.9%	63.2%	61.8%	65.5%	48.0%	
						43	
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Figure 12:

2

Prothom Alo	Count	%
Prothom Alo	387	100.0%
Star 1	52.0%	13.4%
Daily Star	48.0%	12.4%

Figure 13: Table 2 :

3

Human interest

[Note: Prothom Alo Chart 11: Summary of human interest focused news headlines related to COVID-19 Chart 12: Number of Editorial and opinion in both dailies]

Figure 14: Table 3 :

14 CONCLUSION

274 and its impact. Rather than disseminating fear, they can help to develop concerns of all parties to focus on the
275 issues that can reduce its gruesomeness.^{1 2}

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