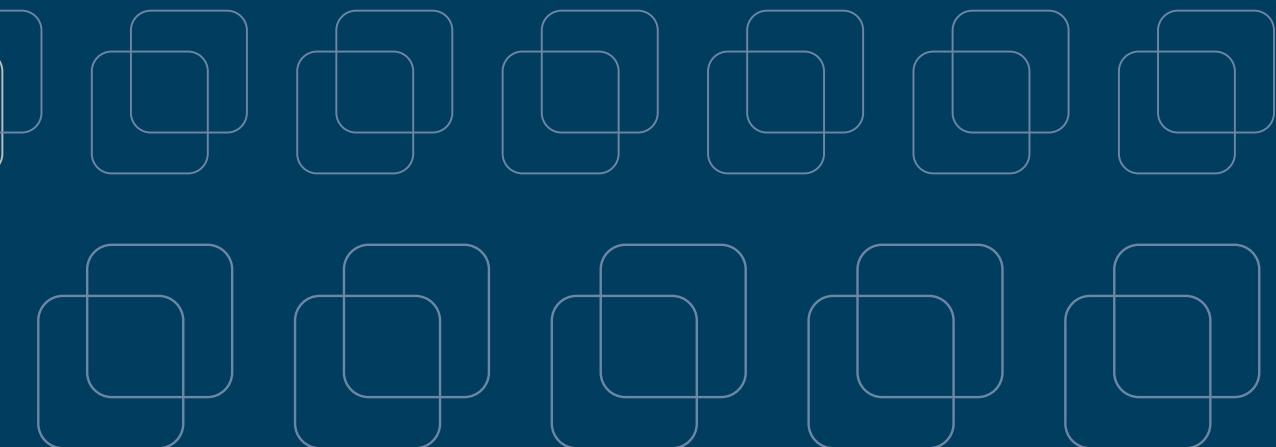


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INTRODUCTION

Media sustainability in the pandemic conflicting world: Reflections from diverse perspectives¹

Sadia Jamil

Asian Media Information & Communication Centre, Country Representative, UAE

Nikos Panagiotou

Christos Fragkonikolopolous

Aristotle University, Greece

Anna Gladkova²

Lomonosov Moscow State University, Russia

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Understanding media sustainability

The notion of media sustainability is quite contestable. There is no universal definition. This is perhaps because of diverse political and socio-cultural contexts within which news media operate. One aspect of media sustainability can be assessing it through the quality of content it produces. However, media do require enough resources of time, money, technology, and experienced professionals who are expert in producing quality content as per the public needs and demands. This implies that resources lie at the heart of maintaining media sustainability (Kluempers & Schneider, 2015).

Media sustainability is the news organization's capability to function effectively under stable political, legal, and economic conditions (Frere, 2013). In a sustainable environment, 'journalists and media organizations perform their roles without any intervention or fear of violence, and media organizations have stable legal and business conditions that make them enable to pay their staffs good salaries', gain institutional legitimacy by discouraging corruption,

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² Corresponding author:

Anna Gladkova, Lomonosov Moscow State University, Faculty of Journalism, 9, Mokhovaya st, Moscow, Russia.

Email: gladkova_a@list.ru

and foster overall media industry's integrity (Centre for International Media Assistance, 2014). Media sustainability also reflects itself in the ownership structure, which is pluralistic and that give ensure representation of all members of society regardless of any discrimination (Kluempers & Schneider, 2015).

Moreover, media operates at an intersection of three resources: technology, economics, and law and policy (Jamil, 2020). Conceptually, media sustainability is underpinned by an operating framework that encompasses all three areas of resources. For production and distribution, media organizations require technology that is cost effective and efficient, and that can efficiently distribute the produced content to the public. This means it necessitates a business model and an economic system that drives enough revenue to produce quality media content, as well as it requires a legal and policy framework that supports independent and free media. But it is crucial to recognize that business models may vary in different economic systems and socio-cultural settings, and thus a universal concept of media sustainability is not possible.

It is crucial to recognize that media have the capacity to survive even on minimal resources because of the unique financial attributes of information (Friedrichsen & Kamalapouri, 2017). In many developing countries, especially in the Global South, media organizations do operate with minimal resources as well and still they survive and operate (Gladkova & Jamil, 2021). Nevertheless, media sustainability is not just all about survival with minimum available resources, but it requires to focus on sustaining quality media. This means it necessitates to consider political, economic, technological, and social aspects together. This helps not only to ensure sustainability, but as well as enhances media's contributions to transparent, democratic governments that are responsive to their people, support human rights, are not corrupt and enable economic development.

The challenge of measuring media sustainability

Monitoring the sustainability of media systems is challenging because the issue crosses political, economic, and social factors. In countries that lack a strong market economy, advertising-supported news media is difficult to establish or sustain. In some countries, financially and technologically weak media organizations houses are supported either by businessmen with other commercial interests, or politicians with an agenda other than providing independent news and information. The International Research & Exchange Board (IREX) has created a 'Media Sustainability Index' to measure sustainability and to compare results across countries and over time. It is useful to measure the

sustainability of media across a wide range of factors ranging from economic, socio-political, and cultural environments, technological resources, plurality, independence, journalistic freedom, impartiality, safety, level of censorship and self-censorship (International Research & Exchange Board, 2016). However, the onset of COVID-19 pandemic has affected the operation media organizations in many parts of the world, especially in terms of business models and the used technologies. Therefore, new aspects would be needed to focus on to assess the broader impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on the sustainable operation of media in different contexts of the world, to mention a few: changing patterns of business models and resources' requirements; emerging news production and distribution techniques; shift in audience's choices and demands; the issues of media plurality and credibility.

Media sustainability in the pandemic world

The global economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are by now taking shape, as markets tumble, and countries take emergency actions to respond to the pandemic (Gladkova, Vartanova, & Ragnedda, 2022). As measures to contain COVID-19 spread around the world and millions of people are quarantined in their homes, reliable, fact-checked news is more important than ever. News audiences are growing in record numbers, but for many media organizations, income is falling (Cotter, DeCook & Kanthawala, 2022).

Many businesses that are affected by the economic situation are suspending their advertisements, and public events and conferences have already been canceled through May – and possibly longer. Some media report that their subscriptions and memberships are growing, but in the face of so much uncertainty, they already fear that readers may soon cancel.

'As measures to contain COVID-19 spread around the world, reliable, fact-checked news is more important than ever. News audiences are growing in record numbers, but for many media organizations, income is falling' (Warner & Cirelli, 2020). While news consumption has increased during the pandemic, the revenue has not followed. Instead, as the global economy is gutted, news outlets around the world have laid off staff, cut salaries and furloughed workers while journalistic conditions have worsened the COVID-19 pandemic is disrupting every industry.

For the media sector, coronavirus creates both opportunities and challenges. The current disruption may be unprecedented, but the media industry has been upended many times before in different parts of world (Jamil & Appiah-Adjei, 2020). Since the turn of the century, digitization of content, the rise of social

media and acceleration in mobile consumption have all forced changes to the way media companies monetize content (Jamil, 2022; Pavlik, 2021). In an era of digital change, media needs to find ways to secure their long-term survival and independence, which prompts scholars to investigate the notion of media sustainability from various perspectives.

Since the onset of COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an increased discussion of what does media sustainability mean and how can it be achieved? Media Sustainability refers to the ability of media to play its vital role as the ‘fourth estate’ (Matschke/kh, 2015; Starosielski & Walker, 2016). In other words, it relates to a media system that provides citizens with ‘useful, timely and objective information’, and as well to a media system that can operate free and independent without political, legal, social, or economic restrictions (Matschke/kh, 2015).

Media sustainability in a pandemic world is the *World of Media*’s first ever Special Issue. It emphasizes media industry needs financial models, as well as enabling socio-political and cultural environments that help media organizations to be able to keep fulfilling its diverse roles, which appear evermore important during times of COVID-19.

Articles featured in Special Issue

Articles included into this special issue focus on national or regional peculiarities of the COVID-19 influence. In the array of the articles there are presented the case of Algeria, the Cyprus case, the cases of Bangladesh and Southern Africa, “The Greek “success story”, the case of India and the research of Russian public discourse. The main aspects of the academic research on the Coronavirus pandemic are psychological impact, evaluations of mass media and social media coverage, audience perception, communication patterns, including novel patterns of news use, the use of social networks, and changes in educational systems. Scholars conducted multi-stage studies based on conventional and novel approaches and used advanced computer instruments for the analysis.

The group of articles examining Bangladesh, Algeria, India, and Cyprus cases (Simons et al.; Loucif; Rani; Spyridou & Danezis) consider such research questions as media role during the health crisis, people’s perceptions about news related to the COVID-19 pandemic, communication patterns and the patterns of news consumption, the level of trust to media sources and the traits of information concerning to its sufficiency or insufficiency and the level of clarity.

Researchers from Bangladesh pay attention to the media’s role during the pandemic. This research issue is also brought up by Loucif in the article

‘Assessment of media and risk communication during COVID-19: The case of Algeria’. Scholars discuss not only the assessment of media or the important role of risk communication in times of crises but also people’s perceptions and the changes in media consumption during COVID-19. The patterns of news consumption are more precisely considered in the article ‘News consumption patterns during the coronavirus pandemic across time and devices: The Cyprus case’ (Spyridou & Danezis). Results of these studies confirm the increase of information at the beginning of health crises that caused information overload or even ‘news fatigue’ and ‘news avoidance’.

The next aspect of research interest is the ratio between digital / online news portals, and mainstream sources of information. The case of Algeria presents that the respondents use many sources to get news about the COVID-19, and the traditional media such as TV was becoming more important ‘in times of confinement in Algeria’ (Loucif). While the case of Bangladesh demonstrates that people got more news from online portals than mainstream media but the majority of respondents trust mainstream media as a credible source of information. The situation in Cyprus (Spyridou & Danezis) shows that the pandemic ‘reminded people of the value of the legacy outlets’ but the increase in mobile news consumption is a strong tendency.

The article ‘The Greek “success story” on the international media representations concerning the pandemic of COVID-19’ carries out interdisciplinary research that combines social concepts and media studies. Stampouli and Vamvakas take into account ‘the realization of social structure’ through language and considers the coverage of pre-pandemic and pandemic situations in Greece in English- and Spanish-speaking media in the refraction of three concepts orientalism, europeanization, and globalisation. To reconstruct the traits of the reality, authors resort to metaphors through conceptual metaphor theory which supports metaphors as ‘vehicles for understanding’.

Aslanov and Kotov examine in this special issue the case of Russia. They also refer to the theory of conceptual metaphor as it allows to research significant linguistic aspects and social and psychological ones in connection. Having examined metaphors in Russian media pandemic-related content, the authors described the influence of coronavirus on the audience’s opinion in terms of the virus and the willingness to take a vaccine. After detailed analysis, the authors conclude that the used conventional metaphors (‘flash’ and ‘wave’) have a limited effect on the respondents and, in particular, the existence of the influence of metaphorical framing depends on the status of groups: vaccinated or unvaccinated.

The case of Russia was also examined in another paper approaching Russian context (Smirnova et al) in the article ‘COVID-19 public discourse in Russia: Semantic mapping’. It is another interdisciplinary research that represents ethnocultural and psychological features of media. As an important part of the media agenda pandemic-related mems are the research issue while semantic change (or semantic shift). Using new methodological approaches and NLP designs scholars identified the dynamics of changes in social perception of COVID-related phenomena in the first and the third waves.

‘Journalism pedagogy and ICTs in a time of pandemic: A case study of selected journalism schools in Southern Africa’ written by Mbongeni Msimanga, Lungile Tshuma, and Trust Matsilele is devoted to educational challenges during the COVID-19 that continues the researches on the changes in educational systems. Although it approaches the previous articles in an attempt to describe the social and political aspects (Aslanov, & Kotov; Rani; Stampouli & Vamvakas). The group of researchers argues a transition to Africanization of education in Southern Africa and the challenges it faced in time of COVID-19: a difficulty of configuration teaching and learning caused by a lack of ICT infrastructure and ICT literacy among the lectures, network coverage and inefficient face-to-face communication. The situation varies from university to university, and yet there is a strong challenge – the digital divide in society.

The last but not the least, Rani shows in the paper how the Kannada Newspaper organizations operated during the pandemic. Using in-depth interviews with the management and the editorial team, scholars focus on recent trends, challenges and opportunities media faced during an uncertain, rapidly transforming period.

Conclusion

The articles, featured in this Special Issue, address diverse issues that have posed challenges to the sustainable operation of media in the pandemic world. However, it is crucial to recognize that news industry was already unstable even prior to the onset of COVID-19 pandemic given revenues were down, and news organizations were shrinking in many parts of the world. The global health crisis has only made these issues worse. Despite multi-facet challenges for news organizations, still the COVID-19 pandemic has unfolded some new opportunities for viable media operation amid the global health crises. As the online news consumptions has increased during the pandemic, now in many countries, newsrooms are adapting and innovating. Digital journalistic practices are being emphasized considering the evolving nature of news production and

consumption in the digital news ecology. The financial sustainability of news media remains a prime concern amid pandemic, but what we observe is the emergence of new sources of funding. There is a growing inclination towards the use of subscriptions' revenue and donor funding in addition to attracting advertising revenue and seeking government's subsidies where national economies can afford to support the news media.

Overall, the purpose of this special issue is to emphasize building an independent, enduring and financially sustainable news media system that can serve in the public interest. Therefore, we do not just focus on highlighting diverse issues and opportunities when addressing the media sustainability during the COVID-19 pandemic. Rather we also emphasize to identifying the news content that can serve the public and societal good given not all news organizations define and practice the core mission of serving the society through promoting inclusive public dialogue on issues of common concerns and fostering democratic values. Hence, we envisage media sustainability not just in terms of financial sustainability of news media, but we recognize the social sustainability of news media through maintaining its credibility and public trust.

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‘Waves’ and ‘flashes’ of the pandemic: How COVID-19 metaphors in Russian media influence reasoning¹

Ivan Aslanov²

Lomonosov Moscow State University, Russia

Alexey Kotov

National Research University Higher School of Economics, Russia

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Abstract

In this study, we examined how metaphors used in the Russian media to describe the COVID-19 virus affect the audience’s judgment about the virus and their willingness to take a vaccine. We found that the two conventional metaphors used to describe the dynamics of the spread of the coronavirus ('wave' and 'flash') have a limited impact on the audience. In particular, by conducting an online experiment ($N=737$), we revealed that texts in which the virus and vaccination were described metaphorically ('a new flash of coronavirus' / 'vaccination could extinguish the flames of a new flash of coronavirus'; 'a new wave of coronavirus' / 'vaccination could curb the onslaught of a new wave of coronavirus') reduced fear and anxiety at the thought of the coronavirus, but this effect appears only in vaccinated participants. Metaphorical framing, while impactful at the affective level, did not affect 'rational' reasoning, such as estimates of the likelihood of becoming vaccinated or estimates of the number of cases in the country. Also, subjects' responses to most of the questions correlated positively with their confidence in official information about the coronavirus. The article interprets the results in the context of current work in the field of metaphorical framing and health communication.

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² Corresponding author:

Ivan Aslanov, Lomonosov Moscow State University, Faculty of Journalism, 9,
Mokhovaya st, Moscow, Russia.
Email: ivaslanov@gmail.com

Keywords

Metaphor, framing, metaphorical framing, COVID-19, health communication.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the importance of the media as a social institution. Although the pandemic emergency was declared less than two years ago, people have already adapted to new formats of interaction, mediating social practices in many areas of public life, such as education (Poluekhtova et al., 2020), religion (Tudor et al., 2021), and sports (Goldman, Hedlund, 2020).

Not surprisingly, researchers are documenting the influence of media information on audience judgments and emotions related to COVID-19. This can range from information about the virus spread on social media, the consumption of which can be associated with a desire to self-diagnose illness (Laato et al., 2020), to journalistic publications disseminating information about the virus, which can polarize public opinion (Hart et al., 2020).

Separate attention has been paid to the linguistic tools of coronavirus reporting, and in particular to metaphors. On the one hand, attempts are made to capture metaphorical patterns found both in the speech of individual politicians (Bates, 2020; Berrocal et al., 2021) and in media discourse in general (Nerlich & Jaspal, 2021; Semino, 2021; Seixas, 2021; Kablukov, 2022; Shi-xu, 2022). On the other hand, there is a comparative analysis of metaphors used to describe the coronavirus versus metaphors previously used to describe other diseases and epidemics (Taylor & Kidgell, 2021; Yang, 2020). The results of such studies are significant not only in the linguistics context, but also for predicting the social and psychological effects of communication because, according to the theory of conceptual metaphor (Lakoff & Johnsen, 2003), the source domain of a metaphor can to some extent rearrange the structure of the target domain 'by analogy' (Wolff & Gentner, 2011). There are several studies demonstrating that 'metaphorical framing' can influence judgments about phenomena of various kinds, such as crime (Thibodeau & Boroditsky, 2011), the police institution (Thibodeau et al., 2017), corporate financial collapse (Landau et al., 2014), mental disorders (Aslanov et al., 2020) and even such abstract categories as love (Lee & Schwarz, 2014) and time (Boroditsky, 2000).

A recent publication by Panzeri et al. (2021) questioned how the common metaphor of 'war against a virus' in media discourse influences audience judgments. The authors found that this metaphor affects only certain audience groups, particularly those with right-wing political views and those who rely on independent sources of information. These respondents were influenced by the

‘military’ metaphor, prompting them to choose more decisive and authoritarian ways to fight the virus. The results of Panzeri et al. (2021) are consistent with work critical of the ‘strong’ interpretation of metaphorical framing, claiming that metaphor has limited influence on judgments and only on specific groups of people (Steen et al., 2014).

It should be noted that health and risk communication researchers have shown before that metaphor can be an effective framing tool, influencing how audiences perceive the threat of various viral diseases and even how they make decisions about vaccination. For example, Scherer et al. (2015) showed that metaphorical framing can increase the likelihood that respondents will want to be vaccinated against influenza, with this effect moderated by vaccination experience. In this experiment, the metaphors affected mainly those participants who had a vaccination experience but had not been vaccinated regularly. At the same time, the result of framing depends not only on the characteristics of the audience and the semantics of the metaphor, but also on the characteristics of the reported information. According to a study of Zika virus messages (Lu & Schultdt, 2018), the metaphor ‘nation as a body’ is able to reinforce feelings of exposure to the virus, but only when the symptoms of the virus are described as very dangerous to health.

In general, research on metaphorical framing in health communication has largely centered around the ‘war’ metaphor (Bowers et al., 2021; Flusberg et al., 2018; Hauser & Schwarz, 2015, 2019; Panzeri et al., 2021). In our study, we wanted to shift the focus to metaphors that are conventional for Russian media discourse. We studied which metaphors are used in the Russian media to describe the COVID-19 virus and how they influence the perception of the threat of this virus and the desire to get vaccinated. Thus, our study included two stages. In the first stage, a content analysis of Russian-language publications was conducted to identify conventional metaphors. In the second stage, an online experiment was conducted to find out how these metaphors affect people at the rational level (e.g., risk scores, estimates of the number of patients, willingness to be vaccinated) and at the affective level (e.g., feelings of fear, anxiety, anger at the thought of the virus).

Content-analysis

Because the study of metaphors does not always lend itself to automated analysis (Rai & Chakraverty, 2020) and requires careful reading of the text, it was necessary to focus on limited material in order to then extrapolate our findings with caution. For the content analysis, we chose a specialized information portal

about health and medicine: Medikforum.ru. This resource was chosen due to the fact that in 2020 it was the most cited media resource of the medical and pharmaceutical industry in the Russian media (Medialogia, 2020). This media resource was the leader in terms of citations not only among online publications, but also among all types of media (print media, TV channels, and radio stations) on this topic.

We analyzed all available publications of this site in the Coronavirus section for the six-month period since the beginning of the study (December 2020 to May 2021). We studied which metaphors were used in the headlines of this resource. In total, we studied 1,170 publications, 108 of which used metaphors in their headlines (i.e., about one in ten publications). A list of the metaphors we identified is available in the online repository³.

In our analysis, we examined the types of topics to which metaphors were applied. In the array, 44% of the metaphors were used to describe the virus ('virus retreats', 'epicenter of the coronavirus', 'raging coronavirus'), 29% described the lockdown ('tough lockdown', 'make lockdown softer', 'put the screws [of lockdown] on'), 15% referred to the actions of authorities ('fight the coronavirus', 'a shy start of vaccinations', 'recruit an army of volunteers'), 7% described the actions of vaccines ('the vaccine suffers a defeat', 'the vaccine has a winning formula', 'long-playing vaccine'), 4% described symptoms and consequences of the disease ('brain fog', 'white heat', 'bringing back from the other side: why people who suffered a covid do not want to live'), and 1% (only one metaphor) referred to reactions to information about the virus ('escape from the stress of the coronavirus').

Among the virus metaphors, we found 17 different metaphors, 13 of which occurred only once, 2 metaphors ('flow of the virus' and 'slowdown of the pandemic') occurred twice each, and two metaphors ('a flash of the coronavirus' and 'a wave of the coronavirus') were used 20 and 14 times respectively. Thus, these two metaphors accounted for 19% and 13% of the total number of metaphors detected, or 41% and 30% of the virus metaphors, respectively.

As a proportion of the total number of publications studied, the metaphor 'flash' was encountered in 1.7% of the headlines (20 of 1,170), and the metaphor 'wave' was encountered in 1.2% of the headlines (14 of 1,170). An automated search of the Integrum archive of Russian-language publications⁴ showed that this proportion corresponds to the representation of these

³ Available from: https://osf.io/5u2yw/?view_only=31ef69fc3894bd9bb5624641a5b7ef8

⁴ Available from: <https://integrum.ru/>

metaphors in publications of the Russian-language Internet media on the topic of the coronavirus over the same period ($N = 788,046$): the metaphor ‘flash of coronavirus’ occurred in 1.1% of publications and the metaphor ‘a wave of coronavirus’ in 1.8%.

The results suggested that these two metaphors ('flash' and 'wave') are conventional for Russian media discourse. Both metaphors are used to describe the dynamics of the spread of the virus, which makes them convenient for comparison within the experiment.

Experiment Participants

The study involved 1,062 subjects recruited on the Russian crowdsourcing platform Yandex.Toloka. Those questionnaires that contained incorrect answers to at least one of the two control questions on understanding the text of the stimulus material were excluded (85 questionnaires). Participants whose answers were not excluded at this stage received a reward of \$0.07. Next, responses which had receiving times that differed from the mean by more than 1 SD were removed ($M = 152$, $SD = 64$ seconds). The strictness of these restrictions was due to the need to exclude bots and professional respondents from the sample, as well as those who were distracted while completing the task. The final sample size was $N = 737$; 313 were men (42.5%) and 424 were women (57.5%); mean age $M = 34.5$, $SD = 11.7$ years. There were 422 participants (57.3%) with higher education and 218 (29.6%) with specialized secondary education. Among the participants, 192 were vaccinated, while 545 were not. We used this information to analyze the responses of vaccinated and unvaccinated participants separately.

Material

For the purposes of the experiment, a short text fragment stylized as an excerpt from a journalistic piece was used. The text stated that, according to experts, the spread of the coronavirus in Russia had increased. It also reported on the symptoms of the coronavirus and stated that vaccination could be considered as a measure to reduce the growth rate of the disease. The control group read a report that the coronavirus has spread again in Russia. For the two experimental groups, however, the text contained one of the previously identified coronavirus metaphors: for one group, the spread of the virus was described as ‘a new flash of coronavirus’; for the other, it was ‘a new wave of coronavirus’. Also, wanting to make the metaphor more expansive, which, according to available data,

should have strengthened its effect (Thibodeau, 2016), we ended the text with ‘vaccination could extinguish the flames of a new flash of coronavirus’ for the first experimental group and ‘vaccination could curb the onslaught of a new wave of coronavirus’ for the second. The control group read the phrase ‘vaccination could reduce the rate of further spread of coronavirus’. Factual information about the symptoms of coronavirus was taken from the official WHO website. An example of the stimulus material (translated into English) is presented below; the original material (in Russian) is available in the online repository:

Experts believe that there is a new wave of coronavirus in Russia. This wave could turn into a real tsunami, so all possible measures should be taken to keep the situation under control. The main symptoms of the coronavirus include fever, dry cough, fatigue, and shortness of breath and chest pain in severe cases. Some believe that mass vaccination could curb the onslaught of a new wave of coronavirus.

Procedure

Subjects were asked to read the news text and share their opinions. By taking the survey, the subjects agreed that they did not object to us using all of the transmitted data for processing. After reading the material, respondents answered a series of questions: a) whether they had been vaccinated against COVID-19 (yes/no answers); b) how likely they were to vaccinate against COVID-19 or revaccinate (probability was estimated from 0 to 100); c) how many or few people, according to their intuitive estimate, are now in Russia with the coronavirus (scale of 1 to 7); d) how severely, according to their intuitive estimate, they would have suffered from the disease caused by the virus (scale of 1 to 7); e) how serious the consequences for Russian society would be if mass vaccination was not carried out (on a scale of 1 to 7); f) how strongly they would feel the emotions of fear, disgust, anger, and anxiety at the thought of the coronavirus (the intensity of each emotion was rated on a scale of 1 to 7); and g) how much attention the government should pay to fighting the coronavirus (on a scale of 1 to 7). Three COVID-19 questions sought to determine the level of trust in official authorities in the context of the pandemic: we asked to what extent respondents trusted the authorities’ actions to control the virus, to what extent they trusted official information about the virus, and to what extent they trusted official information about vaccines. For each of the three questions, a score of 1 to 7 was given, after which we obtained an arithmetic mean of the respondents’ trust in authorities.

Thus, we relied on procedures previously used in health and risk communication studies. In particular, questions on the threat assessment of the virus and the perception of one’s own emotional state were adapted from Lu and

Schuldt (2018), and the probability of being vaccinated scale was adapted from Scherer et al. (2015). Following the logic of these authors, we hypothesized that metaphorical descriptions of the pandemic help audiences better imagine the threat posed by the disease, as metaphors appeal to specific object images. Consequently, the threat of the disease should become more explicit, while at the same time assessments of the danger of the disease (for the individual and for the country as a whole) should increase. At the same time, the metaphorical description of the vaccine should increase the willingness to be vaccinated, since the metaphor makes the benefit of the vaccine clearer, using an analogy.

Focusing on the results of Panzeri et al. (2021), from which it follows that the respondent’s political views moderate the influence of the metaphor, we intended to capture the political views of the participants in the experiment. With this we were able to test whether metaphors influenced people’s responses, or whether those responses were more influenced by prior political attitudes. However, since Russia is characterized by an eclectic mix of leftist and rightist ideas (Yudina et al., 2020), it was difficult to determine the respondents’ ideological orientation, so the analogue for this measure was a measure of trust in official authorities. After the experiment, messages were sent to all participants, clarifying that fictitious material was used in the experiment and that any information about the coronavirus was recommended to be obtained from official sources.

Results

Nonparametric statistics were used to analyze the results, because the Shapiro-Wilk test showed a difference from the normal distribution for each of the variables ($p < 0.001$). Because vaccination experience may have been a significant determinant of information perception in the text presented, we divided subjects into a vaccinated group and a non-vaccinated group to analyze responses within each group.

The unvaccinated group. For the unvaccinated group ($N = 545$), the Kraskell-Wallis test showed no effect of condition for each of the variables, namely for the probability of vaccination ($\chi^2 (2) = 1.486, p = 0.476$); the intuitive estimate of national sickness ($\chi^2 (2) = 1.531, p = 0.465$); the subjective severity of disease course in personal illness ($\chi^2 (2) = 1.497, p = 0.473$); estimates of the consequences for the country if mass vaccination were not implemented ($\chi^2 (2) = 2.850, p = 0.241$); levels of fear ($\chi^2 (2) = 0.464, p = 0.793$), disgust ($\chi^2 (2) = 2.534, p = 0.282$), anger ($\chi^2 (2) = 1.143, p = 0.565$), and anxiety ($\chi^2 (2) = 0.207, p = 0.902$) at the thought of the virus; and estimates of the

attention the state needs to pay to the coronavirus problem ($\chi^2 (2) = 1.460$, $p = 0.902$).

Spearman's correlation coefficient was used to find out the relationship of the dependent variables to the level of trust in authority. It was found that the level of trust in authority in the virus questions was positively correlated with almost all variables. There was a slight correlation with the level of disgust at the thought of coronavirus ($r = 0.084$, $p = 0.05$); a weak correlation with the intuitive estimate of the number of people sick in the country ($r = 0.261$, $p < 0.001$) and the estimate of the subjective severity of the course of the disease in personal illness ($r = 0.28$, $p < 0.001$); a moderate correlation with the state's assessment of the attention needed to be paid to the coronavirus problem ($r = 0.375$, $p < 0.001$), with feelings of fear ($r = 0.394$, $p < 0.001$) and anxiety ($r = 0.359$, $p < 0.001$) at the thought of the virus; and a strong correlation with the likelihood of being vaccinated ($r = 0.56$, $p < 0.001$) and assessment of societal consequences if mass vaccination did not occur ($r = 0.519$, $p < 0.001$). A slight negative correlation was found between the level of trust in authority and feeling angry at the thought of the coronavirus ($r = -0.085$, $p < 0.047$).

Vaccinated group. For the vaccinated group ($N = 192$), the Kraskell-Wallis test showed no effect of condition for 7 of the 9 dependent variables, namely the probability of vaccination ($\chi^2 (2) = 4.833$, $p = 0.089$); the intuitive estimate of the number of people sick in the country ($\chi^2 (2) = 3.535$, $p = 0.172$); the subjective severity of illness course in personal illness ($\chi^2 (2) = 0.846$, $p = 0.655$); estimates of the consequences for the country if mass vaccination did not take place ($\chi^2 (2) = 3.335$, $p = 0.189$); level of disgust ($\chi^2 (2) = 5.959$, $p = 0.051$) and anger ($\chi^2 (2) = 2.983$, $p = 0.225$) at the thought of the virus; estimates of the attention the state needs to pay to the coronavirus problem ($\chi^2 (2) = 4.608$, $p = 0.1$). However, there was a significant effect of condition on fear ($\chi^2 (2) = 13.945$, $p < 0.001$) and anxiety ($\chi^2 (2) = 10.118$, $p = 0.006$) levels when thinking about coronavirus.

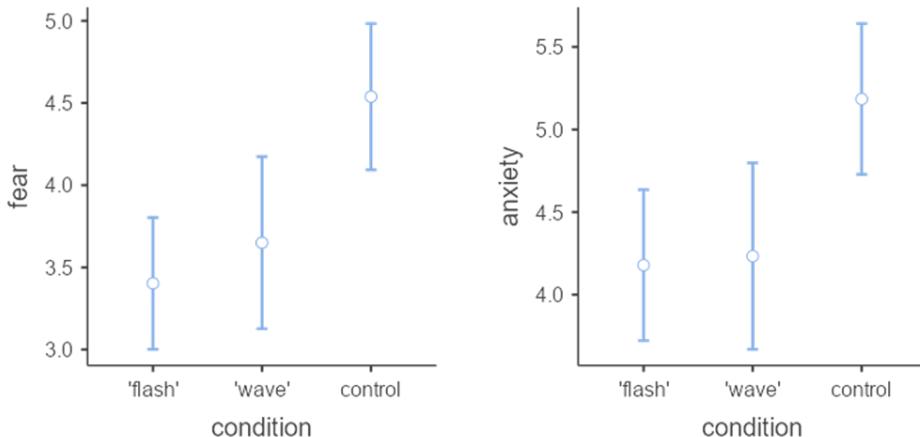
Post-hoc Dwass-Steel-Critchlow-Fligner pairwise comparison showed that scores for the level of fear at the thought of coronavirus were also reduced in the 'flash' metaphor group ($W = 5.292$, $p < 0.001$; $M = 3.40$, $SD = 1.84$) and in the group with the 'wave' metaphor ($W = 3.524$, $p = 0.031$; $M = 3.65$, $SD = 2.02$), relative to those in the control group ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 1.79$). The same was true for anxiety scores: they were reduced in the 'flash' metaphor group ($W = 4.283$, $p = 0.007$; $M = 4.18$, $SD = 1.87$) and in the 'wave' metaphor group ($W = 4.283$, $p = 0.007$; $M = 4.23$, $SD = 2.18$) relative to the control group ($M = 5.18$, $SD = 1.84$). At the same time, a comparison of the responses

of the two experimental groups to the same questions showed that neither fear level scores ($W = 0.97$, $p = 0.772$) nor anxiety level scores ($W = 0.245$, $p = 0.984$) differed significantly between them (*Figure 1*).

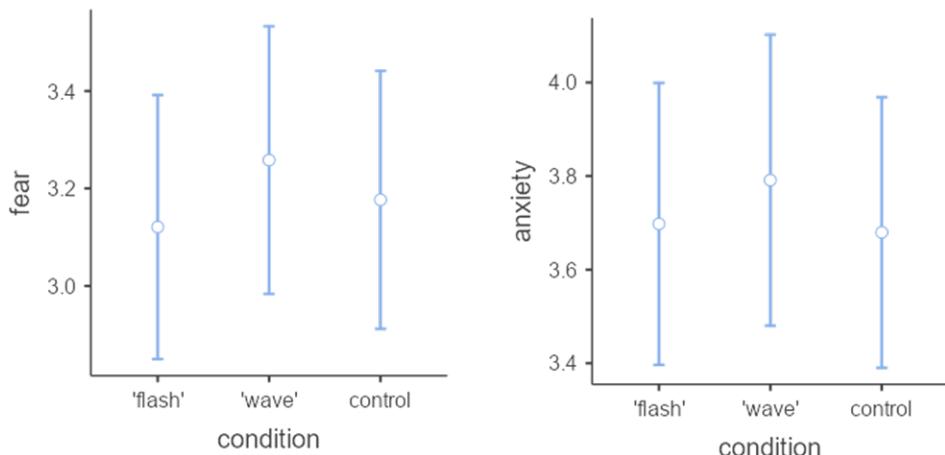
Figure 1

Average fear and anxiety scores in the experimental and control conditions (95% confidence interval)

A) Vaccinated group



B) Unvaccinated group



Spearman's correlation coefficient was used to discover the relationship of the dependent variables with the level of trust in authority. It was found that the level of trust in authority in virus-related issues was positively correlated with a number of variables. A weak correlation was found with the likelihood of being vaccinated ($r = 0.281$, $p < 0.001$), with an estimate of the attention the government needs to pay to the coronavirus issue ($r = 0.246$, $p < 0.001$), and with feelings of fear ($r = 0.149$, $p = 0.039$) and anxiety ($r = 0.142$, $p = 0.049$) when thinking about the virus; a moderate correlation was found with the assessment of the consequences for society if mass vaccination did not take place ($r = 0.323$, $p < 0.001$).

Discussion

As shown by the content analysis of the headlines in the most quoted Russian media related to news from the medical field, among the most frequent metaphors used to describe the COVID-19 virus are the metaphors 'wave' and 'flash', which refer to the dynamics of the spread of this disease. The proportion of these metaphors in the studied array of headlines corresponds to the frequency of their appearance in Russian media discourse over a similar period, which allows us to assume that in this case we are not dealing with an exceptional stylistic feature of the studied publication, but with a trend that is more or less characteristic of the entire Russian media. In other words, these metaphors can be considered conventional in the context of Russian journalism.

The results of the experiment demonstrated that these metaphors have a limited effect on the respondents. In particular, the effect of metaphorical framing was detected only in the group of vaccinated respondents, while people with no experience of coronavirus vaccination were not affected by metaphorical framing. This is consistent with earlier research showing that metaphorical framing in influenza and vaccination publications is moderated by vaccination experience (Scherer et al., 2015). In addition, these metaphors had influence more on an affective level: they reduced fear and anxiety when thinking about the coronavirus in the vaccinated group and did not affect responses requiring more 'rational' assessments (such as the likelihood of getting vaccinated or estimates of the number of cases in the country). It is likely that in this case there was a metaphor consistency effect (Thibodeau, 2016), since in the experimental material the description of the vaccine action also contained a relevant metaphor. Thus, vaccinated participants who read the statement that, for example, 'vaccination could extinguish the flames of a new flash of coronavirus' could indeed feel a decrease in fear and anxiety, as this metaphor helped to

present the principle of vaccine action more easily and to convince them of the correctness of their decision. Overall, we can say that the metaphors used in the Russian media to describe the coronavirus were able to reduce anxiety and fear in the audience, but apparently only in people who had already been vaccinated. Thus, messages containing such metaphors may partially reduce social tension, but are unlikely to encourage people to get vaccinated. Perhaps this pragmatic challenge could be addressed by finding a better way to represent the disease metaphorically in public discourse — for example, by using metaphors that help draw analogies between national diseases and disease in one’s own body. ‘Body’ metaphors of this kind can effectively represent social processes (Landau, 2009), including health care (Lu & Schuldt, 2018).

An interesting finding of our study is that almost all dependent variables (relating to both the rational and affective levels) are positively correlated with the level of trust in information from official authorities. People who trust the authorities are more likely to be willing to receive a vaccination, give higher estimates of the total number of people who fall ill in Russia, consider it a more dangerous social problem, and experience more negative emotions at the thought of the virus. These correlations are stronger in the group of unvaccinated people, but this may be due to the fact that this group is quantitatively much larger than the group of vaccinated people. The presence of such a correlation can be explained by the fact that the vaccine available in Russia is perceived as a drug directly affiliated with the authorities, and therefore the perception of its effectiveness and safety depends on the willingness to trust the actions of the authorities in general. At the same time, distrust of official information about the coronavirus may prompt people to underestimate the real threat of this disease, which is expressed in a lower level of negative emotions at the thought of the virus. Either way, we have shown that the level of trust in the authorities is a significant factor influencing the perception of coronavirus reports and the willingness to be vaccinated. Unfortunately, because there was a large bias toward distrust of authority in the sample, this made statistical analysis of the interaction between the experimental condition and the level of trust in authority difficult. We limited ourselves to correlation analysis, but in the future we hope to find out how the level of trust in authority directly affects the interpretation of metaphors in such messages.

At the end, let us point out some limiting factors of our study. We did not control for trust in the stimulus material; that is, there may have been respondents in the sample who did not believe that they were reading an excerpt from a real journalistic publication. Some authors recommend paying attention to this in

experimental studies of framing (see, e.g., Graf et al., 2019), and future studies should probably try to account for this factor as well. Another limitation is that the study was conducted in an online format. Because of the ‘digital divide’ observed in Russia (Gladkova et al., 2020), not all groups of citizens have equal access to the Internet, which may lead to the underrepresentation of certain social groups on crowdsourcing platforms. However, since we did not set out to obtain a sample that is representative in the strict sociological sense, the influence of this factor should not be considered determinative.

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Assessment of media and risk communication during COVID-19: The case of Algeria

Amar Loucif¹

University of Medea, Algeria

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Abstract

During the COVID-19, mass media have played and continue to play a fundamental role in protecting individuals. However, the most important role of the media in a crisis is to involve people in this process in order to save their lives. Like in all corners of the world, mass media in Algeria have contributed and continue to contribute to give more information to prevent from COVID-19. This paper attempted to explore the role-played by the media during COVID-19 in giving sufficient details and convincing people about existing risks. The study tried to know people's perceptions about news related to situation pandemic in Algeria. The aim of this study was also to find out communication patterns during the pandemic period. The present research adopted a quantitative approach using an electronic survey. In order to collect data, an electronic questionnaire was conducted. A total of 329 respondents from the east of Algeria have participated in this study, 65% (215) were male and 35% (114) were female. The findings showed that the majority of respondents preferred social media to get information about the epidemiological situation.

Keywords

Media, risk communication, risk perception, coronavirus, COVID-19.

Introduction

During the spread of an outbreak or infectious disease, people need to be informed about different types of risk they confront, and what kinds of practice to

¹ Corresponding author:

Amar Loucif, Department of Information and Communication Sciences,
Faculty of Human and Social Sciences, University of Medea, 7Q7X+V2P,
Médéa, Algeria.

Email: amarloucif19@gmail.com

do to protect themselves. To do this task, mass media are generally the powerful tools in disseminating different informative messages to general people. In fact, these tools of mass communication have played in the past and continue to play a crucial role in health communication by sharing and exchanging information, knowledge, attitudes and practices related to public health safety. For instance, the media such as print press, radio, TV and particularly the interactive platforms are the main sources to get news information in the United States in times of risk. (Chipidza et al., 2021).

On one hand, several researchers and scientists agree today that media can offer people guidelines and preventive measures to deal with different types of hazards in their lives such as diseases, viruses and different disasters. In the literature review of previous research, there are plenty of examples to confirm this idea. First, according to Reynolds & Seeger (2005), during the spread of West Nile virus, mass media have been widely used by public health institutions to increase the level of understanding, knowledge and attentiveness about a virus.

In the same way, Sandell et al. (2013) found in their research that the media have been a fundamental part to deal with the rapid proliferation of a novel influenza A (H1N1) in 2009. In addition, communicating risk through mass media comprises transmitting useful information like: describing current outbreak, talking and explaining the potential hazards, syndrome and forms of contamination, sharing preventive and protective measures, government efforts to stop the infection and how to react if contamination suspected, informing about the attainability of vaccine and where to get it (Sandell et al., 2013)

On the other hand, many researchers consider mass media as credible channels which may play an important role in raising the level of awareness about public health safety. For example, McCarthy et al. (2008) pointed out in their study that the media are charged to treat and interpret the results of scientific research and to write final report in easy language. In other words, media can play an intermediary entity between health agencies and the audience in the risk communication process. Journalists and communicators have to paraphrase scientific and technical information before conveying it to the public.

Since the emergence of an outbreak of coronavirus in China in 2019, the world is facing a global health crisis. It has spread to the majority of countries in the world in a few months. During the current crisis of coronavirus, effective risk communication is needed to stop the spread of an outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19) and to save lives. For Karasneh et al. (2020), media

can perform multiple functions like: providing new information, enhancing the level of understanding and changing attitudes and habits of both healthcare professionals as well as public at large. In addition, media which represents confided and credible sources during times of risk and crisis related to public health, can help people to make the right decisions like how to protect their lives by following good preventive rules (Garfin, Silver & Holman, 2020).

In today's world, mass media allow the public to get accurate and timely information about particular risk based on transparent sources. Building confidence between all stakeholders of the risk communication process is necessary to fight the risk. In addition, success risk communication requires that public health agencies facilitate access of journalists to information sources; preparing spokesperson who should elaborate clearly and concisely the content of communication and being well-informed about the issue. (Lowbridge & Leask, 2011).

According to Boukhatem (2020), Algeria has detected its first case of a novel coronavirus on 25 February 2020. Later, the virus has remarkably spread in the whole country. The country has witnessed the third wave of the coronavirus pandemic in summer 2021. According to Algeria Press service, on 30 July, the number of confirmed cases in Algeria is 168,668, including 1,537 new cases during the last 24 hours. Also, the emergence and spread of an outbreak cause in Algeria death 4,189 deaths. (Algeria Press Service, 2021)

In this context, the media are working to provide people the evolution of coronavirus in the four corners of the country and to give them knowledge to protect themselves against an outbreak of COVID-19. In Algeria, the National Commission for Monitoring and Surveillance of coronavirus Epidemic, which includes several scientists and researchers, is the only authority to give data on the coronavirus pandemic. This decision has been taken by The National commission in order to stop the spread of misinformation and rumors among people especially through social media. The mass media has a crucial role to play in this crisis, especially in terms of increasing the level of awareness and preparedness to respond to coronavirus disease.

The following research questions were formulated for this study:

RQ 1: What are the sources to get news information about coronavirus in the east of Algeria?

RQ 2: Does the information provided by the Algerian media about coronavirus is sufficient?

RQ 3: Does the language used by the Algerian media about coronavirus pandemic is easy to understand?

RQ 4: What aspects are the most covered by the Algerian media upon when dealing with coronavirus?

RQ 5: How evaluate people the information provided by the Algerian media on the issue of coronavirus?

RQ 6: What are preventive and protective measures adopted after being exposed to media?

This research paper attempts to explore the role played by the media during COVID-19 in providing sufficient information and convincing people to take protective procedures against potential and existing risk. Also, the study tries to know people's perceptions about news presented by local media related to pandemic in Algeria. Thus, this research aims to find out people's perceptions about the communication patterns adopted by the local media during coronavirus pandemic.

Literature review

Risk communication

There is consensus among researchers that risk communication in public health is an integral part of risk management. In fact, many previous studies have significantly concerned with the subject of risk communication. For Qiu et al. (2016), risk communication is new topic which appeared in 1970/1980. According to the National Academy of Sciences, risk communication can be defined as:

'...an interactive process of exchange of information and opinion among individuals, groups, and institutions. It involves multiple messages about the nature of risk and other messages, not strictly about risk, that express concerns, opinions, or reactions to risk messages or to legal and institutional arrangements for risk management' (National Research Council, 1989). Also, Cavello et al. (1987) have defined risk communication as: 'any purposeful exchange of scientific information between interested parties regarding health or environmental risks' (Kar & Cochran, Jr, 2019)

There is convergence between scholars and scientists that risk communication is 'two-way process between the communicator(s) and the recipients of messages'. (Sheppard, Ben, Janoske, & Brooke, 2012). In other words, Bourrier & Beider (2018) view risk communication as conversation in order 'to create mutual understanding'.

Regarding the ultimate aim of risk communication, Renn (1992) indicate that the main objectives of risk communication process are:

'1) - to make sure that all receivers of the message are able and capable of understanding and decoding the meaning of the messages sent to them;

2) - to persuade the receivers of the message to change their attitudes or their behavior with respect to a specific cause or class of risk;

3) - to provide the conditions for a rational discourse on risk issues so that all affected parties can take part in an effective and democratic conflict-resolution process' (Renn, 1992).

In other words, increasing the level of understanding of risk, helping people how to react and to behave correctly against the hazard, and involving the public in a dialogue process to be able to respond perfectly to risk are the principal objectives of successful risk communication (Heath & O'Hair, 2009).

The content of risk communication is the principal component in the process. According to Bourrier & Beider (2018), there is always a wall between experts and people in terms of knowledge about risk because the risk communication topic has been marginalized for long time. For this raison, Morgan et al. (2002) insist that communicators of risk should write the content of the message in a good way because understanding the content of message is an important part of risk management. For Ng & Lean (2012), communicators should paraphrasing informative messages from experts to general public and make sure that the content is understood. On the other hand, Bourrier & Bieder (2018) consider risk communication represents a vital medium enables the specialist and non specialist to have the same level of knowledge based on the dialogue process.

Successful risk communication enables the public to follow the right practice towards different risks and it helps agencies' health to know public's anxieties and necessities in terms of more information and guidelines.(WHO, 2017). In his paper entitled 'Risk Communication for Public Health Emergencies', Glik (2007) predict that risk communication will play critical role in future in informing people how to respond in times of catastrophes.

Media & risk communication in times of uncertainty

Broadly consider risk communication as any other communication process which includes: 'sources, receivers, messages, channels, and contexts' (Rowan, 1991). There is no doubt that the media is the principal component in the risk communication process and risk communication plays a vital role in risk management. Many researchers in communication field pay more attention to the media's role in risk communication. They define the role of media in risk communication as: keeping people well-informed about existing or potential risk; raising the level of understanding and awareness; and involving people in decision-making and preventive measures taken (Bakir, 2010).

In times of risks and crisis, the media should take critical part in providing knowledge which is the key factor to prevent against disease, (Mejia et al., 2020) and health agencies should rely on media to convey health messages to all categories of public (Thompson, 2019). Risk communication is a process of cooperation and coordination between health agencies and media. In addition, the media should transmit accredited and verified information while reporting health information to the public. (Park, Sohn, 2013).

In his research paper about the importance of the media in risk communication, Mebane (2005) said that 82% of the U.S population viewing mass media as an integral component of health communication in improving the level of safety in their life. Sandell et al. (2013), who used a quantitative content analysis on the H1N1 coverage in the Australian and Swedish print media, emphasize the importance of the media in forming people's awareness about H1N1 pandemic. These authors highlighted 81 articles: 45 from Australian newspapers and 36 from Swedish newspapers. They conclude that media have a huge impact in shaping people's perception of hazard and action toward risk. They also ask authorities to involve the mass media in the risk communication process related to infectious diseases.

In their research, Gever & Ezeah (2020), who content-analyzed 537 stories from six media in Nigeria – two TV stations, two newspapers and two radio stations, found out that the coverage of the media has tripled after the spread of coronavirus. On the other hand, these authors estimate that the information provided by the Nigerian media is insufficient, able to promote health care and capable to implement useful programs vis-à-vis coronavirus pandemic. A survey of 486 pharmacists conducted by Karasneh et al. (2020) have found that the media may raise pharmacist's understanding and awareness regarding coronavirus.

In times of crisis and risk, people rely on classical media to get new and accurate information. In other words, according to several studies TV represents the main media to diffuse knowledge about coronavirus disease (Wormer, 2020). For the Lancet (2020), the verification of the information about coronavirus pandemic is the most important preventive measure to stop the fear's infection. In their research, Finest et al. (2020) indicated that building trust and confidence is the key factor to fight coronavirus pandemic and save lives. Under these conditions, it is important to provide accurate and verified information to the public (Finset et al., 2020). On the other hand, Adebsi et al. (2021) conducted a research about 'Risk communication and community engagement strategies for COVID-19 in 13 African countries'. They reported Data from several sources such as articles

in peer-reviewed and other documents in 13 African countries including: Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Algeria, Cote d'Ivoire, The Democratic Public of the Congo, Mauritius, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. The results of this study revealed that Risk communication and community engagement strategies in the 13 African countries give priority to train people, to consolidate risk communication process, to strengthen coordination between all actors, to involve community, to communicate to public at large, to deal with uncertainty and to manage 'misperceptions' and 'misinformation'. These processes have encountered many barriers such as: 'distrust in government, cultural, social, and religious resistance, and inertia among others' (Adebsi et al., 2021).

Methodology

In order to carry out this study, a quantitative approach was adopted. In fact, the questionnaire was the appropriate method for this research because respondents' perceptions and opinions were the crucial tool of data gathering. In his book entitled 'Introducing Communication Research', Donald Treadwell defined surveys or questionnaires as 'A survey is a series of formatted questions delivered to a defined sample of people with the expectation that their responses will be returned somewhere between immediately and in a few days' (Treadwell, 2017). A questionnaire was prepared based on previous studies.

An electronic questionnaire was utilized and due to the COVID-19, Convenience sample was used. Convenience sampling, which is considered as an accidental sample, enables researchers to choose easily the sample of the study (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). According to these authors, this type of non-random sampling is accessible and available at any time. Regarding educational level, 90% of participants have university level and 10% of them have only high school level. The survey was conducted in the east of Algeria. Therefore, a total of 400 questionnaires were sent to the population during May to June 2021. Regarding the population of our research, the sample consisted of 329 people. Among the participants, 65% (215) were male and 35% (114) were female. Regarding the age of participants, 31% are aged between 18 and 30 years old, 39.1% are between the ages of 31 and 40 years old, 20.7% are between 41 and 50 years old, 9.2% are between 51 and 60 years old. More than 80 % of participants were from urban areas and the proportion 19, 5% were from rural areas.

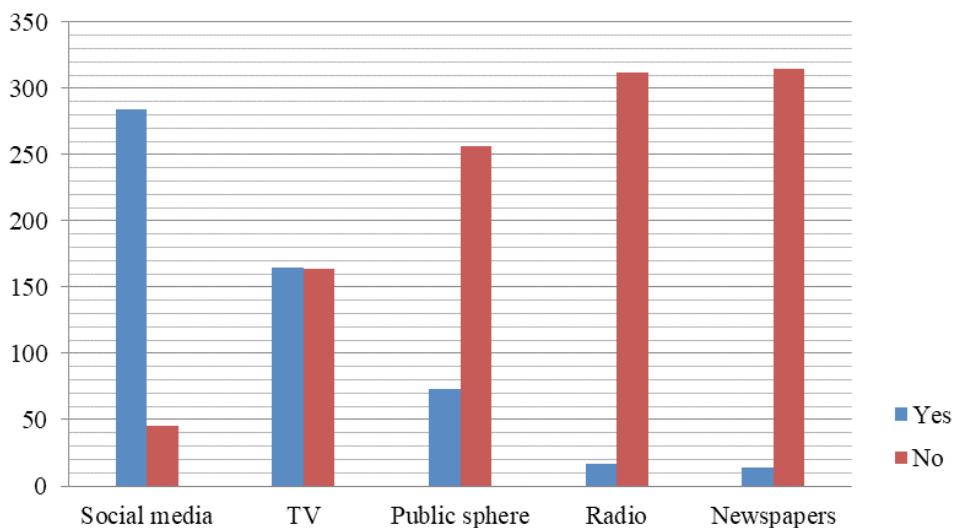
Results

Research Question 1: What are the main sources to get news information related to coronavirus pandemic?

As can be seen, *Figure 1* contains data regarding the sources used by participants to get credible and accurate information about coronavirus disease. In fact, the majority (86%) said that they follow Social media in order to obtain news information concerning the COVID-19. On the other hand, TV is considered as the second main media to provide the evolution about coronavirus pandemic. The proportion of half (50%) of respondents uses TV to get information regarding this disease. The public sphere comes in third position. Thus, 22% of participants in this study indicated that they prefer public sphere to know about the COVID-19. According to this figure1, Newspapers (4%) and Radio (5%) are less used to get news information about coronavirus.

Figure 1

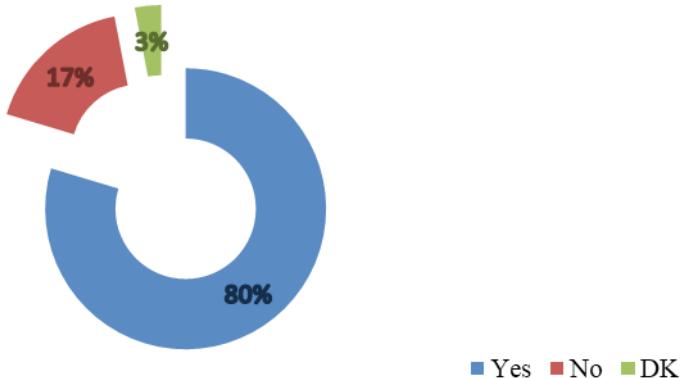
Sources to get news information about COVID-19



Research Question 2: Do you think that the information provided by the Algerian media about coronavirus is sufficient?

The result in *Figure 2* demonstrates that the majority (80%) of respondents indicated that the information given by the Algerian mass media regarding the COVID-19 is sufficient. On the other hand, the percentage of (17%) of the participants said that the information provided by the Algerian mass media is insufficient. Finally, the proportion of (3%) of participants chooses the option 'I don't know'.

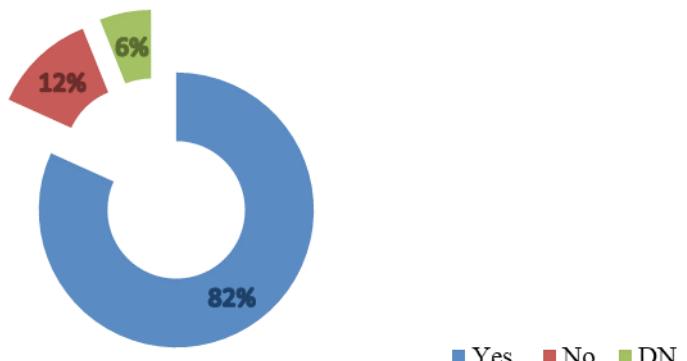
Figure 2
Sufficiency of information provided by media



Research Question 3: Do you think that the language used by the media about coronavirus pandemic is easy to understand?

Regarding the content presented by the Algerian media about coronavirus disease, *Figure 3* shows that (82%) of participants answered that they found the language used by the media is easy to understand. In contrast, the proportion (12%) of respondents said that the content of media is not easy to understand. Lastly, 6% of respondents choose the option ‘I don’t know’.

Figure 3
Language of messages used by the media



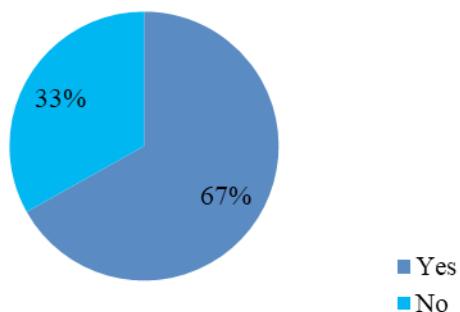
Research Question 4: Could you please mention the aspects covered by the media upon when dealing with the coronavirus?

Participants were asked to mention the aspects covered by the media concerning COVID-19. Regarding the coverage of the Algerian media, data in *Figure 4* below shows that 85% of participants indicated that the mass media cover mostly information about both statistics and preventive and protective procedures of coronavirus. Additionally, about two thirds (66%) of respondents view the measures taken by government to stop the spread of coronavirus as topic most covered by the mass media in Algeria. Finally, according to respondents, Algerian media don't talk about research and scientific studies related to COVID-19.

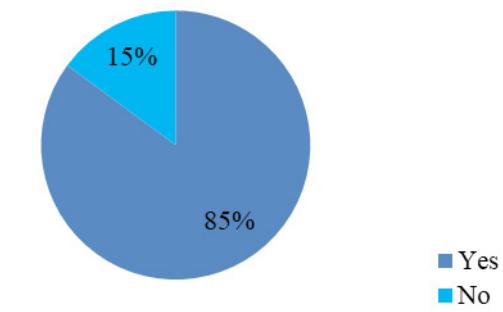
Figure 4

Aspects covered by the media upon when dealing with the coronavirus

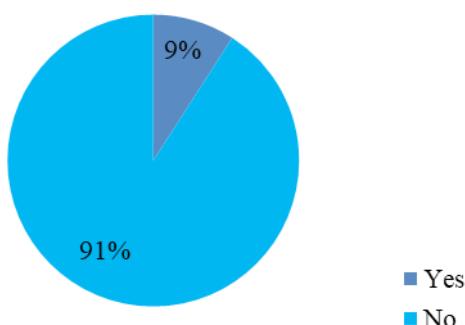
(a) Do the media cover measures taken by government to stop the spread of coronavirus?



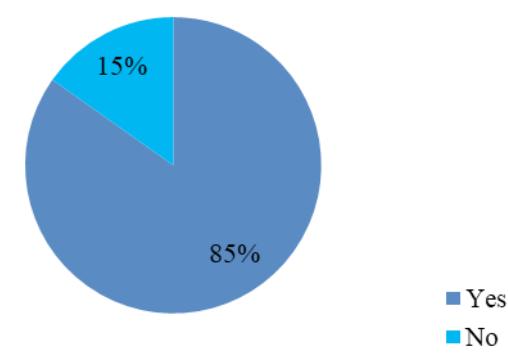
(b) Do the media diffuse information about precaution and prevention of COVID-19?



(c) Do the media present new research and studies about COVID-19?



(d) Do the media give daily statistics about coronavirus?

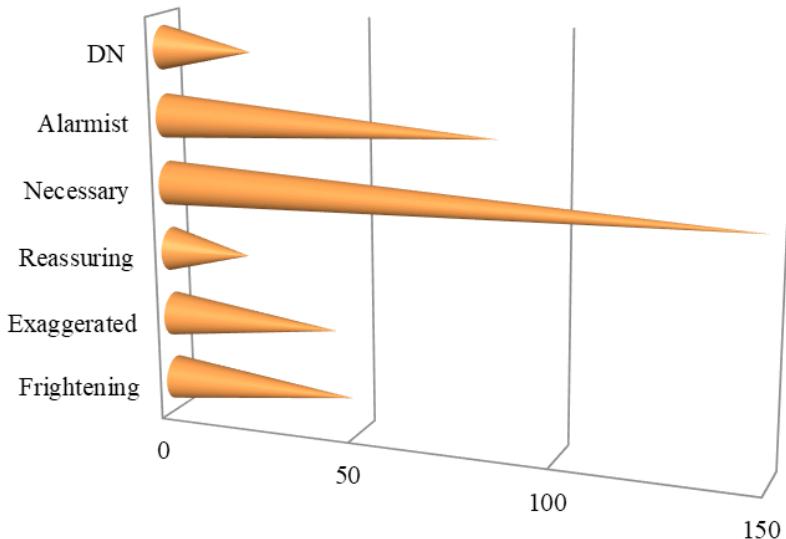


Research Question 5: How to assess the information provided by the Algerian media on the issue of coronavirus?

Result in *Figure 5* shows that the highest proportion, 45% of respondents consider the information regarding coronavirus provided by the mass media is necessary. In addition, more than 25% of participant indicated that the information presented by the media about coronavirus is alarmist. On the other hand, the percentage of 14% of participants answered that the information provided by the media is frightening and the proportion 13% of respondents view it as exaggerated.

Figure 5

Assessemement of information diffused by the mass media

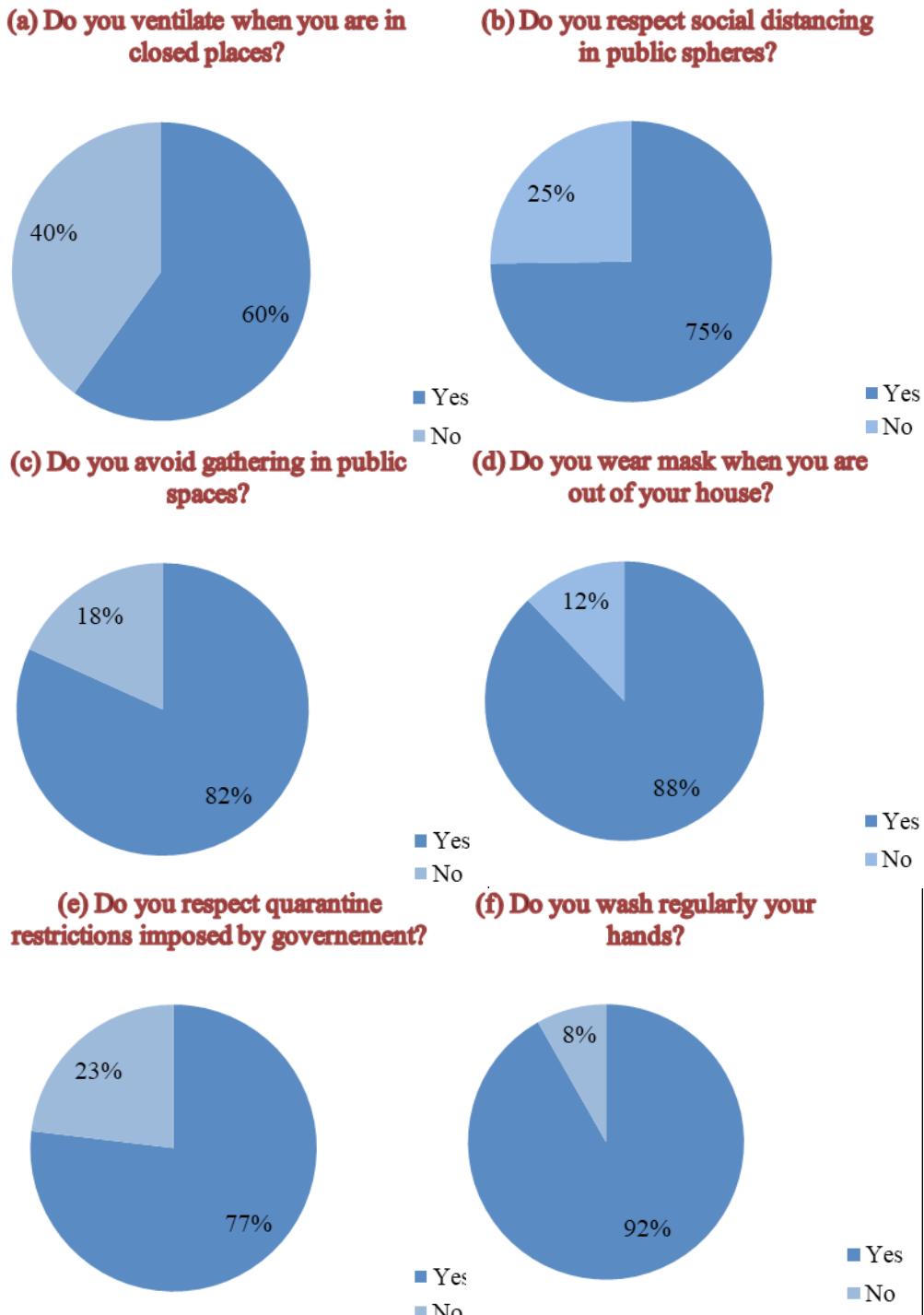


Research Question 6: What are preventive and protective measures that you and your family followed during the coronavirus period to prevent about it?

Regarding the preventive measures taken by respondents and their family to prevent against coronavirus, the highest proportion, 92% of participants said that they washed their hands frequently during the day. About 88 % of respondents indicated that they wear mask most the time and more than 82% of participants said that they avoid gatherings in public places. In addition, more than 77% of respondents answered by respecting the quarantine restrictions imposed by government and more than 75% answered by respecting social distancing when they are out of their house. Lastly, the proportion 60 % of respondents indicated that they ventilate indoor spaces.

Figure 6

Preventive measures followed during coronavirus disease



Discussion

The purpose of this study is to explore the role played by the Algerian media during COVID-19 in providing enough information in order to convince people about existing risk. Regarding the first question related to the media most preferred to get sufficient information about the evolution of coronavirus in the country, the findings show that about 86% of respondents used Social media in order to obtain new information concerning the COVID-19. This finding can be explained that the majority of respondents were young and they use in their daily life social media applications on their mobile phone. According to Zaghlami (2020), in Algeria the youth aged under 35 represent the highest proportion 65%, and more of 80 % of this category swim in the ocean of social media through cell phone. In Algeria, about 20 millions use social media and 50% of the population are present on platform Facebook (Zaghlami, 2020). This result confirmed the opinion of Chatterjee et al. (2020) that 93% of participants utilize cell phone which is very easy to manipulate and to carry it anywhere. *Figure 1* shows also that TV used by 50% of participants in this current crisis and the traditional media like newspapers and radio were less used by respondents. In his work, Wormer (2020) reveals that in the current crisis of coronavirus the people are remarkably using and continue to use the TV to refresh their knowledge about coronavirus. An outbreak of coronavirus has changed people habits. In fact, many people spend more time watching TV during the quarantine. For example, the government in Algeria has imposed confinement many times. The newspapers and Radio are less used by people. But Wormer (2020) indicated that the use of classical media has remarkably risen in times of crisis.

Concerning the quantity and the quality of information about coronavirus issue, the majority of participants (80%) indicated that the media in Algeria provide sufficient information using easy language in coronavirus coverage. For Malecki et al. (2020), to perform risk communication process needs ‘clear, simple and appropriate messages’, because the key role of risk communicators is to help general people to understand correctly the content and to respond in right way. Glik (2007) estimate that professionals of risk communication may make technical language during crisis very easy to understand by general public.

According to *Figure 4*, the survey findings reveal that the main topics covered by Algerian media are: statistics about coronavirus (85%), precaution and prevention (85%), measures taken by government (67%), and research and studies (9%). The National Commission for Monitoring and Surveillance of the coronavirus Epidemic in Algeria announces every day the latest statistics

related to the coronavirus pandemic. In this study, we can notice that there is a strong link between the type of information provided by the media and different preventive measures followed by respondents. For example, the majority of participants reveal that the media diffuse the information about precaution and prevention and the same proportion obey several preventive measures.

We observe remarkable respect of protective measures provided by the media and recommended by the World Health Organization and health agencies. In fact, 92% of participants said that they washed their hands frequently during the day. In addition, 88 % of respondents indicated that they wear mask most the time and more than 82% of participants said that they avoid gatherings in public places. Thus, 77% of respondents revealed that they respect the quarantine restrictions imposed by government and more than 75% answered by respecting physical contact when they are out of their house. Lastly, the proportion 60 % of respondents indicated that they ventilate indoor spaces. In their work, Heydari et al. (2021) has found that there is link between risk communication on preventive and protective activities against COVID-19. Besides, Varghese et al. (2021), revealed that the respect of social contact is highly respected in Italy than in Portugal.

Conclusion

This study investigated the role-played by the Algerian media in times of coronavirus pandemic on one hand. On the other hand, it highlighted the quality and quantity of information communicated to the public in order to raise understanding and awareness regarding the COVID-19. The findings show that respondents used many sources to get news information related to COVID-19. Among these media, social media is the most important tool used by people to obtain information and knowledge in order to understand the existing or potential risks. According to findings, we can also notice that TV is becoming more important especially in times of confinement in Algeria. It is worth noting that this study has been taken place in the east of Algeria; so it could not apply to other regions. Digital divide could be one of the barriers which face people from the south of Algeria. On the other hand, social media represent preferred channel to canalise fake news in order to manipulate and deceive people. In this context, health services and mass media both should intensify collaboration to verify all data communicated to public at large concerning this pandemic.

We can easily observe that the media has a crucial role in the risk communication process. In times of uncertainty, people move from source to source to meet their information needs. Also, Alaszewski (2005) views receivers

during crisis as active individuals seeking news information related to hazard from several media in order to make the right decision. Even people seek voluntary or involuntary information in times of uncertainties, Zhang et al. (2020) suggested that communicators should keep receivers informed in real time in times of uncertainty to cope correctly with all kinds of risk. Good plan for such campaigns is of greater importance to improve the understanding of the community on how to behave toward the risk.

We conclude that the media are great player in the risk communication process during crisis and different kinds of risk. As a result, the government should implicate the media in risk communication situations in order to send communicative messages to the general public. As recommendation, media literacy represents today useful programmes to help people how to use media especially during the time of uncertainty. A serious reflection should be taken to integrate media literacy in all cycles of education.

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Journalism pedagogy and ICTs in a time of pandemic: A case study of selected journalism schools in Southern Africa

Mbongeni Msimanga

Lungile Tshuma

University of Johannesburg, South Africa

Trust Matsilele¹

Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa

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Abstract

The paper explores journalism pedagogy in selected Southern African journalism schools. It draws from two South African Universities: The Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) Journalism Department and the School of Communication at the University of Johannesburg (UJ). From Zimbabwe, it draws on Journalism and Media Departments: The National University of Science and Technology (NUST) and Media and Society Studies at Midlands State University (MSU). The paper utilises the Domestication theory and Replacement model as theoretical paradigms to assess how the selected journalism schools reconfigured teaching and learning on their practical and theoretical subjects during the COVID-19 pandemic era. Semi-structured interviews are used with students and journalism educators to understand strategies adopted in the deployment of lectures. The study aims at understanding the teaching techniques that were adopted by journalism educators during the pandemic and how students adopted to virtual delivered education. Lastly, we solicit views from students who were already seeking or had been placed on attachment or work-related learning to establish how they readjusted, if at all. The study found that teaching practical courses was a challenge because, for

¹ Corresponding author:

Trust Matsilele, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, CPUT Bellville Campus Technology way Food Science & Technology Building, Bellville South Industrial, Cape Town, 7530, South Africa.

Email: trust.matsilele@gmail.com

example, editing suits for film and radio courses are housed on campus. For Zimbabwean universities, the challenge was that students were not given data by the University for online learning while lecturers' data was not enough for their teaching. This is in contrary to South Africa where both lecturers and students were given data, laptops and other gadgets for online learning. Despite challenges faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, lecturers received training on how to conduct online lessons and restructured their syllabus to ensure that it meets the demands of the 'new normal'.

Keywords

COVID-19, journalism schools, South Africa, Zimbabwe.

Introduction and context

Journalism education in Southern Africa is, as elsewhere in the world, at crossroads. This is due to changing socio-economic, political and technological circumstances, as well as changes in education, journalism and the media system itself. Agreeing with this notion, Banda et al. (2015) articulates that, in order to understand journalism education in Southern Africa, as elsewhere in Africa, there is need to recognise that it is a product of larger social and political conditions. This challenge was observed by a Zimbabwean journalism scholar cited in Banda et al. (2015) stating 'there is a challenge in building African textbooks and resources into the curriculum, so that when we train, we are not just using materials informed by Western experience. The lecturers themselves also need to be aware of the African perspective'. The challenge for the future, therefore, is to integrate these contextual conditions more and more into the very epistemological assumptions upon which theories of journalism and curricula for journalism education are based.

As Berger (2008) observes, 'the changing atmosphere is further compounded by the fact that much discourse on specifically journalism education still originates within and focuses upon democratic Anglophone countries of high media density'. This is the challenge that Banda et al. (2015) laments stating, 'Journalism education in Southern Africa must contend with defining a new academic identity for itself, extricating itself from dependency on Western oriented models of journalism education and training'. Journalism education has been deeply influenced by the political and socio-economic changes of the early 1990s, while it also has to face a rather unmapped future (De Beer, 1995) with the most recent challenge to journalism education, for South Africa specifically, being the student protests, which started at the end of 2015, questioning the high

costs of education and demanding ‘decolonisation’ of curricula. The cadetship model has also been affected with the drastic contraction of newsrooms that removes the promise of jobs upon graduation and the swiftly shifting digital terrain rearranges the financial basis of all journalism. These factors introduce a dynamism and uncertainty into South African journalism that educators are compelled to respond to with imagination and principle (Garman & van der Merwe, 2007).

Much as these studies are more inclined to the decolonisation of the curricula and the socio-economic and political changes, this study will inquire how journalism education in Southern Africa has been reconfigured by the COVID-19 pandemic that forced students and educators to an online oriented form of learning. This will be demonstrated through semi-structured interviews undertaken with lecturers and students in selected countries and respective universities under study. In the broader discussion that follows, we argue that the quality of journalism has been compromised by COVID-19 pandemic as it forced students to miss out on practical journalism training or on the job training. Such a form of training, for institutions in Zimbabwe and some universities in South Africa, is a prerequisite for job placement in the journalism and media studies field. The chapter proceeds by reviewing literature related to journalism education in Southern Africa. In this section, we acknowledge the various debates on journalism education especially on the need to decolonise education. The chapter then discusses the replacement and domestication model, which forms the basis of the theoretical lens of study. The methodological processes undertaken in gathering and analysing data will be discussed next. We then conclude this study by discussing the study’s findings.

Journalism education in Africa: A review

Journalism education in the Global South is yet to fully attract substantial scholarly inquiry. Few studies on journalism education in the Global South have looked at decolonisation and ‘de-westernisation’ (Dube, 2010), meaning based practice (Hochheimer, 2001), history of journalism education (Murphy & Scotton, 1987), journalism education and training (Banda et al., 2007) and journalism education and practice (Motsaathebe, 2011). However, these studies do not adequately capture the prevailing macro environment in the journalism education sphere. The political changes and shifts of the past decade have exerted pressure on journalism training which for decades had been ‘Eurocentric’ with a demand to decolonise and de-westernise emphasising African culture and values. The past decade has seen the rise of movements, especially at

South African university campuses, under the banner of RhodesMustFall and Africanising the curricula (Bhambra et al., 2018; Murris, 2016). At the core of this call was the attempt to deracialize and free the African university from the colonial infrastructure. Journalism departments have not been spurred by these calls.

As Kasoma (1994) argued decades earlier, theoretical literature on regulatory issues is often invoked by African cultural intermediaries to also imply the regulation of content, as well as notions of African morality, decency and virtue. This ambivalence is what leads Kasoma (2000) to conclude that, ‘this category confusion – between industry regulation on the one hand, and morality on the other – is underpinned with injunctions for the institution of content barriers to “protect” Africans from the allegedly insidious influences of so-called (western) “foreign culture”, “alien” genres of reporting’. Before discussing journalism education in the Global South, the study will briefly highlight the debates that have been in place around the subject. Globally, the purpose of university journalism education is debated among different players who seek to ascertain the ‘ideal’ nature of education which students of journalism should be taught or acquire. Debates on journalism education have been on three major schools of thought: ‘journalism education is a craft with an emphasis on acquiring skills through practice; journalism education is a mix of skill acquisition and traditional liberal education; and journalism education is a critical engagement about the place of the journalist in society’ (see Rodney, 2007). In this milieu, schools of journalism have structured their curricula in such a way that they are tailored for required critical skills in the industry and theoretical grounding in media and communication skills so that journalism exerts its place in society.

The post-cold war (1990s) era geopolitics brought significant shifts in the Southern African media. Media were also affected by political events, globalising technologies and policy changes. As Tomaselli and Dunn (2001) observe, ownership, content, delivery systems, users and audiences/readers for a range of media services are thoroughly re-conceptualized throughout the Southern African Development Community. In South Africa, (one of the countries under study), journalism education ‘still has Anglo-American roots’ (De Beer et al., 2017) while there have been strong calls since independence to ‘Africanise’ the journalism curriculum by developing material that takes into account home grown solutions that are based on indigenous knowledge systems (Dube, 2010). Additionally, South African journalism training is often still ‘at odds with the needs of the media industry, emphasizing the divorce between ivory-tower research and real-life challenges’ (De Beer et al., 2017). For South

Africa again, Rodney-Gumede (2018) observes that four strands informed the trajectory of journalism and journalism education which are ‘re-affirmation of the role of journalism in democratic processes, the need for comparative studies and research-led teaching, journalism as active citizenship and journalism as a reflexive practice’. This new pedagogical approach had to be done appreciating the locale.

In Zimbabwe, journalism training started during the colonial era. Since the first print media house was owned by the Argus Group of South Africa, the majority white reporters were trained in South Africa and moved to Zimbabwe formerly Rhodesia to take up employment (Muchena, 2013). As Muchena (2013) further observes, soon after independence in 1980, the Division of Mass Communication at the Harare Polytechnic College started to train journalists with the sponsorship by donors to quickly fill in the gap of trained white reporters who had fled the country upon attainment of black majority rule. During this period the dominant training model of journalism in most African countries was the short course type. These short-term courses were intensified after independence as a way of inculcating a patriotic strand of journalism the post-colonial government dearly required in the media (Muchena, 2013). However, journalism education and training has since early 2000 been affected by the repressive environment which has resulted in the closure of newspapers (Chuma et al., 2020). While there has been a move by higher learning institutions in Zimbabwe to pursue journalism education, macro-economic challenges have been encountered resulting to lack of equipment and books for reading as the economic crisis has had a bearing on learning institutions (Banda et al., 2007).

Despite the challenges, it has been argued that ‘journalism education in Africa is on its way, but the road ahead is steep’ (Banda et al., 2007). In this chapter, we argue that COVID-19 pandemic has made the road much steeper because of various challenges it brought to the world, various sectors of the economy and institutions (Matsilele, 2020; Mututwa & Matsilele, 2020), journalism schools included. With COVID-19 regulations which forced the closure of schools and marked the end of contact lessons, universities had to move to an online teaching format. However, e-learning is being implemented in an environment that is characterised by digital inequality, poverty and other structural challenges. For South Africa, students with poor backgrounds still cannot afford to get equipment for use. Zimbabwe too has faced multi-faceted crisis that has eroded people’s incomes. Given these conditions, the COVID-19 pandemic forced a sudden reconfiguration teaching and learning, worsening the gap in accessibility to education (Matsilele, 2021). This means, traditional

ways of educating students, including sending them on a rather ad hoc way for internship and job finding missions, needed to be re-evaluated in terms of new technological, financial and other demands. In the next section, the chapter draws on the conceptual paradigm that will be adopted by this study.

Conceptual framework: Domestication and Replacement model

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the rapid use of these technologies for lectures and assessments. The pandemic accelerated the adaptation of E-learning tools fully, as students, and journalism educators adopted a ‘new normal’ pedagogy of learning (Matsilele, 2020). This meant that students had to adapt fully to using smart phones, I-pads, advanced laptops and computer software’s for lectures to proceed remotely as regulations prohibited mass gatherings like face-to-face learning (Motsaathebe, 2021). However, in order to satisfy an apt understanding of online learning that was adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic at the various institutions under study, the chapter draws on two conceptual frameworks: The Domestication and the Replacement model.

Habib (2005) states that domestication theory is ‘integration of new technologies into the domestic sphere and the “moral economy” of the household. The core idea is that objects and products go through a process of domestication that renders them fit to use in the eyes of their owners or users’. The concept helps to explain patterns of ICT usage and non-usage; and adoption and experience (Chigona et al., 2010). Hynes and Richardson (2009) further state that ‘Domestication, essentially, is about giving technology a place in everyday life. The concept catches the practical, temporal, spatial place, but most importantly, it underlines how this is mixed with the cultural as an expression of lifestyles and values’. Domestication is a concept widely used by researchers to explain how technologies and how media and computing technologies become part of our everyday life (see Vuojärvi et al., 2010). The theory seeks to explain the process in which innovations are adopted by users, especially new technology. The paradigm seeks to understand the meaning, importance and experience of technology in people’s lives (see Haddon, 2006). Thus, when people encounter ICT’s, they are either accept or reject them (Haddon, 2006).

The theory been found relevant in education and understanding ICT’s (Habib, 2005). Studies have also been done on how the model has been used to understand how domestication enables lecturers to embed e-learning into their curricula and how students integrate e-learning activities into their learning experiences showing its relevance in explaining ICT’s and education (Chigona

et al., 2010; Dagada, 2009; Dagada & Chigona, 2015). Domestication is a concept widely used by researchers to explain how technologies and, media and computing technologies become part of our everyday life (Vuojärvi et al., 2010).

Domestication occurs in four phases (Silverstone et al., 1989): the first stage is appropriation. Within this stage, a technology is acquired by an individual or household. This is then followed by the objectification stage. At this stage, through the display of technology, the user and his/her environment change to adapt accordingly (Dagada & Chigona, 2015). The third stage is the incorporation stage. At this stage, the technology is used every day and incorporated into the individuals' life for use. Lastly is the conversion stage. This stage is concerned with the relations between the households or individuals' internal/personal affairs and the public domain or outside world (Vuojärvi et al., 2010). These stages give an outline of E-learning activities were adopted by lecturers and learners during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The chapter also draws on the replacement model by Carol Twig. Key within the replacement model is the reduction in class-meeting time, replacing (rather than supplementing) face-to-face time with online, interactive learning activities for students (Twig, 2003). The assumption is that certain activities can be better accomplished online, either individually or in small groups than in a class (Auster, 2016; Twig, 2003). During the COVID-19 pandemic, classes went online so that spelled out that students could participate anytime, anywhere. The replacement model replaces some class meetings with online activities, making significant changes in what goes on in the remaining class meetings.

Methodological premise

This qualitative study employed semi-structured interviews with journalism educators, students on work related learning and exit level students at select universities in South Africa and Zimbabwe. Four universities participated in the study, two from each country. Purposive sampling was used for selecting the Universities, students and lecturers. Researchers purposively selected two types of universities from each participating country – a Technikon or a University of Technology and a traditional University². Technical Universities are more focused on applied instructional teaching and learning model while the traditional Universities have a theoretical bias. Lecturers and students were also purposively sampled. The lecturers chosen teach theory and applied subjects.

² From Zimbabwe and South Africa, we selected NUST and CPUT as technical universities respectively. For traditional universities, we selected the UJ and MSU for South Africa and Zimbabwe respectively.

In total, two lecturers and three students from each University were interviewed bringing the cumulative number of those interviewed to 20. The interviews were conducted between July and August 2020.

For analysis, the research employed thematic analysis which involves a process of identifying and analysing various themes within given data. Braun and Clarke (2006) note that themes are captured aspects about data in relation to the research questions and/ objectives and represent a certain level of patterned response or meaning within the data set. There are two types of thematic levels explained by Braun and Clarke (2006) and fall under semantic and latent themes. Semantic themes ‘...exist within the explicit or surface meanings of the data and the analyst is not looking for anything beyond what a participant has said or what has been written’. The latent level focuses on the deeper meanings of the data and ‘...examines the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualisations – and ideologies that are theorised as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The research however adopts the later.

Discussion and findings of data

The findings and analysis of the study are anchored around the following themes: i) Teaching in an online environment: perceptions from lecturers on challenges and experiences, ii) Learning in an online environment: student’s perspectives and experiences and iii) Internship students: challenges faced and experiences.

Teaching in an online environment: Perceptions from lecturers on challenges and experiences

University lecturers interviewed from NUST, MSU, CPUT and UJ agreed that the COVID-19 pandemic affected their academic year as they had to stop face to face lectures and deliver their lectures online. This was because of the World Health Organisation guidelines and regulations implemented by the South African and Zimbabwean governments that spelt out social distancing and a ban on mass gatherings. University lectures were part of these mass gatherings. However, lecturers interviewed from MSU agreed they used multiple platforms such as Google Classroom, Emails, WhatsApp, YouTube, Facebook and Twitter for teaching purposes. They agreed that there where challenges in deploying lectures especially for practical courses. One of the lecturers teaching a practical film and television course at MSU stated:

Students were vacated from campus and all learning activities had to be conducted online. Most students could not afford data bundles necessary for

the online learning. At the same time, there are practical courses that require the presence of students, and these are the worst affected

Lecturers from NUST shared similar sentiments on the mode of delivering lectures as online platforms such as Google Classroom, e-mail and WhatsApp were dominant. The lecturers said the platforms consumed less data. A lecturer who is responsible for a print journalism course added:

The biggest challenge was lecturing practical print courses. Students are supposed to visit places such as courts and other places for story writing. All that was not possible because of lockdown rules and the need to practice social distancing. Some students wanted to consult but they could not do so. COVID-19 grounded us.

Students learning practical courses in television and radio where mostly affected as they could not be physically present on campus to carry out lectures and practical sessions required for their modules. This ultimately meant learning the specific requirements and techniques of the course such as editing, writing for online, writing radio programmes could not be achieved or taught online. More so, a lecturer from MSU indicated that lectures could not be effectively delivered as some students did not have smart phones and data bundles to access them³. Supporting the difficulty of teaching practical broadcast courses, a lecturer from NUST said:

Teaching was to be done online. For practical courses coupled with this harsh economic environment, only a few were able to participate. Secondly, students needed to access the studio for editing and recording their programmes for both television and radio. Online learning couldn't replace such key a requirement for practical courses.

The sentiments expressed by the Zimbabwean lecturers show how, there was an attempt to domesticate ICT's fully to conduct lectures online. This could be conceptualised as the incorporation stage where ICTs are incorporated into the everyday routines of lectures a shift from the use of face-to-face lecturers (Chigona et al., 2010). However, the effectiveness of domesticating technologies fell short because institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe are poorly funded and are unable to support students with data bundles for them to fully partake in online learning. Even though the Zimbabwean Government identified digital technologies and ICTs as vital catalysts for educational and economic development, it was not followed effectively in implementing and establishing infrastructure to enable this to bear fruit; particularly during the pandemic era (TechZim, 2020). This saw a missed opportunity in ICT and digital technology development in higher and tertiary education learning.

³ Data bundles are packages for internet access.

Another lecturer at the MSU teaching a theoretical journalism course expressed pessimism about online learning in Zimbabwe. Although he used multiple platforms for learning purposes, he expressed that it was not as effective as the ‘normal’ face to face learning that students were used to. Students, he said, did not have access to proper digital technologies and data bundles, hence it was difficult to conduct lectures. Below are the excerpts of the interview:

I must say theoretical courses were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. I had to subscribe to various social media accounts such as YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and Google Classroom. However, most students could not access these platforms because they did not have smartphones. Some were in rural areas where they did not have access to proper network. Only the few privileged could access these platforms as they had both smart-phones and data bundles to access the lectures I posted on these platforms. Online learning, however, is the way to go, but is still far from being achieved in Zimbabwe.

The lecturers’ responses show the nature of the digital inequality in Zimbabwe that also affects students and Zimbabwean society (Mutsvairo & Ragnedda, 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic exposed this inequality in journalism education. This view also tallies with Bourdieu (1986) who is of the view that lower social class have little or no opportunity to acquire the traits, habits, or information necessary to accomplish a rise in status, income, class, or livelihood. Lecturers’ experiences showed some of the inadequacies of online learning in face of the COVID-19 pandemic in Zimbabwe.

The COVID-19 pandemic was by far strenuous for journalism lecturers across the board. For some, it was a new way of doing things as they had to fully go online and conduct distance learning. This then required institutions to support academic staff psychologically and provide data bundles to deploy lectures effectively. Both lecturers teaching practical and theoretical courses from MSU expressed that they were supported by the university during the COVID-19 pandemic. Support came in the form of data bundles from cellular phone service provider, NetOne. However, one of the lecturers had this to say:

In an economy like Zimbabwe, challenges are also extended to network issues which hinders accessibility to be online. I would agree that the university supported us in terms of providing NetOne lines and data bundles, but the network was weak. I personally had to resort to using personal resources by switching to better networks such as TelOne service provider. Again, the service provider had network problems, although they were better compared to NetOne.

This then brings us to the challenges faced by these two lecturers. Both lecturers expressed how power cuts affected their day-to-day lecturing routines.

The lecturers acknowledged pessimism by students and the community at large who termed online learning as a way of obtaining ‘WhatsApp degrees’. Besides these issues, the lack of a robust online learning has thrown the idea of the ‘new normal’ a technologically driven way of learning enhanced by the Fourth Industrial Revolution into doubt. These sentiments were further expressed by a lecturer from NUST who emphasised that online learning was not effective:

Firstly, the practical side of the course was affected. Everything which students wanted for effective practical work was at school. Equipment for shooting and the editing suit cannot be taken home. While they can download some pirated software, their machines are not big enough to store the material. In some cases, they would have done their work in groups, but due to lockdown rules, students had to travel to their respective homes across the country. So practical work was not effective.

However, there were however glaring differences on the experiences of UJ lecturers. Unlike the Zimbabwean scenario, there was an attempt to replace face to face lectures with online driven learning. One of the lecturers teaching a theoretical course in journalism studies said the university had already anticipated scenarios that could result in lectures going online in the future. UJ, he said had already adopted online learning before the COVID-19 pandemic, although it was not as robust. Below are the excerpts of the interview:

The University of Johannesburg had long anticipated that one day we would go online. However, it was not as robust, and we still had contact classes. It is not necessarily by virtue of COVID-19 pandemic, but there were already plans to go fully online. Hence, we already were using platforms such as Blackboard for uploading lecture notes, course outlines and any other material related to the course. Looking at it closely, the university already had a head start because there were sessions on blackboard every semester.

In relation to challenges faced, the UJ lecturer expressed how he had to put in extra hours into lectures and consultations work, something he had not done in the normal face to face lectures. There were however more consultations via email, Zoom and WhatsApp as students had to learn doing things on their own. Regarding institutional support, he agreed that lecturers were supported by the university. This support came in the form of data, devices and constant departmental meetings to encourage and support lecturers psychologically. This shows how ‘Online learning is complementing and even replacing traditional face-to-face educational models at colleges and universities’ (Amber et al., 2017). In line with the domestication theory, this shows how the institution integrated new technologies to support and embed online learning in the curricula (Auster, 2016; Twig, 2003).

However, a Television studies lecturer at the same institution had a different view regarding teaching practical courses. He expressed pessimism towards online lectures:

We were new to online learning and honestly it did not work especially for practical oriented courses. Some students did not have devices and data was not sufficient for carrying out practical courses. It was difficult for students who could not access the studio, as we are used to face to face lectures. Some had to use cameras on their cellphones, instead of the proper television cameras.

The lecturer expressed lack of support from the institution and said at times, he had to use his own resources for lectures. In most instances, he said, students received their data late and it was difficult to conduct lectures.

However, like most universities in South Africa, the CPUT was also forced to migrate from contact to virtual teaching due to the COVID-19 pandemic, replacing it with online learning. To ensure classes continued through a remote platform, a lecturer teaching both practical and theoretical subjects expressed the following sentiments:

The institution made Blackboard collaborate available for teaching. To ensure lecturers were able to make a smooth transition, guidelines on delivery methods and seminars / training on new online learning were duly given by the institution. However, I had to use my personal data bundles to conduct classes and attend seminars.

Other than the challenges of internet access, the CPUT lecturers expressed challenges with migration from contact classes to virtual assisted teaching. Two of the interviewed lecturers, both for theoretical and practical subjects, said the following with regards to challenges:

Instead of classroom-based teaching, I moved to online teaching due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While I found it helpful in the teaching of theoretical subjects, the practical components were heavily affected. Some of my teaching requires software and PC lab to do some activities. This challenge was further worsened by students' connectivity problems.

The other lecturer from the CPUT had this to say:

I had connectivity issues as an instructor and students faced the same predicaments. Some students do not know how to navigate around BB. Online tools are not efficient, such as submission links, which causes much anxiety for the instructor and especially the students. More should be done to improve the techno structures of the BB at this institution.

However, from the above sentiments, lecturers had challenges in teaching practical courses. Connectivity issues further hindered delivery of lectures.

Learning in an online environment: Student's perspectives and experiences

Zimbabwean students through national student body Zimbabwe National Students Union (Zinasu) contested the decision to migrate fully online at the courts of law. Some of their reasons for challenging the decisions to migrate online included the lack of ICT infrastructure, network coverage and bundles needed to access the internet (Chikandiwa, 2020). In line with this, Mutsvairo and Ragnedda (2019) express how the digital divide has significantly affected the Global South, and journalism students in Zimbabwe are no exception. The digital divide continues to widen this gap with the continuous development of new information technologies, that then alienate other societies in the process (Van Dijk). Students faced challenges in this new normal type of scenario. As such, one fourth year student interviewed expressed concern on how the pandemic affected her studies. She indicated that there was no support from the institution, and learning had to stop:

It was a difficult period for me. COVID-19 caught us unaware, and we were forced to return home in February. I was meant to be done with my studies in June 2019, but I had to extend my studies. Dissertation consultations stopped because I could not afford data. Again, this is the time the telecoms industry hiked tariffs making the learning more difficult. Government promised to provide data for online classes, but that did not happen.

The fourth-year student further expressed that online learning was not as effective and delayed her completing her studies. Her sentiments render the domestication of technology ineffective and show the gap in accessibility of ICT's. The student attributed her delay in competing her degree to ICT illiteracy of some lecturers.

For some lecturers, this online learning did not work. Some of the lecturers could not conduct lectures via google classroom or WhatsApp because they could not use the technologies to communicate with students. We had to wait till June when the lockdown regulations where relaxed so that classes resume. Out of the five modules, only modules were learnt via these platforms. Still, it was a nightmare conducting lectures online. At the end of it all, I would not say that online learning was effective. Learning was very difficult, but I would not wholesomely discredit it because it was new. Out of a mark of 10, I would give online learning five marks.

Students further indicated that Zimbabwe's comatose economy and the need to learn from home affected their concentration and took them away from school. For the former, with inflation rates where high with most families finding it difficult to survive. As a result, data bundles for e-learning were beyond the

reach of many students. One of the students from NUST expressed how 'lessons became as preserve for the elite...The environment at home was not suitable and would never be suitable for online learning'. Another student said their courses are structured in such a way that they get industrial experience before they go for attachment. The outbreak of the pandemic, she argued, disturbed their course structure as they could not put to practice what they could have learnt. She explained:

I major in print journalism. Some of the course's demand that we write features stories, court stories and other community related stories. However, lockdown regulations grounded people as gatherings, visitations were not allowed. This resulted affected our learning. I am supposed to go for attachment but the knowledge I have is not the one which I am supposed to get or got. I hope to do better when I go for industrial attachment.

There was a stark difference with UJ Honors student, who felt that students were supported by the institution. One student interviewed said there was some confusion at first, but with time online learning was clear. From her opinion, they were already partially leaning online by virtue of platforms such as Blackboard. However, she expressed how online learning had some form of 'online fatigue' which sometimes discouraged her from learning and attending lectures.

There was a bit of confusion in the early days of this online learning. However, with time there was clear direction of online learning. We partially had already started doing online learning previously by virtue of platforms such as Blackboard. The institution provided data for us every month. The only problem was that there were slight delays in allocating data. The only problem with online learning is that you must put in extra effort when doing lectures, which results online fatigue or breaking down.

The students from Cape Peninsula University of Technology had mixed feelings with regards to migration from contact learning to virtual learning. A diploma in journalism student told the researchers the following:

Coronavirus has affected journalism students in a way that we were supposed to do some assessments that would make us to be able to survive in a newsroom and give us experience. For instance, we were supposed to do a current affair show and interview an expert on that show, but we are unable to because of the pandemic. In another assessment we were supposed to cover a live event, but we were unable to do so.

The response by the student shows how the structural challenges made learning during the coronavirus pandemic difficult. This migration to online learning was a challenge during the first days even though some significant changes were experienced weeks after virtual learning commenced.

Internship students: Challenges faced and experiences

The study sought to elicit views from students who had been placed or where yet to be placed on attachment for work experience in South Africa and Zimbabwe. Students from the UJ and the Midlands State University agreed that the COVID-19 pandemic greatly affected their internship. In some instances, students had to stop internship completely. Some companies with journalism or communication related work were not accepting applications from students due to the pandemic. One of the students from the UJ stated that:

Directly or indirectly, my internship was affected. COVID-19 struck at a time we never expected it to. And again, this was a time when I was only getting to learn the hands-on job- that I must say was slightly different from what I learnt at the university. However, I had to rely on online meetings and assistance from senior colleagues at work who would help me edit my stories. It was a different experience from what we originally had in the office. Furthermore, it was difficult for a cub reporter like me to get stories during the pandemic, let alone source for information. In summary, it was a difficult experience for me.

The above outline shows how difficult it was for students recently placed on internship. Sourcing and writing news stories for ‘cub reporters’ was difficult and they had to rely on senior reporters who had work pressure. However, a student from the Midlands State University also expressed pessimism towards work related learning. The student felt the year had gone to waste as he could not be placed on attachment. He had this to say:

It was a difficult time for me and most of my colleagues had to be placed on attachment. Mostly companies with journalism-oriented work closed and were not taking students. It was more of a ‘wasted’ year as we were home doing nothing. This will potentially delay my graduation as well.

The structure of bachelor’s degree programmes in Zimbabwe require that students go for industrial attachment when they are on their third year. However, the pandemic was also worst felt by different companies who couldn’t take interns due to lack of financial support.

Conclusion

This study found that the pandemic has reconfigured the way journalism is structured in southern Africa. Of importance to note is that journalism education and training in Africa is tailored made to ensure that students who go for industrial attachment, upon finishing their degree programmes, they quickly adjust and meet the needs of a given industry. This practice has been topical among various scholars who have been looking at ‘how journalism students should be prepared

to work in journalism in Africa' (Matsaathebe, 2011). While such a practice has been on going, the pandemic has restructured the practice which has resulted in some students failing to acquire work related learning. According to Banda et al. (2007), 'journalism education in Africa is on its way, but the road ahead is steep' but the testimony from educators and students, demonstrate that the road has even became steeper owing to various challenges. Other than the industrial attachment, this study also found that challenges with online learning affected journalism students and the effects were in line with deep seated structural challenges institutions and countries studied face. For example, journalism students in Zimbabwe faced more challenges in comparison to their South African counterparts. While lectures adjusted to new methods of teaching, this study also found that lectures had to acquire new skills even as they faced structural and macro challenges affecting their respective countries. The structural challenges faced by respective countries and institutions meant that in some institutions lecturers had to rely on their personal resources as they lacked institutional support.

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Credibility, resilience and sustainability and the COVID-19 pandemic: A study of Kannada print media

Padma Rani

Manjushree G. Naik¹

Manipal Academy of Higher Education, India

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Abstract

The Indian Media industry was affected by the pandemic circulation, and revenue started declining. Print media organisations devised ways to cope with the financial instability by cutting down their workforce, closing down editions, merging various editions, reducing the number of pages and salary cuts of their employees. Print revenues declined by a 41% fall in advertising and a 24% fall in circulation revenues. (FICCI, 2021) The regional newspapers could recover a large part of their circulation. Print in India is thriving in Tier II & Tier III cities due to the opportunities available for literacy, economy, and population size. Diversity in India fuels the growth of traditional media. This paper seeks to analyse the Kannada Print media during the pandemic. Kannada is the official language of Karnataka, situated in the south-west part of the Indian Union. The study analyses how the Kannada Newspaper organisations operated during the pandemic. In-depth interviews with the management and the editorial team were conducted to understand their coping strategies to deal with the pandemic. The analysis points out that the print media organisation's credibility and resilience have helped them sustain themselves in the market.

Keywords

Pandemic, credibility, resilience, sustainability, print media, Kannada.

¹ Corresponding author:

Manipal Institute of Communication, Manipal Academy of Higher Education,
8QXR+F34, Madhav Nagar, Eshwar Nagar, Manipal, Karnataka 576104.
Email: manjushree.naik@manipal.edu

Introduction

India has a newspaper in all Indian languages and English. According to FICCI report 2021, Kannada, Hindi, Telugu, Tamil newspapers registered a growth. Kannada is the official language of the state of Karnataka, situated in the south-west part of India. Kannada is the eighth most spoken language in the country. According to the 2011 census conducted by the Government of India. Kannada print media recorded a growth of 13% in the year 2020. Regional media can deliver hyperlocal news that has contributed to the strong customer loyalty and preference for regional newspapers. Hence the study focused on Kannada print media.

The circulation of the Kannada newspapers in thousands is as follows: Vijaya Karnataka (8,226), Vijayavani (7,655), Prajavani (7,642), Udayavani (3,582), Kannada Prabha (2,438) and Samyuktha Karnataka. The publication of these newspapers continued uninterrupted during the pandemic. In-depth interviews with the management team and the editorial team were conducted to understand the working and coping strategies they adapted to deal with the pandemic.

India reported the first COVID-19 case in December 2019. From March 24, 2020, the Government of India imposed a complete lockdown to prevent the coronavirus spread. In its various phases and forms, the lockdown continued in India until July 2020 (Ghosh & Mallick, 2020). The Indian Media industry was affected by the pandemic, circulation and revenue started declining. Advertising in English newspapers has decreased by 52%, while advertising in Hindi and regional languages has decreased by 35%. Print revenues declined by 41% in advertising and 24% in circulation revenues (FICCI, 2021). Print showed a decline in all categories. Fearing that circulation would not rebound to pre-COVID-19 levels, advertisers did not return in sufficient quantities. (FICCI, 2021). The circulation figures were affected by the spread that newspapers could be the coronavirus's carrier. In metros, English newspapers bore the brunt of the pandemic. (FICCI, 2021). The lockdown increased online news viewing, estimated to reach 454 million unique visitors in 2020, up from 394 million in 2019 (FICCI, 2021). Many print enterprises have a distinct digital division, focusing on items like websites, apps, and e-papers. However, monetisation remained a struggle, with digital products accounting for less than 5% of total ad sales for most print enterprises (FICCI, 2021). Print media organisations devised ways to cope with the financial instability by cutting down their workforce, closing editions, merging various editions, reducing the number of pages and salary cuts of their employees. Most print media company have reduced their costs by 25% (FICCI, 2021).

In 2020, newspaper circulation revenue in Hindi and vernacular languages plummeted 20% from the previous year, while English circulation revenue dropped 50%. Due to the fear of infection, many building societies and resident's welfare associations in metro cities banned doorstep delivery of English newspapers, resulting in a drop in circulation revenue (FICCI, 2021). However, by December 2020, average circulation had returned to roughly 80% of 2019 levels, with unequal distribution between languages (estimated at 88%) and English (67%) (FICCI, 2021).

The regional newspapers could recover a large part of their circulation. Print in India is thriving in Tier II & Tier III cities due to the opportunities available for literacy, economy, and population size. 'India's diversity and scale will continue to fuel the growth of traditional media...' (Sanjay Gupta, in FICCI, 2021). One of the leading Hindi newspapers Dainik Bhaskar Deputy managing Director, Pawan Agrawal, believes that credibility and trust in print as a medium of information is at an all-time high. Advertisers are confident about the print medium as it delivers the response to their advertising. The main unique selling point of print has been credibility.

Credibility

Credibility enables Print Media to build its brands of journalists and increase its share of readers' time. According to Maathuis (2004), 'credibility is a concept linked to the sender and refers to the degree to which an object is considered to be a reliable source of information, products, services, and other matters'. Correct and timely communication can increase credibility in the eyes of various actors. Birley and Norburn (1985) argue about the significance of credibility in establishing businesses. Messages are interpreted and evaluated through the filter of the receiver's perception of the message's source, according to McCroskey and Teven (1999). No message can be received independently of its source.

Furthermore, source credibility is multidimensional. According to McCroskey and Teven (1999), source credibility has three dimensions: competence, trustworthiness, and goodwill. Different writers use different terms for these dimensions, but theorists agree on two. 'Competence' refers to qualification, expertness, intelligence, and authoritativeness, whereas 'trustworthiness' refers to character, sagacity, safety, and honesty (McCroskey & Teven, 1999). The third dimension, 'goodwill', or 'perceived caring', varied over time, but McCroskey and Teven (1999) defined it as understanding, empathy, and responsiveness.

Furthermore, whether the goal of the communication effort is persuasion or the generation of understanding, source credibility is critical (McCroskey &

Young, 1981). The newspaper's credibility has increased, and the interviewees have also reaffirmed that in cases such as the COVID pandemic, the relevance of the credibility rises. Media information becomes an acritical component of society's function. Because of the high amount of uncertainty, most people look to the media to comprehend and judge the environment in which they live. 'Udayavani group of organisation controls 60% of the market share in Coastal Karnataka, and other 40% are divided by English media and per went vernacular language newspapers. Credibility is an ongoing process and part of working culture. The credibility is maintained through three layers of filtration before finalising the published materials. The news is wetted and rewetted before reaching the bureau heads and the editors. If it happens accidentally, as the organisation is also dependent on external sources, the organisation does not hesitate to accept the mistake and apologise.

Moreover, the organisation has set its credibility and has touched every second household in the area. The readers compare the news appearing on television channels with Udayavani newspaper content to check the credibility. Such is the newspaper's reputation', added the CEO of Udayavani. The company may attract more customers and use brand awareness and client loyalty.

This helps to avoid the disinformation to a large extent. Prajavani, a leading Kannada daily, has a column on fact-finding wherein the readers are invited to send their doubts on the news. The credibility of the news item is analysed with the help of software for the purpose published. Another respondent reaffirmed that though the readers are frequently exposed to social media messages, they trust the news only in newspapers. The message credibility has helped the newspapers develop a positive relationship with the readers (Ledingham, 2003). The channel through which the message is distributed and the message structure may impact its credibility (Metzger et al., 2003). The characteristics of a message that influence its believability are referred to as message credibility (Roberts, 2010).

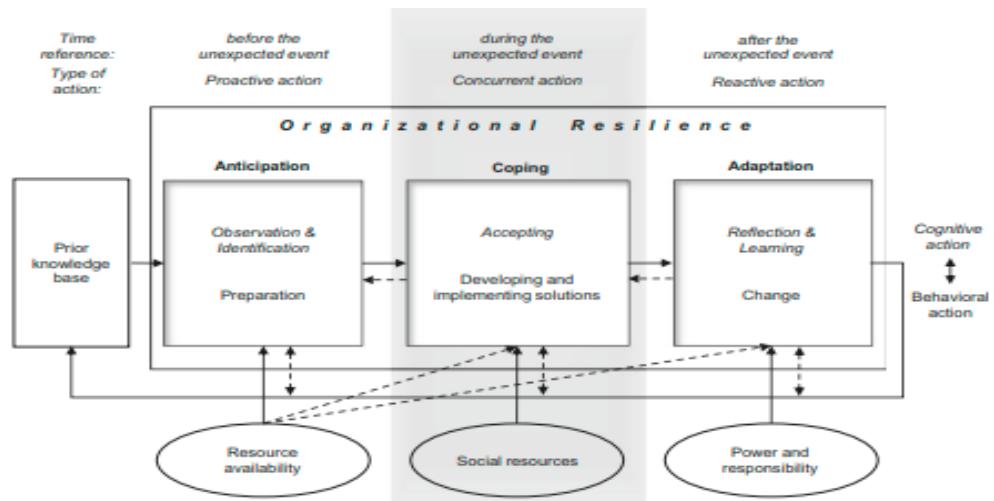
Mc Croskey and Teven (1999) talked of source credibility and its dimensions. Mc Crosky and Young (1981) emphasised the criticality and importance of source credibility. 'Although readers frequently are exposed towards these forwards all over social media, they do trust the news only in newspapers', says the executive editor of Kannada Prabha. 'Health awareness articles and new regular columns were started. The newspaper aimed at more engagement with the readers. At the same time, engaging with the readers is again a challenge during post-COVID. The continuation with the bond was important', observes the editor of Vijaya Karnataka.

Resilience

Organisations need to develop the resilience capacity to deal effectively with the crisis and grow in future. Resilience is a dynamic process in which there is an interaction between the organisation and the environment (Duchek, 2020). Based on this perspective, an organisation has to deal with resilience after the crisis and before the crisis and during the crisis.

For an organisation to develop resilience, they need to go through three successive stages: anticipation, coping and adaptation, as Duchek (2020) proposed in his capability-based conceptualisation of organisational resilience.

Figure 1
A capability-based conceptualisation model proposed by Duchek



Anticipation is the first step in organisational resilience. The COVID-19 pandemic was one such crisis that arrived unannounced or unanticipated. Organisations must recognise early crisis signals and respond to them quickly (Ortiz-de-Mandojana & Bansal, 2016). The Kannada newspaper organisations were able to understand the nature of the pandemic. Nobody anticipated that there would be a complete lockdown and business activities would come to a standstill. The Government of India action regarding COVID-19 began with the weekend curfew, and then came the lockdown, and it was reopened in a partisan manner. The newspaper organisations were permitted to function with adequate safety guidelines. The first thing that needed to be done was divide the staff.

Udayavani divided the editorial staff into three groups, two groups were working on a rotation basis, and the third group was kept as a reserve group. The idea of a reserve group was essential as even if one group member was infected, the whole group had to be quarantined. ‘The essential category was grouped into three teams with 33% each. Small batches were created. Though the workload was heavy, 33% of the employees worked for a week. It was on a rotation basis. They were also offered accommodation facilities’, reported the managing director &CEO of Udayavani.

All Kannada newspaper organisations in the study confirmed that they realised there would be a financial crunch as advertising revenue had dipped to zero in the lockdown. The uncertainty had affected the circulation of newspapers too. The rumours that newspapers are the carriers of the virus was common in urban areas only. Preparation in terms of resilience, organisation means a business or firm ‘is equipped to deal with unforeseen adversity and it is ready to capitalise on expected opportunities’ (Lengnick-Hall & Beck, 2009). Resources necessary in times of crisis include a recovery plan, mutual understanding, and effective relationships. Samayukta Karnataka took up extreme awareness drives through public demonstrations and initiated sanitation processes for the newspapers. The delivery boys and agents were given hand gloves and sanitisers. They were educated on the safety of receiving and delivering the newspapers. The newspaper also sought the help of television advertisements to educate the masses about the safety of using newspapers.

Resource availability in terms of physical resources, workforce and logistics supply influence the preparation and the capacity to deal with the crisis.

An essential element in terms of resources in a newspaper organisation is newsprint. An organisation has brought the newsprint in bulk and much lower price than during the lockdown. As they had excess stock, they could share with another short supply organisation (Udayavani, CEO).

For an organisation, it is not enough to accept a crisis, but solutions need to be developed and implemented (Jaques, 2007). The capabilities could be an immediate or short-term response to the crisis. The anticipation and coping capabilities are closely related. Coping capabilities involves accepting, developing and implementing solutions to overcome the crisis. For implementing solutions, there needs to be coordination between the formal and informal structures in an organisation.

Social resources are social capital, shared knowledge, mutual respect, and the shared vision among the organisation members, various networks within and outside the organisation. Resources positively influence the resilience of

an organisation (Duchek, 2020). ‘Besides, the lower cadre employees came and requested a salary deduction out of a sense of commitment towards the organisation and fear of losing employment. Due to the risk factor, and the tea breaks and servings were reduced’. (Udyavani, CEO).

‘Nearly 80 to 90% were on work from home. However, the establishment expenses did not reduce as we had to offer the laptops and internet facilities to the employees assigned work from the home schedule. Besides, the negotiations were done with the landlords to reduce the rent of the offices by 15 to 20%', reported the editor of Vijay Karnataka. ‘The other adjustment in terms of the economy was to share the transport expense by different media houses. Pre COVID scenario enabled different transport facilities by all the media organisations. The Post COVID situation compelled the media houses to compromise with rival publications to use a single vehicle for a similar route. Later readers would pick the newspaper of their choice’ (Vijayavani editor). ‘When it comes to the distribution channel, the vehicles used to distribute the newspaper copies were reduced. Vehicles were only sent in those places where the number of circulations was high. 30% of the expenses were saved’, observed Prajavani editor.

Besides anticipation and coping, resilience also includes adaptation. Adaptation is the ability to change in the long term. It includes reflection, learning, and organisation change capabilities (Duchek, 2020). Reflection and learning are about organisations stepping back and pondering the crisis and solutions implemented and learnings from the crisis, which can be implemented long-term. ‘The new trend was a shift towards digital media. It was an attempt to reach out to the readers without much investment. The PDF formats and links of e-paper were distributed through WhatsApp (Udayavani, editor). The other successful attempt by Prajavani Group was going FB Live, which was a huge hit with more than 15 lakh views, which was followed by other language newspaper publications. YouTube channel has crossed lakhs of views’, maintained the executive editor of Prajavani. ‘Apart from that, there was a dilemma over the digital platforms. However, never a platform could be parallel. News consumption patterns in cities have changed, and the content requires something innovative. News is becoming customised and individualised as the pandemic has hit the lifestyle. The attempts are made. However, it is in the trials and error phase’, observed Kannada Prabha, the editor.

‘The existence was a question, and it was a period to experiment. The publication was compelled to adopt several changes enabling multimedia technology. The concept of native content was introduced under the title “Brand

Spot". As it was a question of survival, the publication had to deviate from the ideological stance to a certain extent. A disclaimer runs stating that this content has no relation with the editorial section and consider it as an advertisement. However, other language publications do not run any such disclaimer', said Prajavani editor.

Organisation change is higher-order learning that can only happen when organisations are ready for cultural readjustments. The organisations can exploit the new solutions and transfer them to their parts. The change agents need to be recognised and a critical element in resilience.

When an individual is empowered in an organisation and has a sense of responsibility to accept the change for good, it influences the organisation's resilience.

'First and foremost, the publication decided to reduce the expenses incurred. The pages were cut down to 10 in place of 16. Prajavani was offering supplements every day, which was stopped', observed the editor of Pajavani. 'The first reaction to the crisis was to reduce the number of pages and magazines. The pages were reduced to 10 from 18. This helped the organisation with 40% savings. After reducing the pages, the production cost came down to Rs 8', added Kannada Prabha editor.

In the case of the pandemic, there was no prior knowledge base that the organisation could fall back. There has also to be a balance between cognitive and behavioural action for resilience. Cognitive action refers to mindfulness, sense-making and critical thinking. Behavioural action implies the implementation of improved experiments and knowledge gained. These are the main drivers of an organisation. During the COVID-19, all Kannada newspapers took cognitive and behavioural action to keep their organisation tide over the difficult times. None of the newspaper organisations studied had stopped publication for a single day. They did reduce the number of copies, the number of pages was reduced. Prajavani and Udayavani stopped the publication of their magazines in order to maximise their capabilities with a minimum workforce. Collaboration between competitors could be seen during the pandemic and has continued even after the second lockdown. After the first lockdown, the newspapers did not face a problem collecting news from credible sources.

The first lockdown had taught them how to work with minimum staff, and also press conferences, meeting announcements by governments were all being done online. The online platform used by these media houses also made attractive as there was a surge in users.

Sustainability

Organisations' sustainability implies creating long-term values by considering how a given organisation operates in the ecological, social, and economic environment. Sustainability assumes that developing strategies would foster the company's longevity. Organisations that opt for the sustainability route are best positioned to survive, both for their benefit and for society's well-being. (Fabio, 2017). The core concept behind the idea of a sustainable relationship between business and the environment, which was first articulated roughly two decades ago, is that environmental conservation and corporate goals do not have to be mutually exclusive (Barbier, 1987; Hawken et al., 1999; Holliday et al., 2002; World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987).

Firms are subsystems of bigger macrosystems. Managers must manage their assets to ensure both short-term profit and a long-term income stream for their companies to exist. Firms that do not effectively handle intertemporal trade-offs face hazards at the micro and macro level of study. Firms face immediate risks at the micro level when they fail to control their income flow. Firms that underinvest in research and development, for example, risk eroding their long-term worth. They are subject to indirect risks at the macro-level if the system fails because firms collectively fail to balance the short-term and long-term (Hayes & Abernathy, 1980). As a result, a company that manages both the short and long term reduce risk both inside and between the levels of analysis. Sustainability necessitates compromises, especially over time.

The changes made by the organisations after the two-phase phases of lockdowns in terms of cutting down physical resources like bureau offices in other towns and cities and other states; cutting down the size of the workforce except for the Samayukta Karnataka.

Employers and employees could communicate via technology, document transfer, and sharing information about their present work situation. During the COVID-19 outbreak, employees benefitted from adopting an open-source platform to easily carry-on conversations, read, and obtain new knowledge by decreasing their movements outside the home and using time more productively (Almunawar, Anshari, & Susanto, 2018). During a crisis, activities can be continued from home using a smartphone and the internet because practically everyone owns a smartphone, and no additional hardware is required (Susanto et al., 2020). By working from home, they were also saving electricity bills and other resources at the workplace. Cost-cutting was highly effective. None of the Kannada newspapers taken up for the study had shut down their publications, even for a single day during the pandemic.

After the second lockdown, as things are slowly returning to normalcy in India, in October, November 2020, advertisements of FMCG products, digital marketing companies have started appearing in Kannada newspapers.

Though there was a fall in the advertising revenue by 41%, the Kannada newspapers have regained much ground.

In terms of circulation, it has returned to its original numbers as endorsed by a few people from the organisations interviewed. Simultaneously the surge the digital media witnessed during the pandemic continues to exist.

All the Kannada newspapers used digital media in the sample. The pandemic brought an awareness among the management of the newspaper organisations about the necessity to adapt to digital media. ‘The portal was reintroduced with attractive columns. A new website was introduced. COVID awareness was instrumental, and also some news on practising Yoga, helped the website garner the huge number of views and reached out locally’, added the editor of Vijayavani. The Kannada print media has sustained itself by balancing the organisation’s short term and long-term goals. The task is not simple; it requires various permutations and combinations to engage with the top management and editorial heads.

Conclusion

Despite various obstacles, the Kannada print media has continued its publication throughout the pandemic. The Kannada media is small compared to the English Print media in India. The readers acknowledged the credibility of the print media during the times of the pandemic when misinformation and fake news circulation was shared on other platforms. Kannada organisations adopted various ways to ensure the credibility of the news published by verifying the sources and fact-checking using the software. The Kannada print media reduced the number of pages, merged editions, stopped printing some editions and reduced their workforce to reduce the cost. Some organisations faced a shortage of newsprint.

On the other hand, one organisation with the newsprint stock shared with other newspaper organisations. The resilience adopted by the Kannada print media organisations also helped them cope with the adversities and sustain themselves in the two stages of the pandemic situation in India. Some of the steps, such as providing e-paper and circulation of paper on WhatsApp, have strengthened its bond with its readers. Sustainability of the Kannada print media organisation during the COVID-19 is possible due to the credibility it enjoys among its readers and the resilience these organisations have shown

to deal with the crisis. The whole business model of the Kannada Print media needs reinvention in the light of the pandemic. The newspaper organisation learnt from the first phase of the lockdown to work remotely with minimum staff presence in the office. The steps taken to reduce the economic burden on the organisation due to the pandemic continued to be practised even after the second lockdown. The limitation of this paper is that the top management's views are considered. Future studies can be carried out by studying bureau offices and the readers' views.

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Public perception of media's role during COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh

Greg Simons¹

Independent Researcher

Abdul Kabil Khan

Ananda Kumar Biswas

University of Liberal Arts, Bangladesh

Ferdous Bin Ali

Jahangirnagar University, Bangladesh

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Abstract

This article represents an example of a non-Western study into the public perception of the mass media's role during the coronavirus pandemic in Bangladesh, which is of particular importance given the global environment of a high level of informational uncertainty and health risk that is equally applicable to countries around the world. Quantitative research methodology was used to gather perceptions of citizens across the country on the role and performance of the mass media's coverage of the coronavirus pandemic. The responses gathered demonstrated that the pandemic generated an increased demand for news and information on the virus, which was used as a means of attempting to reduce personal risk and harm. In this time of an increased demand for information, respondents tended to perceive the information that they received from mainstream media news sources as being credible and rated media performance positively. This final observation is seemingly bucking the general global trend of decreased public trust in news media sources.

Keywords

Coronavirus, infodemic, Bangladesh, mass media, journalism.

¹ Corresponding author:

Greg Simons, Independent Researcher. Postal address: Lapplandsresan 27, SE 757 55 Uppsala, Sweden.
Email: gregmons@yahoo.com

Introduction

COVID-19 news began to emerge from Wuhan, China, in 2019. The coronavirus (COVID-19) is a highly infectious disease in the 21st century (Rahman & Shati, 2020). It has collapsed the highly interconnected global system, such as the economy, health, communication, transportation, education, etc. (Karasneh et al., 2020). Bangladesh in South-Asia followed these same trends and the first COVID-19 affected person was in March 2020. The government has frequently announced all types of treatment, prevention and measurement, but the role and action of government activities is still debatable (Anwer et al., 2020). However, the government of Bangladesh is actively working and taking steps for tackling COVID-19 (Kabir, 2020). The Prime Minister of Bangladesh has regularly communicated with district COVID-19 prevention committees. Infodemic, misinformation and fake news have created a negative hive among general people and the government has taken different initiatives for combating it. COVID-19 test mobile and web apps, COVID-19 information-based web portal, new media and traditional media are initiated by the government of Bangladesh to spread the news among the online and offline communities (SACMID, 2020).

Bangladeshi media houses are broadcasting different types of COVID-19 related information like statistics, audio-visual content, articles and opinion on the media's web portal as well as differently oriented versions of newspapers. However, journalism is not working freely due to the Digital Security Act (2019). However, the Government of Bangladesh had taken a news or content screening on private televisions, news portals and social media platforms from the 26th of March (Nahid, 2020). The level of Freedom of Speech is decreasing during COVID-19 in Bangladesh according to Reporters Without Borders.

The new media, mainstream and traditional media are promoting campaigns against COVID-19 helps to maintain the social distance and awareness among Bangladeshi people (Mejia et al., 2020). Media play a vital role in creating public perception of COVID-19 in news coverage. Recently, the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) has conducted a perception survey where 66% respondents learnt or empowered themselves through television. The significance of this article is the inclusion of a non-Western country, Bangladesh, as the subject of research and one that is not often included in international research.

The objectives of this study explore the people's perception on media's role and how media create an impact on people's thinking from a non-Western setting and seek to fill a gap by addressing the attitudes, concerns and perceptions of the audience during the global pandemic. The questions of this research are: What do people think they know about COVID-19 from information seeking?

How do people perceive the media's role on COVID-19? Is COVID-19 an issue that can change the public's perception in favour of restoration of the media's role in society?

This article begins by addressing the theoretical foundations and considerations that inform the collected empirical content. Then the following section engages in the current state of the art literature review on academic material engaging in the communicative aspects of the pandemic. Methodology is the topic of the following section. Before moving into the case study, which includes the effects of the pandemic and its communication in Bangladesh through an opinion survey, where respondents discuss how they perceive and react to the information environment, together with an analysis of these responses and reflections.

Theoretical considerations

With the development of social sciences and communication studies in the wake of two world wars, from the mid-late 20th century witnessed the development of a number of theories and explanations dealing with media functions. Lewin (1947) wrote about the role of social institutions as being channels or gates for the interaction and communication of a group, the movement of goods and ideas. He argued that 'gate sections' are governed by either impartial rules or by gatekeepers. In the later, the gatekeepers, the in-power group dictates the rules. If social change occurs, then the gatekeepers also change or are influenced (Lewin, 1947). Mass media are a gatekeeper of information, hence influence the quality of information, although the technical ability to do so in the current state of information communication technologies is compromised owing to their loss on the monopoly of the means of mass communication. Laswell (1948) understands communication as a social institution that distributes and shapes the values and norms of a society, appealing to mobilising and influencing the minds, attitudes and behaviour of its citizens. The communication process in society performs three functions: surveillance of the environment; correlation of society's components; and transmission of the social inheritance (Laswell, 1948). McCombs (1977) developed a deeper understanding of the agenda setting function of mass media, where many attempts were noted when media campaigns attempted to persuade publics. Conventional wisdom of the time revealed that media seldom changed the attitudes and behaviour of audiences, so the notion of persuasion was unrealistic. However, McCombs noted that while media could not tell people what to think, they did tell people what to think about.

Central to understanding and making sense of the data derived from the responses received in this preliminary research is through Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) Hierarchy of Influences model, which was used to describe the various factors that affect news content that is organised as factors along a continuum from individual to social levels (Hanitzsch et al., 2010; Reese, 2019; Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). This continuum is organised into five different levels that include the *individual, routine, organisational, socio-institutional* and *social systems* levels of influence (Hanitzsch et al., 2010; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Journalism and mass media are potentially very influential in shaping public perception of key events, such as the current COVID-19 pandemic, which makes tracking various influences on news content a vital task.

The Hierarchy of Influences model is a key concept in journalism studies (Franklin et al., 2005) that identifies various influences on media content and then establishes these influences into a more detailed framework (Reese, 2019) that can be used to provide additional explanatory power to the observed patterns and trends. In this paper, the Hierarchy of Influences model is repurposed to understand the audience perception of the media's role in its news coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh. As such, the responses received indicated several key elements as the importance and central place of the audience perception of the role of mass media and journalism in society, media audience reception and risk's impact on information seeking.

Perception of mass media and journalism's role in society

Currently there is a gap in perception concerning journalistic role conception and role enactment (Deuze & Witschge, 2018; Hellmueller & Vos, 2013; Himelboim & Limor, 2010; Tandoc, 2013). In Western media and journalism there are three enduring normative values: authenticity, accountability, and autonomy. These affect the perceived credibility of journalists and their content, hence the attempt to keep these alive even if the returns and relevance have diminished (Hayes et al., 2007). One of the regular criticisms aimed at media institutions and journalists is that they are not fulfilling their role in society. A study by Himelboim and Limor (2010) analysed 242 codes of ethics from 94 countries to identify the perceived social role, which was rather consensual and involved the values of neutrality, detached from society and defensive against the loci of power. In a literature review, Hanitzsch (2007) proposes that journalism culture consists of three essential constituents (institutional roles, epistemologies and ethical ideologies) and divided further into seven principal dimensions

(interventionism, power distance, market orientation, objectivism, empiricism, relativism and idealism). Other researchers, such as Mellado (2015) propose six dimensions in the role performance of journalism: intervention; watchdog; loyal facilitator; service; infotainment and a civic model. She stresses that these roles can overlap in practice, simultaneously displaying different dimensions. This can also be a reflection on the variations of journalistic cultures across nations.

The ideas concerning the contemporary definition of the concept and role of journalism and mass media are open to interpretation but are also contested and evolving. A study on Danish journalists and how they perceived and implemented the key professional normative value of objectivity found it was very open to interpretation, where different journalistic cultures and different circumstances influenced the production, publication and perception of news (Skovgaard et al., 2013). Singer (2007) notes the commitment to truth and transparency (public accountability) are central normative values of professional journalism. However, this is increasingly being challenged and questioned by popular communicators (including bloggers) in the contemporary media environment. This has meant journalism has lost the monopoly in defining and publicly articulating its professional constructs, which are being reinterpreted. The institutional identity of journalism is constructed and contested discursively.

Journalistic roles are articulated and enacted on two distinct levels: role orientations (normative and cognitive) and role performance (practiced and narrated roles). The process model of journalistic roles proposes a circular structure, where normative, cognitive, practiced, and narrated roles are connected through processes of internalisation, enactment, reflection, normalisation, and negotiation (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017). This relational and discursive approach to analysing and understanding journalism reveals the fluid nature of the process. Traditionally, journalistic capital has relied on the distinct division between journalists and audiences. In the current situation, these distinctions are much less obvious. This has led to the ‘misalignment between journalists and the public’s views of journalistic roles’ that are having an impact ‘in the profession’s external legitimacy’ (Vos et al., 2019). There are different divides evident between different groups on a national to global scale.

In a study involving the examination of journalistic culture across 66 nations, it was concluded that journalism is undergoing a great deal of change through transformations and developments in many different countries (Hanusch &

Hanitzsch, 2017), therefore it is problematic to assume one particular model, such as liberal journalism as being universally applied on a global scale. From a case study involving judicial reform in Pakistan, the role of newspapers went beyond the role of merely informing and letting the audience decide, but to actively engage in the construction of social reality in the minds of the public. The author concluded, 'on the basis of findings it is suggested that to activate people on certain issues and making up their perceptions or shaping up the judgements, newspapers can play a vital role in producing change in society' (Sadaf, 2011).

Review of existing literature on communicating the coronavirus

This section is intended to set the background for a brief overview of the enormous current state of the art literature review on academic literature on the topic of the COVID-19 pandemic as it stood in December 2020. General searches were conducted using general internet search engines for academic literature using keywords such as: 'corona virus' and 'COVID-19' and 'novel coronavirus'. This was supplemented with a snowballing technique of finding other 'related articles' related relevant articles that were successfully located.

The current state of art of published academic research is focused on several key aspects of the coronavirus pandemic. These include: the physical and psychological impact; evaluations of mass media and social media coverage; audience perception and information seeking patterns. It should be noted that there is often interaction between these various categories within any one article. Within the category area of the physical and psychological impact of the coronavirus, there are at least two different topic trends, one that relates to understanding human anxiety caused by the virus and the other concerning resilience in face of the challenges caused by COVID-19. Lee (2020) argues that the mental health concerns of people impacted by the pandemic have not been adequately addressed. The aim of his paper was to develop a coronavirus Anxiety Scale (CAS) in order to create a mental health screener that will identify at risk and affected people. Other research has focused on describing the stressful psychological conditions faced by specific groups (Ma & Miller, 2020). Bryce et al. (2020) focused on the study of organizational response to the pandemic (namely the National Health Service) in the face of a great deal of uncertainty in the physical and information domains. This is in reference to the idea of building organizational resilience. These papers fell within the academic disciplines of management, psychology, risk, health and death studies.

Diverse trends and perspectives are also observed in the growing academic literature base on the topic of the evaluations of mass media and social media performance and role during the pandemic. An outlier is the article by Fu and Zhu (2020) that poses the question if the world overlooked mass media and social media in China and global news that were giving an early warning in the early stages of the pandemic. Other papers focused on how media shaped knowledge and awareness among medical professionals (Karasneh et al., 2020) or the media role in validating fear perception and the magnitude of COVID-19 (Mejia et al., 2020). There is also a rapidly growing direction that is identifying and analysing the issues of trust in media (Liu et al., 2020) as well as misleading and misinformation in mass media coverage of the pandemic (Baptista Ferreira & Borges, 2020; Jamil & Appiah-Adjeh, 2020; Motta et al., 2020; Wen et al., 2020; Zheng et al., 2020). There is also academic interest in social media research, on the element of social media in terms of communicating the health and crisis dimensions (Yu et al., 2020) and social media as a source of misinformation on the virus or key actors involved in the crisis (Au et al., 2020). Actions and trends in terms of the quantity and quality of information has impacted upon the cognitive domain.

Audience perception and information seeking also proved to be rather diverse in nature. This includes the perspective of the communication flows on the pandemic as being an ‘infodemic’ (couched as a medical condition - information epidemic) (Nielsen et al., 2020), and the role of perception (Dryhurst et al., 2020; McFadden et al., 2020) and how it affects actions based on trust (Chakraborty, 2020; Llewellyn, 2020; Rahman & Sathi, 2020) and fact checking (Krause et al., 2020). The previously mentioned research aspects affect public perception and trust in the policy response by the authorities (Esaiasson et al, 2020; Liu et al., 2020; Siddika & Islam, 2020) and this impacts upon the compliance with that policy (Wong & Jensen, 2020).

Methodology

The objectives of this study demand a quantitative research approach. Analysing different research articles also navigated a cross-sectional study because it gives information about what is happening in a current population. A web-based survey was carried-out from June 1 to June 30, 2020. From 31 May to 15 June 2020, the Ministry of Public Administration, Bangladesh, has circulated a notification that the government has decided to conditionally carry out the overall activities in the country and the movement of the public.

This research aim was to investigate the public perception before and after the lockdown.

We have followed a purposive sampling technique to select necessary samples from our target population. As a result of that, the questionnaires were shared among people of different professionals. Prior to the survey, people were duly informed regarding the purpose of the research and assured about the data privacy and confidentiality of their feedback. Questionnaire was utilized and shared with the respondents by using Email and different digital platforms. Considering, 95% level of confidence and 5% acceptable margin of error ($d=0.05$), we estimated the desired sample size following Cochran's formula, $n = z^2 p(1-p) d^2$

We assumed that the sample proportion was 0.5 because it provides the maximum sample size. Thus, we estimated the sample size and the required sample size was 385. A total of 392 respondents that completed the questionnaires were included in the final analysis. So, our sample size represents the overall population.

A self-reported structured questionnaire was developed using Google forms and the invitation link to the survey questionnaire was sent nationwide via social media, messaging apps, and email. There is no capability to track the participant of this research. SPSS software was used as a tool of data analysis in this research. Structural Equation Model & other necessary statistics used for showing the relationship between peoples and media's role during COVID-19 times.

Questionnaire developed

The questionnaire was written in English for preparing the study report. After the pilot test, the final questionnaire comprised four items including closed ended questions. The answer options were multiple choice formats and Likert scale. Strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree strongly, disagree. These were coded by assigning number points for each question. Participants were able to choose only one answer to each of the questions.

Presentation of the survey data

Table 1

Demographic information

Variables		Number	Percentage (%)
Sex	Female	157	40.9
	Male	227	59.1
Age	<25 years	10	2.6
	26-35 years	143	37.2
	36-45 years	179	46.6
	46-55 years	44	11.5
	>55 years	8	2.1
Educational level	Primary	37	9.6
	S.S.C/H.S.C	97	25.3
	Graduation	105	27.4
	Post-Graduation	136	35.4
	PhD	9	2.3
Place of living	Rural	141	36.7
	Urban	243	63.3
Do you have any job right now?	No	168	43.7
	Yes	216	56.3
I'm feeling tensed about my financial condition?	No	124	32.3
	Yes	260	67.7
Still, need to go to the workplace?	No	287	74.7
	Yes	97	25.3

In total 392 respondents participated in this study (see *Table 1*). Before the pandemic 43.9% respondents used online news platforms for getting updated information but after the COVID-19 outbreak this rate decreased to 37% (see *Figure 1*). The significant change happened when news has been consumed in social media. In general time, 25% respondents used social media for getting information but during the COVID this rate had increased to 34.9%. Other sources had not made any significant changes in terms of news consumption due to COVID-19.

Figure 1
Trends of news consumption across media before and during COVID-19 pandemic

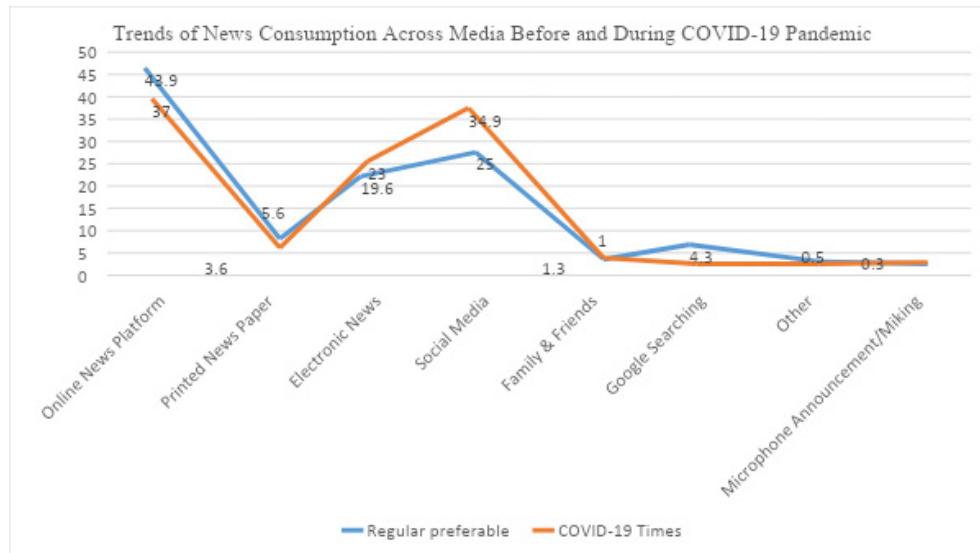
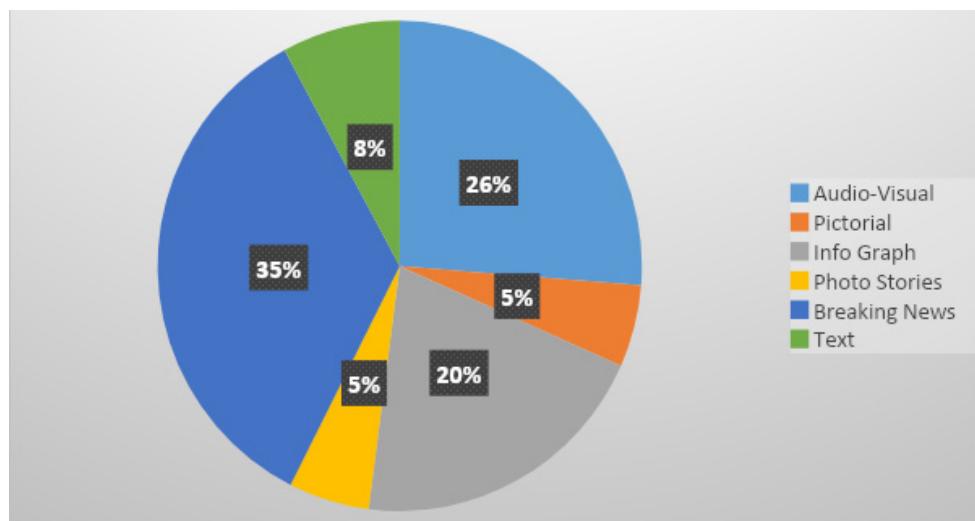


Figure 2
Preferable mass media content in COVID-19 related news



Question pertaining to which mass media content of the news sources respondents usually followed (see *Figure*) and it was explored that 35% respondents preferred audio-visual content of COVID-19 related news, 26% respondents were comfortable with the breaking news updates of coronavirus. In this study, 20% respondents followed infographic materials of COVID-19. Pictorial, photo stories and textual based content had not been seen to gain enough attention among respondents.

Public perception on media's role

A question was asked about the satisfaction of mass media coverage of COVID-19. Strongly agreed 10.2%, 39.3% agreed, 16.6% disagreed, 6.9% strongly disagreed. Importantly, 27% of respondents were neutral.

Infodemic is one of the integral parts of COVID-19 pandemic. A question was asked about the reliable and authentic news on COVID-19 published by different media organizations. Strongly agreed 9.7% people, 42.6% agreed and 16.1% disagreed, 5.6% strongly disagreed. In the answer of this question, 26% of respondents were neutral.

Bangladeshi mainstream news media were publishing different types of updated and awareness related media content that helped general people to increase their knowledge on COVID-19. By adding responses of agree and strongly agree, the cumulated answer is 65%, 13.3% disagreed and strongly disagreed regarding coping with COVID-19 media content presentation. Neutral answers stayed 20.9% of respondents.

A question was asked about the Bangladeshi news media frequently providing updates on COVID-19. Overall, 79.1% respondents were in favour in the statement that the news media actively covered COVID-19 news. Only 8.6% respondents (combined) disagreed and strongly disagreed with this statement, where 12.2% were neutral.

During the pandemic period, different news websites published more updated news on COVID-19 than mainstream media (TV, radio and newspaper). By adding responses of agree and strongly agree, 68.4% respondents were in favour in the statement. On the other hand, 8.7% respondents combined disagreed & strongly disagreed with this statement and 23% respondents stayed neutral in this question.

A question was asked about the mass media's role in forming and influencing people's attitudes on COVID-19. The data set showed 84.2% respondents said that the news media played a significant role in forming & influencing people's attitudes on COVID-19. Collectively 7.9% respondents disagreed with this statement and 7.9% respondents remained neutral.

We found that 85.5% respondents believed that news media were actually responsible for enhancing public knowledge on preventative public health measures. Collectively only 4.6% respondents thought that the mass media didn't increase any knowledge on preventative health issues and 9.9% respondents stayed neutral in this statement.

According to the survey data, collectively 71.9% respondents said that during the lockdown time they benefited from mass media's news to get in rational thinking whereas 11.7% didn't change their rationality and thinking through the media. Respondents stayed neutral at 16.3%.

A question was asked about the mass media's role in building public awareness on COVID-19 among the different classes of people. Collectively 79.3% respondents were agreed & strongly agreed regarding mass media's role on making awareness among different social groups. The 8.1% is the cumulative percentage of respondents who are not in the favour of the statement and 12.5% respondents were neutral.

During the pandemic situation, frequently updated news that people consumed from different channels made them confused about taking the correct decision on COVID-19. Having realized that a question was asked to know about the media's exaggeration of negative impacts on human minds associated with the COVID-19. After compiling the results of responses, 58.9% agreed and strongly agreed, whereas collectively 15.3% disagreed and strongly disagreed about exaggerated fear, anxiety and risks created by the news media. Respondents stayed neutral at 25.8%.

A question was asked to find out the worries about people's future careers after reading newspapers and COVID-19 effects in their personal lives. Collectively 83.2% respondents believed this statement. On the other hand, cumulatively, 6.4% respondents showed disagreement with the statement and 10.5% respondents stayed neutral.

A question was asked to understand whether people can consider social media as a credible news source rather than mainstream media. Collectively 28.8% respondents agreed and strongly agreed. Combined 40.3% respondents showed their trust on mainstream media as a source of news during COVID-19 times. On the other hand, 20.9% respondents stayed neutral.

We asked if during the pandemic situations people were influenced by social media content more than mainstream media or not, in against collectively 41.6% respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed, whereas cumulatively 37.5% respondents agreed and strongly agreed with people being influenced by social media content more than mainstream media content. Some of the respondents, 20.9% indicated neutral.

A question was posed to understand whether people managed to navigate easily on demand media content on COVID-19 from news websites. By adding the responses of agree and strongly agree, the cumulated answer is 57.9%. Collectively only 12% respondents showed disagreement with the statement. About 30.1% respondents stayed neutral.

A question was asked to understand the public perception of freedom of expression that whether the media enjoyed publishing unregulated information on COVID-19. Statistics show that, collectively 40.8% respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed with the statement and they believed that Bangladeshi news media have not been enjoying press freedom in publishing COVID-19 information. On the other hand, 23% respondents stayed neutral and finally 36.2% respondents agreed and strongly agreed with the statement.

Bangladesh still has the lowest press freedom among many other South Asian countries. According to Reporters Without Borders, Bangladesh ranked 152nd out of 180 countries in 2021 World Press Freedom Index. Hundreds of journalists and human rights activists have been detained since the Bangladesh government imposed the controversial Digital Security Act in 2018.

A question was asked if Bangladesh news media had been politically biased in covering COVID-19 or not. Combined 63.3% respondents supported this statement, collectively 13.1% respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed with this statement whereas 23.7% respondents were neutral.

This is also relevant to know why mainstream media and news agencies are unintentionally publishing misleading and fabricated news. A question was asked that Bangladeshi media published misleading or fabricated news on COVID-19. Following the previous question, more or less similar types of response are achieved regarding this statement. Adding agree and strongly agree, 63.8% respondents had similar statements thought, collectively 12.3% disagreed and strongly disagreed. In this statement, 24% respondents stayed neutral.

People frequently visited news portals and followed mainstream media for getting coronavirus news. In this case, a question was asked that after following the news media public understood the present reality and impact of COVID-19. Collectively 76.8% respondents were in favour of the statement. This is a significant number of people who are following news media and understanding the COVID-19 present status and reality. Adding 8.9% respondents

showed disagreement with this statement and 14.3% respondents stayed neutral.

Mass media has the power to influence the human thinking process like making judgmental decisions or statements. A question was asked that the mass media has influenced the public decision process. Collectively 74.5% respondents were positive, collectively 9.7% respondents were against this statement and 15.8% of respondents stayed neutral.

Survey data analysis

In order to shed light on the research questions, our analysis framework consists of three different stages. In the first stage we have done univariate analysis. Univariate analysis is where the data being analysed contains only one variable. The main purpose of univariate analysis is to describe the data and find patterns that exist within it.

In the second phase, we have done bivariate analysis. It involves the analysis of two variables to determine the empirical relationship between them. Bivariate analysis can be helpful in testing simple hypotheses of association. Chi-squared statistics is used for our hypothesis testing. It represents a single number that explains the difference between our sample counts and the expected counts if there were no relationship at all in the population. In bivariate analysis, we have explored the relationship among variables with a second research question, how do people perceive the media's role on COVID-19.

To improve measurement reliability and validity, we have conducted multivariate analysis in the third phase of our framework. We have performed Factor Analysis using an orthogonal factor model to extract factors related to the media's perception from people. Then we have used SEM (Structural Equation Modelling) to understand the nature of the relationships. Our result of multivariate analysis is supported by p-value which tells about if test results are significant or not.

Univariate analysis

We have done univariate analysis based on three individual aspects in order to answer the research question.

RQ1: What do people think they know about COVID-19 from information seeking?

From our data, we can see that 91% of the total participants know about the origin of COVID-19 and 27% of them are aged between 26-30 and 41% of them is underage or 25 and most of them are university students or at least

graduate. Among the total sample, 95.4% of them believe that staying at home is the best way to prevent this situation and most of them are urban dwellers (87.2%). Study shows that, 92.9% of them believe that it's transmitted through the infected person's coughs, sneezes or exhales among which 89.1% is working or employed though 4.1% of people doesn't know that touching a contaminated surface and then your eyes, nose or mouth can transmit COVID-19. Most of them are living in urban regions (87.2). Among the participants, 85.7% of them are conscious about COVID-19 recovery time although 60% of them believe that older people are more prone to be affected.

RQ2: How do people perceive the media's role on COVID-19?

From our analysis, we can see that online news platforms (44%) are the most widely accepted news media but 35% of people accept the information that is spread through the social media regarding COVID-19 and 37% of people rely on other online news media. But 16.6% people are not satisfied with the media coverage of Bangladesh. On the other hand, 59.9% people strongly believe the media has played a significant role in forming and influencing people's attitudes on COVID and how to prepare for it as well as in increasing public knowledge on preventative public health measures. This apparent contradiction is due to the education level, living areas and age of the participant. Because 55.6% people strongly believe the media helped them in making rational decisions during lockdown time. Most of them are educated (95.8%) and living in urban areas.

RQ3: Is COVID-19 an issue that can change the public's perception in favour of restoration of the media's role in society?

Our result shows that 44.9% people strongly think that the news media have exaggerated fear, anxiety and risks associated with the virus, 73% of people get more worried about the future of my life than pre-COVID-19 time. And 40% people agree with the concept of political biases of the media covering COVID-19. 46.2% people strongly believe that Bangladeshi media sometimes publishes misleading or fabricated news on COVID-19 and so the news consumption rate is decaying. So, it will be difficult to change the public's perception in favour of restoration of the media's idealised role in society.

Bivariate analysis

In this bivariate analysis part, cross tabulation technique is applied to identify the pair-wise relation between media perception of people with other relevant variables. The results of the bivariate analysis are presented in the table in this section.

Table 2
Variable significance test

Variables	Value of Chi-Square	P-value	Decision
Perception about media vs Which form of Media did you get informed about COVID-19?	11.242	.0047	Significant
Perception about media vs When did the public first hear about COVID-19?	17.752	.003	Significant
Perception about media vs What types transmission of contents do you prefer in COVID-19 related news	27.572	.00	Significant
Perception about media vs How many times do you visit your desired news portal or medium for getting more updates	5.862	.015	Significant
Perception about media vs Compared to the pre-COVID-19 situation, how would you rate your news consumption	50.926	.00	Significant
Perception about media vs Preferable news agency	18.655	.00	Significant

As we know, the p-value is larger than the significance level, we fail to reject the null hypothesis because there is not enough evidence to conclude that the variables are associated. In our case, all of the selected variables seem to be significant from the statistical point of view.

Multivariate analysis

We have done factor analysis followed by structural equation modelling to extract the crucial causal factors. In this analysis, we have considered variables from V0 through V26. These variables are Gender, Age, Educational Attainment, Occupation, Area of living, preferable mass media, respondent's knowledge on COVID-19, media coverage and all the variables used to analyse media's role and relationship between the COVID-19 content and public perception.

Construction of correlation matrix

For factor analysis we need to first construct a correlation matrix. Generally, it's a correlation matrix is a lower triangle matrix showing the simple correlations between all possible pairs of variables included in the analysis.

Table 3

Correlation matrix

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
0	1	0.53148	0.45622	0.71794	0.7426	0.81188	0.15175	0.69872	0.3228	0.66208	0.3595	0.87999	0.09873	0.07342	0.48611	0.92286	0.42272	0.18073	0.30132	0.35681	0.25478	0.17517	0.9234	0.29107	0.21698	0.07649	0.65576
1	0.92283	1	0.55017	0.06693	0.72201	0.38087	0.94415	0.25986	0.90488	0.63574	0.77619	0.8428	0.36898	0.76818	0.76147	0.11162	0.1795	0.43238	0.91879	0.45113	0.0114	0.90442	0.16325	0.39265	0.48919	0.37399	0.04572
2	0.33535	0.66986	1	0.77469	0.51277	0.54912	0.86476	0.8912	0.06688	0.12415	0.0604	0.77583	0.77387	0.5903	0.23327	0.87841	0.6655	0.17329	0.80155	0.56232	0.41653	0.61971	0.11947	0.0334	0.14711	0.48967	0.97487
3	0.90392	0.89742	0.57292	1	0.01404	0.75285	0.2274	0.65771	0.68715	0.71601	0.69671	0.0833	0.92431	0.09941	0.10205	0.65316	0.36169	0.17874	0.92743	0.32065	0.20041	0.43123	0.84042	0.39978	0.87607	0.16207	0.29218
4	0.76585	0.13376	0.56733	0.0078	1	0.87909	0.58365	0.391	0.12879	0.35509	0.2307	0.19869	0.81158	0.93355	0.82186	0.62481	0.56529	0.06052	0.98729	0.12873	0.69105	0.05465	0.80887	0.19635	0.0345	0.94067	0.24966
5	0.82765	0.02936	0.84866	0.23433	0.05587	1	0.27269	0.55279	0.90331	0.76674	0.58749	0.20336	0.20484	0.32899	0.82799	0.01596	0.53735	0.66553	0.49043	0.44687	0.6359	0.61087	0.09572	0.03451	0.66057	0.38101	0.03055
6	0.07396	0.72499	0.4295	0.06686	0.09177	0.21722	1	0.16511	0.12018	0.30561	0.20157	0.0547	0.71176	0.72683	0.06199	0.46217	0.34851	0.42626	0.61796	0.0737	0.64524	0.91396	0.72645	0.35662	0.2416	0.06195	0.23829
7	0.48459	0.35229	0.76408	0.3304	0.50325	0.80475	0.66367	1	0.4653	0.74792	0.87445	0.70242	0.37176	0.38099	0.25728	0.98903	0.37497	0.97903	0.98145	0.32401	0.31491	0.86307	0.5334	0.59741	0.03172	0.68958	0.37959
8	0.52287	0.22357	0.92057	0.83355	0.11783	0.1263	0.74712	0.28326	1	0.10898	0.52279	0.501	0.64174	0.06098	0.32209	0.40185	0.95892	0.5887	0.89019	0.36283	0.85956	0.60837	0.42464	0.44068	0.65908	0.80551	0.71788
9	0.33974	0.51556	0.98729	0.87375	0.63891	0.28491	0.32018	0.64321	0.77214	1	0.66079	0.76159	0.68246	0.52757	0.44749	0.3142	0.1943	0.1028	0.43765	0.65892	0.5325	0.90707	0.22248	0.30433	0.04079	0.6056	0.81012
10	0.34962	0.98889	0.22124	0.87341	0.01903	0.12381	0.62937	0.15349	0.42379	0.96281	1	0.08676	0.53271	0.69924	0.19276	0.19316	0.59672	0.68262	0.11019	0.6888	0.6574	0.78569	0.66738	0.25968	0.0467	0.16624	0.67937
11	0.02992	0.25159	0.89175	0.99403	0.98713	0.6276	0.28891	0.46983	0.51511	0.0023	0.05049	1	0.57178	0.81921	0.75542	0.46279	0.68071	0.04967	0.02432	0.05502	0.35162	0.98837	0.57968	0.28304	0.13455	0.12478	0.9226
12	0.26381	0.50281	0.03105	0.29048	0.43439	0.98692	0.33504	0.25619	0.89514	0.25873	0.92659	0.38022	1	0.15387	0.04155	0.74151	0.8805	0.18385	0.90284	0.39487	0.89759	0.25558	0.50577	0.08511	0.55887	0.66723	0.56998
13	0.71003	0.97181	0.56883	0.99782	0.34443	0.39217	0.38912	0.72706	0.32413	0.5115	0.00529	0.92101	0.31868	1	0.98337	0.46768	0.28648	0.75011	0.55955	0.75787	0.7207	0.80879	0.15142	0.94174	0.05075	0.30337	0.57018
14	0.122	0.20781	0.18774	0.66237	0.31702	0.67113	0.03508	0.63344	0.37064	0.11887	0.56737	0.13539	0.60223	0.67332	1	0.7994	0.92942	0.20116	0.95954	0.31204	0.05288	0.61201	0.15998	0.75006	0.73195	0.24432	0.36558
15	0.80443	0.94315	0.51647	0.52262	0.12224	0.54656	0.32675	0.76293	0.96803	0.44355	0.14003	0.27822	0.56769	0.53182	0.34049	1	0.54811	0.71017	0.62218	0.58181	0.59142	0.4568	0.02028	0.42912	0.57807	0.61592	0.2842
16	0.49656	0.32726	0.20661	0.25831	0.10405	0.41374	0.4822	0.42629	0.59438	0.77946	0.73692	0.59893	0.00544	0.58164	0.54933	0.33561	1	0.70955	0.26514	0.91827	0.53224	0.55323	0.24187	0.58731	0.43011	0.34982	0.60253
17	0.1542	0.83675	0.32502	0.684	0.18633	0.3339	0.0169	0.10605	0.65816	0.55917	0.13554	0.76811	0.98638	0.15758	0.07869	0.39457	0.85817	1	0.54255	0.44755	0.11005	0.93822	0.42844	0.82916	0.98052	0.75449	0.05717
18	0.98669	0.35235	0.04011	0.03668	0.59605	0.65297	0.97549	0.78785	0.88387	0.63015	0.44296	0.96751	0.98253	0.23091	0.59949	0.26222	0.02858	0.60894	1	0.03451	0.21888	0.83578	0.04687	0.22564	0.27658	0.35657	0.48643
19	0.42678	0.22445	0.04072	0.17426	0.02704	0.08094	0.00183	0.63972	0.27649	0.58855	0.22727	0.54129	0.54355	0.60062	0.5549	0.68898	0.48205	0.09947	0.86624	1	0.56933	0.90245	0.80245	0.41227	0.53033	0.77199	0.05896
20	0.37217	0.44458	0.84444	0.72427	0.2139	0.60024	0.10163	0.18054	0.23256	0.58815	0.95381	0.68584	0.58119	0.77287	0.24482	0.43022	0.64624	0.85048	0.87945	0.22519	1	0.75572	0.35646	0.42979	0.19172	0.67733	0.34931
21	0.41116	0.28785	0.69917	0.112315	0.6937	0.39122	0.81335	0.91915	0.05582	0.09669	0.88378	0.8823	0.01207	0.00175	0.17674	0.74896	0.51077	0.13446	0.2763	0.51525	0.81609	1	0.22578	0.45513	0.29783	0.37705	0.69912
22	0.32332	0.12074	0.28647	0.38282	0.92355	0.99448	0.72531	0.08549	0.02111	0.5129	0.69675	0.15746	0.4047	0.95825	0.67342	0.94226	0.42859	0.93424	0.06089	0.13727	0.60043	0.28143	1	0.81632	0.08951	0.86619	0.37897
23	0.32938	0.01899	0.111798	0.2518	0.40253	0.08893	0.84877	0.75694	0.0158	0.09453	0.30046	0.64169	0.14585	0.37344	0.35007	0.46382	0.96405	0.56687	0.98387	0.57487	0.17498	0.03186	1	0.77736	0.74506	0.90799	
24	0.89178	0.21277	0.08358	0.48092	0.1876	0.34632	0.33415	0.51021	0.16245	0.22712	0.33217	0.60744	0.87706	0.21303	0.351	0.86722	0.91714	0.72395	0.63888	0.49541	0.36733	0.15717	0.32918	0.06674	1	0.59451	0.13817
25	0.85287	0.79687	0.411	0.07404	0.26554	0.86724	0.06292	0.65835	0.22545	0.79477	0.39171	0.51401	0.17892	0.79886	0.34141	0.21261	0.95816	0.1708	0.78593	0.71858	0.9083	0.0851	0.21978	0.23363	0.78261	1	0.59531
26	0.7094	0.8486	0.94349	0.89312	0.65169	0.46566	0.65272	0.47742	0.29626	0.62595	0.18008	0.69286	0.43372	0.87573	0.1014	0.57245	0.50883	0.47723	0.70716	0.31074	0.80016	0.494	0.04158	0.95094	0.79185	0.34822	1

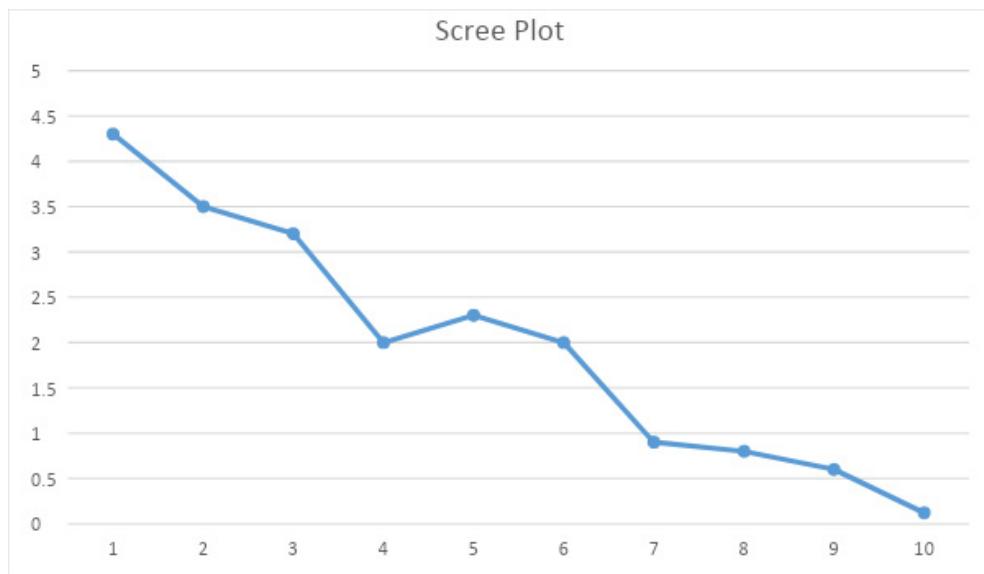
Testing appropriateness of factor model

In order to ensure that the factor analysis for data is appropriate, we have done two different tests. It is a crucial state for our analysis. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy tests if partial correlations among variables are small. As we can see from the correlation table, our correlation values are pretty small. So, this test is significant. We have also done Bartlett's test of sphericity. It indicates if the factor model is appropriate or not. Both Bartlett's test of Sphericity ($p < 0.05$) and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (0.579) suggests that factor analysis for our data is appropriate.

Identification of the factor model

The scree plot is used to find out the appropriate number of factors. A scree plot shows the eigenvalues on the y-axis and the number of factors on the x-axis. It always displays a downward curve. The point where the slope of the curve is clearly levelling off (the 'elbow') indicates the number of factors that should be generated by the analysis.

Figure 3



The plot seems to have two inflection points, one at factor 4 and the other at factor 7. For our purposes we choose to keep the factors 7.

Rotation of factors

The factor matrix contains all the coefficients to express all the feature value as a linear combination of factors. Generally what factor analysis does is to determine the best fit between the variables and the latent factors. It looks for the strongest correlations between variables and the latent factor and chooses that Factor 1 is the most influential. Sometimes, the initial solution results in strong correlations of a variable with several factors or in a variable that has no strong correlations with any of the factors. In order to avoid this kind of situation, we do the rotation of factors. Here we have used Varimax with Kaiser Normalization as a rotation method.

From the rotated factor matrix, we can say that Factor 0 has high coefficients for variables gender, age, and educational background, area of living and preferable mass media. Factor 1 mostly includes occupational status, change in residence place, knowledge about COVID-19, media coverage on COVID-19 and media has published reliable and authentic news on COVID-19 and restored media's role on society variables. Factor 2 has high coefficient for satisfaction of media coverage on COVID-19, helpfulness of media content, frequent update rate of on COVID-19, media's role in influencing and forming and influencing people's attitude and rational decision making regarding COVID-19.

Factor 3 has high coefficients for variables for the news websites published more updated news on COVID-19 than mainstream media (TV, Radio & Newspaper), media has played a significant role in forming and influencing people's attitudes on COVID and how to prepare for it, media has helped in building public awareness on COVID-19 among the different classes of peoples and necessary content on mainstream media. Factor 4 includes news media that have exaggerated fear, anxiety and risks associated with the virus, effect of mental state reading newspapers, trust on social media, influence of social media vs mainstream media, similarly factor 5 consists of media's freedom, political bias, misleading information presentation. The last factor, factor 6 includes the effects of presence of international media, understanding of present state of impact, and judgmental steps or statements on other Countries situations.

Table 4

Loading factors

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
0	0.464618	0.707047	0.039303	0.861328	0.692063	0.824217	0.047223
1	0.410561	0.621589	0.572768	0.122828	0.401186	0.491053	0.791706
2	0.89706	0.983824	0.473899	0.460742	0.113773	0.058026	0.227585
3	0.661501	0.736824	0.031446	0.098833	0.316296	0.666145	0.519109
4	0.25881	0.236544	0.896183	0.503036	0.87104	0.589475	0.116984
5	0.904341	0.994994	0.997488	0.987198	0.194321	0.257321	0.02204
6	0.624053	0.118268	0.905628	0.438695	0.426974	0.087735	0.886442
7	0.55667	0.585098	0.641983	0.3625	0.592023	0.325383	0.083928
8	0.761033	0.823802	0.835255	0.005388	0.229137	0.886851	0.705277
9	0.56329	0.750393	0.938874	0.808383	0.881313	0.67105	0.882083
10	0.228153	0.309354	0.854447	0.07619	0.643704	0.315939	0.592026
11	0.59861	0.545791	0.181897	0.186534	0.745354	0.579655	0.660058
12	0.266234	0.3913	0.499589	0.068056	0.169173	0.081578	0.478332
13	0.284914	0.80185	0.163534	0.800998	0.309285	0.466925	0.76238
14	0.117698	0.840751	0.268486	0.619385	0.411368	0.476206	0.58002
15	0.538985	0.310418	0.199153	0.218614	0.853709	0.658694	0.830359
16	0.039963	0.091965	0.600275	0.811158	0.55083	0.769772	0.61263
17	0.425031	0.779224	0.466699	0.166077	0.570881	0.649457	0.627798
18	0.494754	0.255134	0.839512	0.081042	0.946872	0.977871	0.640088
19	0.947938	0.476544	0.510779	0.278379	0.509475	0.313427	0.519749
20	0.194208	0.114708	0.675572	0.016767	0.121426	0.103828	0.695858
21	0.661725	0.096717	0.60016	0.123308	0.117602	0.685178	0.088468
22	0.456679	0.69114	0.684697	0.413191	0.115363	0.403036	0.997365
23	0.723686	0.935952	0.690756	0.744369	0.089407	0.682228	0.634916
24	0.752977	0.104511	0.863222	0.202238	0.868824	0.302118	0.401282
25	0.416903	0.417635	0.706305	0.657853	0.495606	0.629733	0.497094
26	0.208381	0.233181	0.640189	0.525273	0.084899	0.431994	0.221197

These factors are helpful for understanding the inner correlation among the variables. Factor 0 indicates Personal background, Factor 1 indicates Current state, and Factor 2 suggests effects in decision making. Factor 3 can be identified as perception about media, Factor 4 includes Psychological state affected by media, Factor 5 is Media freedom and Factor 6 is having the variables of Views towards other countries. We can now construct a structural equation model to understand the dynamics among these factors.

Structural equation model (SEM)

Structural equation modelling is one of the most popular methodologies in quantitative social data analytics. Structural equation modelling (SEM) is a methodology for representing, estimating, and testing a network of relationships between variables both measured variables and latent constructs. It also estimates both the strength of each relationship and the overall accuracy of the model.

We need to do confirmatory factor analysis to verify that the measurement model is consistent for SEM. We have developed the factors in the previous section. As we have reached confidence in our measurement model, our structural model is constructed by representing all of the factors.

Table 5

Relationship			Estimate	S.E.	P-value
Factor 0		Factor 3	.061	.015	.005
Factor 1		Factor 3	-.189	.030	< 0.001
Factor 3		Factor 4	-.050	.026	0.060
Factor 3		Factor 5	.306	.237	.202
Factor 2		Factor 3	-.073	.048	.133
Factor 6		Factor 3	-1.686	.487	< 0.001
Factor 0		Factor 5	.109	.379	.202

From the table, we can see that Personal background, current state and effects in decision making has strong relationship regarding media perception. On the other hand, media perception has direct relation with media freedom. Views towards other countries also regulated the perception towards media perception. Factor three that includes variables for the news websites published more updated news on COVID-19 than mainstream media (TV, Radio & Newspaper), media has played a significant role in forming and influencing people's attitudes on COVID and how to prepare for it, media has helped in building public awareness on COVID-19 among the different classes of peoples and necessary content on mainstream media influences Factor four which includes that news media that have exaggerated fear, anxiety and risks associated with the virus, effect of mental state reading newspapers, trust on social media, influence of social media vs mainstream media.

Limitations

Different study methods have different strengths and weaknesses. At this study, 'Google Form' platform was used to customize and collect data. Due to COVID-19 Pandemic we were unable to conduct a door to door survey and face-to-face interviews. The Purposive sampling technique was applied to distribute survey questionnaires through the networks of the researchers. Different online platforms were used as convenient channels to gather information. As a result, underprivileged or vulnerable groups may not have been able to join the survey.

A total (n=392) joined this online survey. Though there were different professionals who participated in the survey, the sample of the study was mostly dominated by male participants. The 392 respondents were coming from different geographical locations, educational attainment, professions, ages, religions and living with urban & rural areas.

Discussion and conclusions

The study was conducted to explore the public perception of the media's role during COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh. The research question posed is what are the various strategies and levels of influences that impact on the Bangladeshi public's information seeking and their ability to deal with the challenges of infodemic amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Media played a vital role in creating a public perception through news coverage. In this case study, the media has played the role of primary gatekeeper of information and knowledge for the common people and creates a relationship between COVID-19 media content and public perception. Audience perception had been created after consuming the different types of news. People made important decisions influenced by media news or information during COVID-19 in Bangladesh.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, people consumed a significant number of various types of news content from different online news portals and social media channels for getting the latest updated information. A large number of people also consumed electronic media as sources of information and news of COVID-19. The media organizations were more active in covering news during COVID-19 than before the virus hit in Bangladesh. After following the news outlets respondents understood the present scenario and impact of COVID-19 in the country. Though people frequently got more updated news from online news portals than mainstream media, still maximum respondents showed their trust in mainstream media as a credible news source. The media outlets produced more interactive content like audio-visual and breaking news that grabbed people's attention and helped to form their perception towards the

media's role. A high number of respondents believed that during the pandemic their overall news consumption rate increased. To get more information and real-time updates news, an impressive number of respondents visited more frequently news portals and social media channels than before the outbreak of Pandemic. The majority of respondents agreed that the media provided authentic and reliable news that influenced people's attitude on COVID-19 and increased knowledge of preventive public health measures.

To achieve the final objective of this study which was to find out the interplay and relationship between the COVID-19 media content and public perception. The results revealed that media coverage affects the public perception. Media provided various content which is related to COVID-19 information, update news and awareness related messages. This is exactly like how the news media were responsible for making up people's minds, influenced and motivated them to make decisions during COVID-19. Media positively helped people taking preventive health issues, rational thinking, increasing awareness on COVID-19 in detail, identifying the factors influencing decisions. The media has managed creating a positive role by objectively delivering information on COVID-19 because of publishing frequently updated news, different types of contents, awareness related online campaigns, and sharing preventive health information. gender and educational attainment also indicated a significant connection between public perception and media's role during COVID-19.

In terms of how this study's results compare to previous academic research, there are some similarities and differences. Given the respondents' attitudes and perceptions towards the mass media and the content, it departs from journalists' self-perceived idealised Western understanding of authenticity, accountability and autonomy (Hayes et al., 2007). In fact, it more closely follows Mellado's (2015) role of loyal facilitator (to the authorities). The result has been a displacement in the relational interactions between journalists and their audiences, which has been noted in previous research (Vos et al., 2019). However, as noted by Sadaf (2011), media can still play a role in influencing audiences and society. This is the case, given the respondents answers on this matter. This is seen in this instance within the context of the pandemic crisis in this case study, the mass media audience is not passive consumer of the larger dynamics of social and institutional structure, but also an active participant in the events covered and their interpretation. This has clear implications in this study, especially during a period of the simultaneous challenges of information overload and informational uncertainty. This influences trust, an important and key element, during informational uncertainty, which also prompts information seeking during periods of elevated risk.

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COVID-19 public discourse in Russia: Semantic mapping¹

Olga Smirnova²

Galina Denissova

Anna Gladkova

Sofia Steblovskaya

Alina Antipova

Lomonosov Moscow State University, Russia

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Abstract

The objective of the study was to analyze the representation and characteristics of most relevant semantic categories in COVID-related memes using semantic mapping strategies as well as to describe interconnected spheres in semantic fields and possible shifts in meanings to assess every mem of the sample. The article represents one of the stages in complex research of ethnocultural and psychological features of media content and its perception in internet memes. The perception of COVID-related internet memes by young audience in Russia and China and visual features of the content were tested at previous stages (Denissova et al., 2021; Smirnova et al., 2020; Smirnova & Denissova, 2021). The article treats internet memes as samples of creolized texts. This topic was chosen due to its key significance. The fact that internet memes are monothematic in content makes it possible to identify the differences in a number of characteristics more effectively. In this paper, we consider internet memes a specific type of messages in the network, combining short captions of different genres and semiotic nature that reveal topical issues. Thus, due to

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² Corresponding author:

Olga Smirnova, Lomonosov Moscow State University, Faculty of Journalism, 9, Mokhovaya st, Moscow, Russia.

Email: smirnovaorama@gmail.com

the capacity of semantic content and visual image memes obtain viral nature and great intensity of informational impact. Creolized memes were selected for the analysis, since we assumed that it is the memes of this type that fulfil such important tasks in communication process as organizing communication and exerting influence.

Keywords

COVID-19, Russia, internet memes, pandemic discourse, semantic mapping, semantic shift.

Introduction

COVID-19 pandemic has brought dramatic changes to all spheres of human life. These changes triggered an immediate response from the media including social media which went on posting up-to-date information about this most relevant issue and among other things users' reactions revealed in internet memes (Pestova & Safonov, 2020). This new challenge has demonstrated novel aspects in global and national contexts (Gladkova, 2017; Vartanova et al., 2020; Vartanova & Gladkova, 2020, 2021). Researchers note that media responsibility is to help scientifically regulate 'anti-epidemic' (Baowei & Xinning, 2020), and that 'pandemic messages' are critical in terms of both theoretical and practical value (Fang & Haochen, 2020). Some researchers, for example, Mikhail Epshtejn, interpret the spread of 'memes' as one of the main functions of a language (Epshtejn, 2006), hence the importance of studying various aspects of the content and functioning of memes in pandemic public discourse is also an issue of great importance. 'Creolized memes' (Kartashova & Akhmedzianova, 2019; Sorokin & Tarasov, 1990) were selected for the analysis, as this particular type of memes exerts influence in terms of correlation between visual and verbal components mostly caught in captions that reflect the main idea of the picture.

An invisible threat has visibly altered the world (Freeman, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic is a worldwide crisis that has entailed a global transformation and rethinking of established social practices. It is regarded by the researchers worldwide as unprecedented health crisis that has permeated all aspects of human society (Wiggins, 2021). Anthropologists say that the virus has affected humanity so much that the 'Coronocene' might well be as worthy of attention as the 'Anthropocene' (Higgins et al., 2020)

In interdisciplinary humanitarian research (Simons et al, 2021; Wilson et al, 2021; Shi-xu, 2022) we can talk about pandemic discourse that is umbrella research united by a common object, namely, pandemic as well as topics derived

from it. The whole set of life manifestations in the post-pandemic world has been under investigation, starting from the growth of xenophobia and racism (Elias & Ben, 2021; Reny & Barreto, 2020), changes in usual everyday practices, such as a handshake (Oxlund, 2020), semiotics of the mask (Leone, 2021; Silchenko & Visconti, 2021), ending up with the emergence of novel patterns of news use (Broersma & Swart, 2021; Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2021), the use of social networks (Das, 2021) and changes in educational systems (Vartanova et al., 2020; Schwartzman, 2020).

In today's world there are many projects concerning Pandemic Public Discourse, for example, 'The UK COVID-19 news and information project' at the University of Oxford which starting in October 2020 studies how the British society navigates information and misinformation about coronavirus and the way the government and other institutions are responding to the pandemic (Brennen et al., 2020; Nielsen, et al., 2021). Russian researchers, social anthropologists from the 'Monitoring of Contemporary Folklore' group on the basis of the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration, members of the expert community of the Yandex.Q platform, are conducting the research 'Infodemia in the era of coronavirus' based on the statistics of search queries (Arkhipova et al., 2020). COVID-19 pandemic, which led to social media communication crisis (London, 2021), became the reason why healthy skepticism has been replaced with conspiracy absence of theory (Wiggins, 2021).

Pandemic-related memes dedicated to its specific manifestations have become an important part of the media agenda: 'Internet memes offer insight into ongoing trends in the public's perceptions of pandemics' (Al-Rawi et al., 2021). Their place in social networks (Gl veanu & de Saint Laurent, 2021) and the nature of humor, which makes the meme creative (Cancelas-Ouvi a, 2021; Hussein & Aljamili, 2021; Smirnova & Denisova 2021) are the issues for current research.

In the study of memes dedicated to the pandemic the text of memes as such has not been under the study yet, though it is the caption of meme that serves the function of perceptual extraction of areas that are key for attention focusing, sharing, and outliving. It is the analysis of texts from memes of different periods that makes it possible to see the dynamics of the use of certain words and draw conclusions on which elements social reflection is built around.

So, the issue of particular importance within this study is the way discursive practice reflects the relationship between specific creolized texts and social practice of their occurrence and usage. In similar frameworks long-term

changes in meanings are widely considered in scientific literature. However, socio-cultural perspective that is vulnerable to short-term drifts remains less investigated (Martinc et al., 2019).

COVID-related specific word sets in memes tend to be very reflective representing novel terminology that seems to be very sensitive to any changes in global pandemic situation, thus, revealing a vast domain for research into the possible semantic changes if analyzed in temporal perspective.

Currently, traditional approach to semantic change in meaning is aimed at detecting the arising changes as well as on classifying them (Traugott, 2017). At the same time, the patterns of semantic change are usually observed separately from a much broader context of their usage. However, language of creolized texts represents a specific type of communicative activity which is highly dependent on contextual and metacontextual parameters, including both the type of discourse and socio-cultural environment. The general mechanism of semantic change can be to some extent inferred from the laws of common mental changes in the population under investigation. Most recent research in the field has focused rather to reveal the pragmatic factors, leading to semantic shifts than to describe the essence of such changes.

Cognitive linguists often approach semantic shift as a reflection or projection of the socio-physical world on the processes of reasoning (Sweetser, 1990). The core postulate of this approach states that words have no set meaning, i.e., they only evoke some meaning and serve as clues to the potential notion, as instructions to meaning reconstruction in the contextual field (Paradis, 2011). These meanings are non-discrete and can be described in a set of prototypical features with core and peripheral areas. Representing reflections of ‘conceptual organization, categorization principles, processing mechanisms, and experiential and environmental influences’ linguistic meaning has a perspectivization function (Geeraerts & Cuyckens, 2007). This approach was deeply theoretically elaborated in the philosophical, epistemological position taken by Cognitive Linguistics (Lakoff, 2008).

Semantic shift is often triggered by the change in language conventions within the group of speakers. This process is deeply rooted in socio-cultural and discursive practices as well as in the other paralinguistic factors. For instance, developing the system of key-words analysis (Wierzbicka, 2006) reveals not only the trends in lexicon along with the change in cultural schemas, but also the way lexical meaning evolves reflecting and promoting cultural change.

Key words reflect the worldview and attitude to certain historical, social, and political issues. Key words are significant in description of a particular historical

moment since they most objectively represent the life of the period under study. Keywords have been studied in a number of perspectives, e.g., linguistic-specific concepts of language (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2013; Wierzbicka, 1997). Short digital textual forms such as twits, comments and the like have now become very relevant forming a new database for pure keyword analysis free from superfluous textual bodies.

Creolized meme texts very well fit into keyword analyzing paradigm. Emerging quickly and spreading over specific groups virally they give the opportunity to disclose tiny changes in social perception of specific historical, political, or even global circumstances based on catchy and refined captions.

Together with that the 20th century has brought into practice profound research focused on semantic fields which include interconnected sets of lexical units. The idea of long-term changes in semantic space was described in the studies of terminology development (Kay, 1975; Williams, 1976). These studies set the scene for systematic analysis of prolonged periods of specific word usage and on vast databases or corpora that may be described statistically and semantically. Though there is a need for new methodological approaches aimed at analyzing smaller text samples with less but more relevant data to grasp short-term shifts in constantly changing historical periods as the one we are experiencing at the moment due to COVID-19 pandemic spread.

Semantic field is a set of actual linguistic units that have semantic unity: a common seme or group of semes. The lexical-semantic field is divided into three components: core, center, and periphery. However, functional-semantic, or grammatical-lexical fields often overlap and diffuse, though, it is possible to distinguish between functional-thematic and functional-semantic which emphasizes that the semantic field is not determined in general language, but rather appear in a certain language material. If the research material is represented as a text or a group of texts, functional-textual fields that do not differ from the linguistic ones in essence are identified, though they often differ from the linguistic field in the composition of the core and the periphery.

Semantic mapping also represents a suitable instrument for semantic change research. Developed as visual representations of interconnections in different concept (Croft, 2001), abstract maps can help to identify related meanings and to assess the extent of their similarity (van der Auwera, 2013). Moreover, they can be interpreted as references to close semantic clusters.

Research of semantic shift also engages the analysis of collocations, the relation between words or lexical groups that coincide in the text. As the 20th century saw an immense increase in the availability of historical digital corpora,

research into semantic shift gained some new approaches to the data processing. A pull of innovative methodologies was elaborated to explain semantic changes as a motivated construct (Allan & Robinson, 2012). As well as to apply the research of shifts to practice. These methodologies widely support that a great proportion of change occurs in minor segments that can be observed in clusters of textual shifts in collocations.

Computer-mediated statistical approaches to corpora analysis involve the investigation of collocates and co-occurring units in various contexts. Thus, shifts in collocations reflect the change in meaning if regarded in ‘diachronic collostructional analysis’ (Hilpert, 2008).

Thus, semantic shift or change is often associated with the long-term processes in the structure of meaning of a lexeme. Though, it is also possible to interpret semantic shift as a phenomenon, manifested in language during short time spans (Newman, 2015). Keyword paradigm states the relevance of short creolized texts in the analysis of short-term shifts that may be revealed in memes chosen purposefully according to some specified parameters such as distinct time or topic.

Method and approach

The research period was April-2020-June-2021. The sample included internet memes on COVID-19 pandemic, which were manually selected by the group of graduate students of the Faculty of Journalism of Lomonosov Moscow State University. Memes were selected from the feed of those social networks of the Russian internet sector, where the students had real accounts.

Memes field was taken for COVID-discourse study for its quick and spontaneous representation of people’s reactions. Different news and events, connected with COVID-agenda, and its memes-reflection often took place almost at the same time. Memes clearly reveal what exactly Russian society tends to worry about and how exactly it copes with frustration by creating memes. Also, memes fixate slightest semantic shifts, which occur in time. That is why memes-field research seems to be highly productive when speaking about Pandemic-discourse.

The sample was created according to a number of categories, including: relevance to the topic, type of meme (creolized meme), language etc. The first half of the memes belong to the first pandemic ‘wave’ (April-June 2020), the collection of the second half coincided with the deterioration of the epidemiological situation in Russia and the ‘third wave’ (May-June 2021). The total sample was N=1000.

The next procedure was carried out to isolate the verbal part of memes

for further frequency and semantic analysis. Every meme caption was taken as a whole and given its serial number. The database of meme captions that has formed a unique corpus of COVID-related slogans was then used in a set of procedures, performed with the help Natural Language Processing (NLP) algorithms created specifically as the novel method for meme analysis carried out in our study.

The overall idea of our research was to perform the so-called text mining, i.e., the process of deriving meaningful information from natural language text. The mining is the process of retrieving high quality information that is impossible without specialized technologies and can't give relevant results in the form of classical content analysis done by an expert or even a group of experts.

NLP is a significant component of text mining that makes it possible to spell out the equivocality of meme captions based on such procedures as automatic summarization, part-of-speech tagging, disambiguation, and chunking.

The first series of NLP in our study was tokenization that involved three steps. Using special algorithms captions were (1) broken down into words, not just separating one from another but (2) accounting for the weight of every word with respect to the sentence. Finally, there is an opportunity to teach the system to (3) produce a structural description on an input sentence so that it may be split into tokens including words, punctuation marks and all other elements of natural written language. The next series combined stemming and lemmatization. Stemming is the process of comparing every word to its linguistic root and clustering all stem words. Lemmatization is a similar process of clustering though it considers not flexions, but word forms of different roots like, for instance, 'think-thought' in English. Lemmatization helps organize the corpus neglecting repetitions of the same semantic categories that are not relevant for the following semantic cloud formation. We have decided to use only base forms as a slice of contemporary and up-to-date agenda of the investigated period to show several categories: the main nominal notions of the time, the main actions associated with COVID-19 and other meaningful characteristics that may show attitude towards the other two previously mentioned groups that may add shades of meanings to the semantic fields we were going to obtain. Thus, the next series was based on figuring out and extracting tokens unnecessary for our study, i.e., stop words: prepositions, conjunctions, punctuation marks and the like.

After refining the text to have a renewed corpus of base categories the procedure of comparative frequency analysis was performed. The analysis of frequencies is one of the most relevant statistical methods to figure out the

co-occurrence of words within two or more time-specific contexts. There are certain limitations as it usually demands bigger data samples. Nevertheless, in our research we planned to show short-term shifts in meanings that are very difficult to capture, so we have made a supposition that comparing even small discrepancies in frequency of particular lemma use would reveal the dynamics of changes in social perception of COVID-related phenomena. To demonstrate this change a delta-value was added to experimental design that shows frequency differences in word occurrence throughout two periods under investigation.

Results

Frequency analysis revealed the most relevant notions for both periods. The highest scores, namely 50 top key words were taken as the core for semantic field structure. For April-June 2020 consider *Table 1*. For May-June 2021 consider *Table 2*.

Table 1
COVID-19 internet memes' semantic core (April-June 2020)

Word in Russian	English equivalent	Occurrence frequency
каранти́н	quarantine	102
ко́рона́вирус	coronavirus	80
день	day	42
Ната́ша	Natasha	36
дом	house	34
это	this	29
маска	mask	28
время	time	20
человек	human	19
ви́рус	virus	19
самоизоля́ция	self-isolation	18
рука	arm	18
сидеть	sit	17
бумага	paper	16
гречка	buckwheat	16
Китай	China	16
мир	peace	15
неделя	week	15
весь	whole	14
выйти	go out	13
туалетный	toilet	13
работа	job	12
COVID-19	COVID-19	12
год	year	11
первый	first	11
делать	do	11
быть	be	10
мочь	be able	10
мы	we	10
лицо	face	10
выходить	get out	10
Россия	Russia	9
твой	yours	9
ваш	your	9
месяц	month	9
бо́яться	be afraid	9
антисептик	antiseptic	9
корона	korona	8
просто	simply	8
ты	you	8
друг	friend	8
работать	work	8
давать	give	8
думать	think	8
вставать	get up	8
школа	school	8
ковид	COVID	7
хотеть	want	7
свой	own	7
мой	my	7

Table 2
COVID-19 internet memes' semantic core (May-June 2021)

Word in Russian	English equivalent	Occurrence frequency
Коронавирус	coronavirus	104
вакцина	vaccine	90
это	this	41
маска	mask	41
год	year	32
человек	human	28
карантина	quarantine	23
день	day	22
ковид	COVID	22
вирус	virus	19
новый	new	19
работа	Job	17
первый	first	17
делать	do	16
COVID	COVID	15
быть	be	15
хотеть	want	15
сделать	do	15
мир	peace	14
свой	own	14
Россия	Russia	13
мочь	be able	12
корона	korona	12
видеть	see	12
время	time	11
весь	whole	11
просто	simply	11
мой	my	11
тест	test	11
который	which	11
Москва	Moscow	11
дом	house	10
твой	yours	10
знать	know	10
сегодня	today	9
пойти	go	9
должный	due	9
Собянин	Sobyanin	9
удалёнка	distant (udalenka)	9
июнь	June	9
ты	you	8
друг	friend	8
носить	wear	8
улица	street	8
страна	country	8
смотреть	watch	8
наш	our	8
россиянин	Russian	8
Путин	Putin	8
мы	we	7

Among the key words we find some specific Russian phenomena. In the April-June 2020 period we should mention ‘Natasha’ – a common Russian female name, addressing to which became a core of meme-serial, as well as ‘buckwheat’ – traditional Russian foodstuff, which has been sold out in the beginning of the quarantine. As for the May-June 2021 period ‘Sobyanin’ can be marked – a Moscow mayor, whose QR-activism and QR-proliferation lobby caused plenty of social reaction, captured in many memes.

Semantic mapping helps visualize the image of the cores and may be viewed as the illustration of the first and third COVID-19 waves. For April-June 2020 consider *Figure 1*. For May-June 2021 consider *Figure 2*.

Figure 1

COVID-19 semantic image of the first wave (April-June 2020)

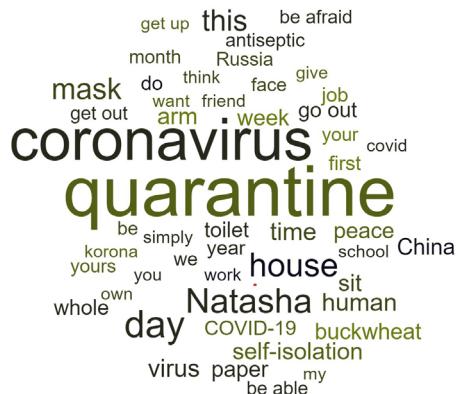
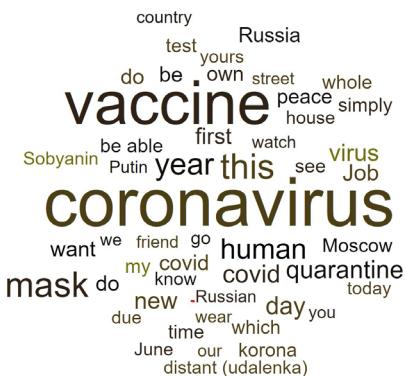


Figure 2

COVID-19 semantic image of the third wave (May-June 2021)



Delta-value in the study shows slight shifts in occurrence frequencies of common words. Negative delta-values reveal words that emerged more often in the first COVID-19 wave if compared to the third one. Positive delta-values, on the contrary show inverse relationships. Delta-value is an artificial parameter that is based on the percentage contribution of a single word into the corpus. Thus, it is a tiny figure that is not as relevant as mathematical value though proves the existence and the dynamics of short-term shifts in word use. To analyze data values, we have decided to make the images of changes on the basis of negative and positive delta scores and illustrate the discrepancies visually. For words that contributed more to the first COVID-19 wave (April-June 2020) in comparison to the third one (May-June 2021) consider *Figure 3*. For words that contributed more to the third COVID-19 wave (May-June 2021) in comparison to the first one (April-June 2020) consider *Figure 4*.

Figure 3
COVID-19 first wave top key word comparative image

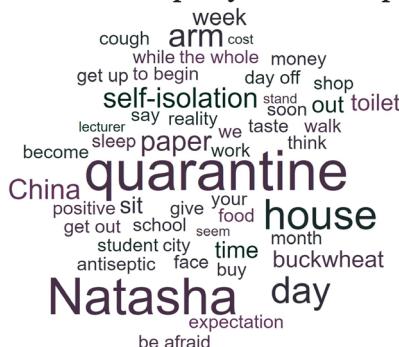
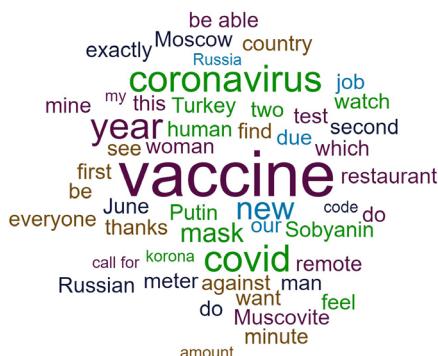


Figure 4
COVID-19 third wave top key word comparative image



'Quarantine' is a central notion of a COVID-19 first wave and other key words are closely connected with it: staying at home, self-isolation, terms ('time', 'soon', 'day', 'month', 'week', 'day off'). People faced acute social frustration, which was comprehended, at least partially, in memes. Another line is new on-line studying experience ('student', 'lecturer', 'sleep'). Also new sanitary standards comprehension is marked in such key words as 'arm', 'face', 'anticeptic', 'cough'. 'Vaccine' is a main notion of a COVID-19 third wave, as well as Turkey air communication renewal and Sobyanin's restaurant codes.

Conclusion

In the research above a new methodological approach and particular NLP designs were used to analyze creolized texts of most popular memes that emerged as the reflection of social perception of COVID-19 pandemic in two extreme time periods: COVID-19 first and third waves correspondingly. Top semantic units and whole semantic groups were identified and described in the form of semantically mapped fields that may be the illustration of both periods under consideration. The following procedure helped objectify the textual part of memes and study it more profoundly. The semantic core of the most frequent lexical units was formed to reflect the lexical rating of categories connected with COVID-19 pandemic influence on internet meme development. Together with that a new approach to short-term semantic shift detection has been proposed and approved showing tiny but significant changes in specific lexical contribution to the perception of global categories such as COVID-19 and its co-related characteristics.

The conducted frequency analysis led to some relevant conclusions:

Comparing even small discrepancies in frequency of particular lemma use helps to reveal the dynamics of changes in social perception of COVID-related phenomena. To demonstrate this change a delta-value was added to experimental design that shows frequency differences in word occurrence throughout two periods under investigation. Among the key words we find some specific Russian phenomena. 'Quarantine' is a central notion of a COVID-19 first wave and other key words are closely connected with it. 'Vaccine' is a main notion of a COVID-19 third wave. Delta-value in the study showed slight shifts in occurrence frequencies of common words. Negative delta-values revealed words that emerged more often in the first COVID-19 wave if compared to the third one. Positive delta-values, on the contrary put on view inverse relationships. The representation of perceptual categories revealed in key word blocks demonstrate semantic peculiarities of the verbal part of memes in terms of serving a compensatory

function for the Russian audiences, helping them overcome negative experiences through being involved in relevantly light content and creative form reducing negative effects of self-isolation, restricted freedom of action, and the lack of face-to-face communication. The results confirmed the thesis that language of creolized texts represents a specific type of communicative activity which is highly dependent on contextual and metacontextual parameters, including both the Pandemic discourse and socio-cultural environment. The key words as well reflect the specific Russian historical, social, and political issues. Pandemic discourse key words described the very particular historical moment and the life of Russian people at the different period. Semantic mapping helps visualize the image of the cores and may be viewed as the illustration of the first and third COVID-19 waves in Russia.

Methodological approach underlying the study is novel for social media that demands quick response to constant agenda changes. Its development seems promising in the sphere of big textual data analysis especially when short-term dynamics of semantic contextual structures influences general representation and overall image of an essential topic such as pandemic. This new methodological approach aimed at analyzing smaller text samples with less but more relevant data to grasp short-term shifts in constantly changing COVID-19 pandemic spread periods seems to be quite effective and can be used in other research areas in the future.

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News consumption patterns during the coronavirus pandemic across time and devices: The Cyprus case

Paschalia (Lia) Spyridou¹

Christos Danezis

Cyprus University of Technology, Cyprus

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Abstract

The coronavirus pandemic sparked a renewed interest in news consumption patterns. When major crises occur, people experience an increasing need for information and sense-making; given the extraordinary impact of this health crisis on people's social and work life, relevant work support a 'rally around the news' effect, news fatigue and news avoidance, doomscrolling and a trend toward mainstream and trusted news outlets. This study explored how the coronavirus pandemic shaped news consumption patterns in Cyprus. The results show that news use hit record levels at the onset of the crisis, followed by corona news fatigue in the following months. Increased news consumption levels and greater engagement with the news were recorded again in the last couple of months of 2020 when the second wave of the pandemic hit Cyprus. Direct traffic to widely used and trusted sources doubled while a crisis boosting effect on mobile access to the detriment of computers was recorded.

Keywords

News consumption; news use; news fatigue, news avoidance, doomscrolling, Cyprus.

Introduction

Within a constantly evolving news media ecosystem the coronavirus pandemic apart from being a public health emergency comprises a communications crisis

¹ Corresponding author:

Paschalia (Lia) Spyridou, Cyprus University of Technology, Archiepiskopou Kyprianou 30, Limassol 3036, Cyprus.
Email: l.spyridou@cut.ac.cy

(Lewis, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic created an unprecedented situation for journalism severely affecting the economic and labour situation of many news outlets around the world (Nielsen, Cherubini & Andi, 2020; Posetti, Bell & Brown, 2020). In their book *Critical incidents in journalism*, Tandoc et al. (2021) consider COVID-19 a pivotal moment for journalism for triggering deep reconsideration of its practice and boundaries. In the context of this crisis, academic work has shown a renewed interest in news consumption patterns (see Nielsen et al., 2020; Van Aelst et al., 2021). News consumption is a central aspect of everyday life in modern societies (Thompson, 1995) enabling citizens to comprehend and analyse social reality. In the present situation of the coronavirus pandemic, news consumption also pertains to understanding the disease itself and being aware of preventive steps and actions taken by governments (Fletcher et al., 2020). When major crises occur, people experience an increasing need for information and sense-making (Lowrey, 2004); more specifically, the perception of threat boosts the rate of news consumption and interpersonal communication (*ibid*). Westlund and Gheretti (2015) found that during a crisis, people experience a need for additional information ‘turning both daily and more seldom users into news omnivores’. However, it is argued that information needs may vary depending on the nature of the crisis; sudden and acute crises create a need for immediate news about safety, whilst slowly evolving economic crises or insidious epidemics call for in depth information on underlying causes and long-term consequences. However, the peculiarity of the coronavirus pandemic seems to have created a need for both: people experienced growing informational needs about the immediate dangers of this ‘external threat’ while looking for a deeper understanding of the virus and its impact on society (Bento et al. 2020; Van Aelst et al., 2021).

There is ample evidence pointing to increased news consumption during unexpected events, yet some countries are understudied. This study examines how people in Cyprus consumed news during the first and second phase of the coronavirus pandemic and sheds light how the evolution of this health crisis shaped news consumption, and what the trends identified might reveal about broader patterns of news use.

Patterns of news consumption in a high-choice media environment during crises

In today’s high-choice media environment, people can access news via diverse media channels and platforms. Legacy media no longer enjoy the monopoly of news production and distribution as the presence of multiple players in the

news media ecosystem modify traditional relations of power (Chadwick, 2013) and create conditions of hyper-competition for audience attention (Myllylahti, 2020). With abundant media choice, people's demands have become increasingly important in determining how people consume news (Napoli, 2011). Such fundamental developments have marked a renewed interest in news consumption patterns.

Literature on news consumption revolves around three main threads of inquiry. The first one is based on the news-knowledge-democracy nexus. The assumption behind this normative perspective is that in order for citizens to comprehend social reality and make informed decisions they need a substantial amount of accurate, relevant and explanatory news (Schudson, 2008). From this perspective 'a **HEALTHY** news media is often claimed to be the life-blood of democracy' (Fenton, 2016, p.81). Despite long-standing and widespread criticism about the quality of news offered to the public, research suggests that the effects of news media use on knowledge and participation are rather 'virtuous' (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006). Recent work (Woodstock, 2014) found that even in the case of 'news resisters', who purposefully endorse habits of limited news consumption, there is a positive correlation between news use and meaningful political participation. However, not all media seem to have a beneficial effect in terms of knowledge gain; while traditional and online news outlets contribute to higher levels of knowledge on political affairs, social media have no or even negative effects on political or current affairs knowledge (Beckers et al., 2020).

The second strand of research focuses on news habits (see LaRose, 2010); in this case, scholars attempt to investigate the cues, both external (e.g. time, events) and eternal (e.g. mood, goals) that lead to habit acquisition, habit activation and reformation. In this vein, Broesma and Swart (2021) explored how COVID-19 affected news habits; they conclude a continuum of news use ranging from 'news avoiders' to 'news 'junkies''. The stability of people's everyday life during the pandemic reinforced existing habits, whilst exposure to social cues increased news consumption. The level of stress people encountered during the pandemic had diverging effects. For frequent news users and news junkies increased stress levels resulted in a bigger intake of news. For followers turned avoiders the stress they experienced had the opposite effect. Finally, dissatisfaction with journalism led to avoiding news use.

News avoidance is a growing phenomenon; an important distinction is made between intentional avoidance which is a conscious and active choice and unintentional which is the result of one's relative preference for other content vis-à-vis news (Skovgaard & Andersen, 2020). Discussions on news avoidance bring

to the fore larger questions regarding factors affecting news use. Trust (Andersen et al. 2021) and interest (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2017) in news have been found as strong predictors of news consumption. Conversely, negative and depressive news content causing feelings of anxiety and powerlessness has a negative correlation with news consumption (Kalogeropoulos, 2017). Recent studies on news consumption during the COVID-19 pandemic provide evidence for two main trends in news use which are closely related with claims for a dominant negative narrative emphasizing statistics of infected, hospitalized and deceased, collapsing health systems and drastic counter-pandemic measures. On one hand, findings (Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2021) confirm previous studies that during crises people depend on news to satisfy their need for orientation and sense-making and increase their intake of news; additionally, the severity of the health crisis along with negative coverage are said to have contributed to the phenomenon of ‘doomscrolling’ which is defined as ‘the act of consuming an endless procession of negative online news, to the detriment of the scroller’s mental wellness’ (*ibid*, 2). On the other hand, negativity, repetitive reporting and information overload make some people feel overwhelmed and emotionally drained and thus choose to switch off from the news or avoid it overall (Nguyen et al., 2021).

The third, and most recent strand of research, concerns how people access the news. Obviously, this add-on to scholarly work relates to technological and structural changes of the news ecosystem and the concomitant changes in news consumption patterns creating ‘a critically important area for future research’ (Westlund, 2013). The shift to mobile devices is steadily increasing widening the gap between mobiles and computers (Newman et al., 2018). As mobile news consumption increases, so do concerns of ‘snacking’ or ‘grazing’ on the news connoting that people use their mobile devices to grab bits of news here and there (Molyneux, 2018). Push notifications used to attract news consumers are shown to create an incidental, sometimes serendipitous, news exposure (Stroud et al., 2020).

Data and methods

This study attempts to explore how the coronavirus pandemic affected news consumption in Cyprus. More specifically, the aim is to investigate the (changing) usage of news consumption in terms of a) traffic, b) acquisition channels (e.g. direct traffic, search engines, social media), and c) the devices used to access the news.

In order to explore how consumption usage evolved during the pandemic in Cyprus we retrieved data from the market leader of the online news publishers

in the country. According to statistics published by the Cyprus Online Publishers Association (COPA), Sigmalive (<https://www.sigmalive.com>) leads the market; in March 2020, Sigmalive ranked first with 2,4m unique visitors and 36m page views (COPA, 2020).

Table 1
Ranking of news websites, March 2020

MEMBERS	PARENT	UNIQUE VISITORS	VAR %	PAGEVIEWS	VISITS			SOCIAL MEDIA TRAFFIC %	AVERAGE MINUTES PER VISIT
					'DESK %	MOB. %	TOTAL		
SIGMALIVE.COM	Sigmalive (p)	2.402.289	68,15.	36.001.231	19,17	80,81	13.978.505	23,56	05:30
PHILENEWS.COM	philenews.com (p)	2.047.728	91,32.	23.391.183	18,17	81,83	8.141.106	23,93	04:07
CYPRUSTIMES.COM	McMedia (p)	1.397.791	77,68.	19.982.793	12,28	87,72	5.003.482	47,09	03:56
OFFSITE	Digital Tree (p)	1.150.095	78,36.	10.468.912	10,48	89,50	3.489.092	44,79	02:00
REPORTER.COM.CY	lmh (p)	1.055.737	65,99.	19.285.052	22,83	77,17	6.646.669	48,30	02:34
IN-CYPRUS.COM	philenews.com (p)	1.039.553	216,69.	3.694.967	9,79	90,21	2.352.305	12,79	01:22
ALPHANEWS.LIVE	Alpha TV Cyprus	982.326	82,63.	4.683.001	9,75	83,80	2.647.415	31,21	02:16
KERKIDA.NET	Digital Tree (p)	728.811	27,18.	14.139.922	14,43	85,57	3.661.709	22,64	04:32
POLITIS.COM.CY	Politis Online (p)	721.489	64,72.	5.197.670	30,02	69,98	2.389.990	27,20	02:38

Source: COPA, 2020

Sigmalive is part of the DIAS Publishing House Ltd which is one of the biggest media groups in Cyprus including traditional and digital media channels, including one television station, one newspaper, two radio stations and a number of magazines and other publications. DIAS operates on the basis of a very competitive convergent newsroom offering extensive coverage of political and current affairs, both national and international. Additionally, Sigmalive is very active on social networks; its Facebook page ranks first among rivals with more than 140.000 page likes (see *Table 2*).

Table 2
Ranking of Facebook pages

Page		Total Page Likes
YOU 1	 Sigmalive	141.8K 
2	 ANT1.com.cy	130.3K 
3	 Phileleftheros ('Ο Φιλέλ...)	127.7K 
4	 Cyprus Times	101.2K 
5	 Reporter	91.4K 
6	 Tothemonline	80.5K 
7	 Offsite Cy	68.8K 
8	 newsbomb.com.cy	59K 
9	 AlphaNews.Live	46.6K 
10	 H Καθημερινή Κύπρου -...	39.8K 

Source: Facebook, 2020

Given the prominent position of Sigmalive in the Cypriot media landscape and the small size² of the country, the data are deemed adequate to reach reasonable conclusions regarding news usage during the pandemic. The data used for the study are retrieved from Google Analytics. Although the market provides a large number of web analytics tools, Google Analytics is used by an

² Cyprus has an estimated population of 888.000 in the Government controlled area (Greek speaking) and 90,8% of individuals aged 16-74 accessed the internet in the first quarter of 2020 (Statistical Service of the Republic of Cyprus, 2020a and 2020b).

estimated 50% of all websites in Cyprus (Built With, 2021) and by all members of the COPA. The application of the snippet code on the websites of the COPA members, and the data provided every month are validated and certified by OJD (Informacion y Control de Puplicaciones) in Spain, which is a third-party Google Analytics expert, and a member of the International Federation of Audit Bureau of Certification (IFABC).

In order to explore the (emerging) patterns of news consumption during the first and second phase of the pandemic, we compared data regarding *Users*, *Sessions* and *Pageviews*, within three periods of time: before the coronavirus pandemic, during its first phase and during its second phase. More specifically, we analysed data regarding the number of users who visited Sigmalive on a day-by-day basis from March 1, 2020 until December 31, 2020; then we compared these findings with data of the same timeframe in 2019.

Measures

- *Users* is a metric that indicates how many users (in practice unique devices) engaged with a website. Every time a device enters a website an identifier called client ID is sent and stored as a first-party cookie in the device of the user. Although the measurement is not totally accurate, for various reasons³, it provides measurement data enabling comparison and reasonable assumptions (Google, a).
- *Sessions* refer to the number of times the total number of users entered (or re-entered) and explored a website. Visits that take place within a 30-minutes period are counted as one session (Google, b).
- *Pageviews* refer to all pages that are loaded (or re-loaded) in the browser of a user. This means that the total number of pageviews, per month for example, amount to the total number of pages that have been loaded (or re-loaded) by the total number of users in every single session they had within this particular month (Google, c). It is important to note that for all members of COPA the auto refresh functionality is permitted only in the cases of the main page and the category pages after ten minutes of inactivity during a session.
- The traffic acquisition channels are presented and compared based on data that measure *Organic Search*, *Direct*, *Social*, *Referral* and *Other acquisition channels*. Users that enter through *organic search* are considered to be those who initially enter a website through search

³ See CLIFTON, B. (2010). *Accuracy whitepaper for web analytics*. Available from: <https://brianclifton.com/pro-lounge-files/accuracy-whitepaper.pdf>

engines (e.g. Google, Bing, Yahoo, Baidu, etc). *Direct traffic* refers to the traffic acquired when users enter the website directly by typing the domain name. *Social traffic*, as the name indicates, is the traffic generated through social media platforms (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc). *Referral* is the traffic achieved through aggregators or any other website that links to any page of the website's domain. The term *Other traffic* in the case of Sigmalive pertains to grouped traffic through various sources from internal linking. The strongest internal linking source is the 'Read More' widget, which uses Artificial Intelligence technology to recommend more news stories to the user in order to continue his/her session, and thus retain the user to the website.

Regarding our final question exploring potential shifts in the devices people used to access the news during the pandemic, we explore data that detect the various types of devices people use to access the news (Mobile, Desktop, Tablet). The aforementioned metrics are compared against a timeline of events (see *Table 3*) compiled by using a) publicly available information regarding COVID-19 from the Cyprus Press and Information Office (PIO), b) data from the most popular articles of Sigmalive, and c) input from journalists that covered the progress of the pandemic in Cyprus.

Table 3
Timeline of events

09/03/2020	The first two COVID-19 cases are detected in Cyprus
10/03/2020	Council of Ministers - Decisions for emergency measures to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus
11/03/2020	The operation of schools is suspended
13/03/2020	A total of 14 COVID-19 cases have been detected in Cyprus
15/03/2020	The President of the Republic of Cyprus addresses the nation following an extraordinary meeting of the Council of Ministers
22/03/2020	The first death in Cyprus due to COVID-19 is announced
23/03/2020	The President of the Republic addresses the public announcing the implementation of a strict lockdown
30/03/2020	The Minister of Health issues new decree under the Quarantine Law Act
10/04/2020	A call centre service for citizens who cannot use the 8998 text messaging service for movement by way of exception is set up
12/04/2020	A sharp rise of COVID-19 cases in China is announced
14/04/2020	12 people are arrested for sharing the same house

15/04/2020	The government puts into effect extraordinary measures to limit the spread of COVID-19 in Citizen Services Centres
19/04/2020	Easter Sunday (Orthodox)
29/04/2020	The President of the Republic addresses the nation announcing a gradual easing of COVID-19 preventive measures
08/05/2020	The President of the Republic addresses the nation announcing the operation of all levels of education
19/05/2020	The Council of Ministers affirms the second phase of restrictions easing with minor modifications
12/10/2020	Further restrictive measures are imposed in Nicosia and Limassol for the next 10 days
22/10/2020	The Council of Ministers decides the implementation of island-wide restrictive measures; stricter in Limassol and Paphos Districts
04/11/2020	The Minister of Health addresses the public to announce extraordinary measures for handling the pandemic
11/11/2020	The President of the Republic addresses the public to offer explanation for the measures decided
27/11/2020	Additional measures are taken to prevent further diffusion of the pandemic
09/12/2020	Further measures are decided to handle diffusion of the coronavirus with effect from 11/12/2020 until 31/12/2020
15/12/2020	A national Vaccination Plan for COVID-19 is decided
29/12/2020	Only permanent residents are allowed in houses; Remote working for public/wider public sector is imposed

Findings

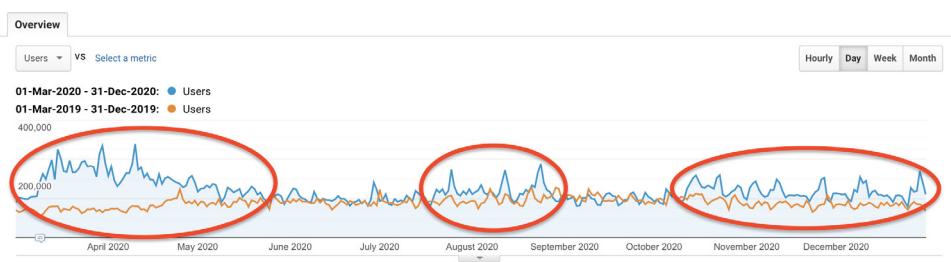
News usage

A first noteworthy observation concerns a significant surge of traffic spotted in three periods of time (see *Graph 1*). More specifically, the first wave of increased traffic is noted at the onset of the crisis in Cyprus which officially began on March 9, 2020 when the first two COVID-19 cases were traced on the island. During March and April traffic peaks, and then gradually fades to reach normal rates in June 2020. Since the first COVID-19 cases were detected in Cyprus a series of events and government decisions took place culminating in a full lockdown in less than two weeks' time. Obviously, as elsewhere, the pandemic itself and the restrictive measures taken to prevent the spread of the coronavirus affected how Cypriots work, lead their everyday lives and communicate (Fuchs, 2021).

News consumption patterns during the coronavirus pandemic across time and devices: The Cyprus case

Graph 1

Number of users who visited Sigmalive per day - Comparison with 2019

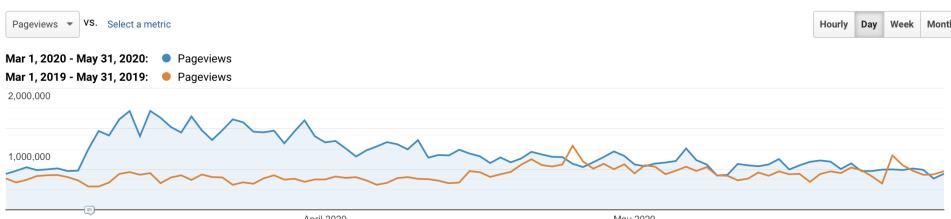
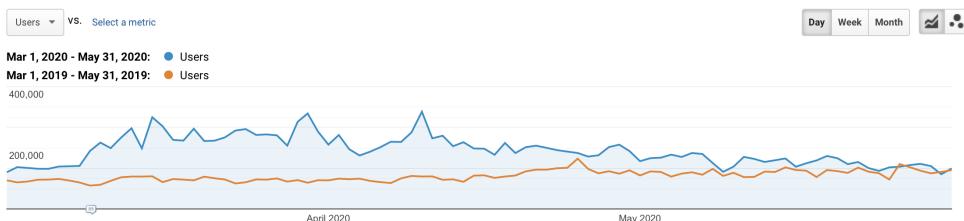


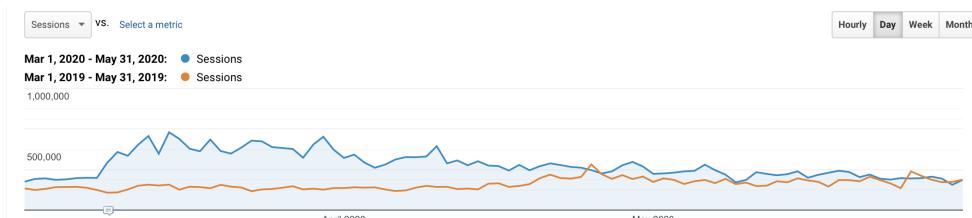
Source: Sigmalive

Taking a closer look at the comparative data between the trimester in question (March-May 2021) (blue line) and the same trimester of the previous year (orange line), a substantial increase is recorded along all three measures: Users, Pageviews and Sessions (see *Graph 2*). In other words, during the pandemic trimester both traffic and engagement were on the rise; not only the number of users increased, but news consumption was greater both in terms of stories read and time spent on the website.

Graph 2

Users, Pageviews and Sessions recorded during the 1st wave of the pandemic – Comparison with 2019





Source: Sigmalive

In order to get a clearer grasp of the increase of Users, we compared each month separately, as in a period of 30 days existing cookies on the users' devices might be purged. This comparison indicates that Users in March and April 2020 more than doubled (see *Table 4*). News usage reached unprecedented rates with the total number of users amounting to approximately 2.402.000; in May the interest in news is still high, yet the steadiness of the pandemic situation resulted in diminished interest in news in comparison to the two previous months.

Table 4

Users per month

	March 2019	March 2020	
Users	1.032.888	2.402.289	↗ 132,58%
	April 2019	April 2020	
Users	1.182.394	2.383.974	↗ 101,62%
	May 2019	May 2020	
Users	1.246.711	1.758.754	↗ 41,07%

Source: Sigmalive

Our results are in line with relevant work (Nielsen et al., 2020; Van Aelst et al., 2021) indicating an overall rise of news use during the first peak of this health crisis, especially in the case of television and online media. The findings also confirm previous studies showing that during crisis which cause feelings of threat and anxiety, media dependency rates go up (Lowrey, 2004) and the use of online media also increase (Westlund & Gersetti, 2015).

The second wave of increased traffic is recorded between mid-July and late August. Two observations are worth mentioning here. First, that the traffic increase is lower compared to the one noted during the first wave. Second, that this increase is not related with COVID-19 news stories. When exploring data pertaining to the most popular news stories driving traffic during this period,

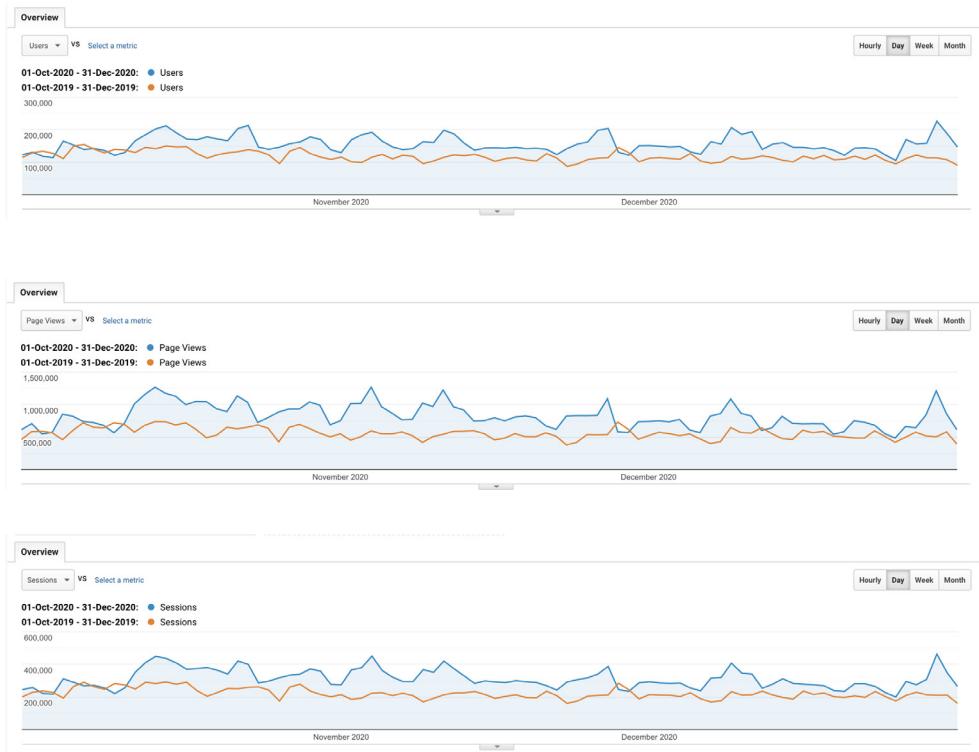
we found that this content was not associated with the coronavirus nor political and economic affairs; rather it concerned more tabloid-style stories about the abandoned country house of a deceased businessman facing criminal charges and two Koreans that sing Greek songs in a talent show in Korea. Such stories resulted in a significant stream of traffic which exceeded the normal rates encountered in the case of Sigmalive.

Our findings confirm previous studies (Newman et al., 2021) showing indications of news fatigue; while many news outlets enjoyed record traffic at the beginning of the pandemic, this heightened interest in news gave way to fatigue in the following months (June-July). Additionally, the findings corroborate with research claiming ‘Corona-fatigue’ due to informational and emotional overload leading people to either dosing their intake of news (Kormelink & Gunnewiek, 2021) or looking for lighter and entertaining topics.

According to our analysis, news fatigue related to the coronavirus was reversed in the case of Cyprus when the second wave of the pandemic hit the country; the data show that traffic towards Sigmalive went up again from mid-October until the end of 2020 as people once again tried to make sense of the worsening situation. Thus, this surge may well be associated with the announcement of new restrictive measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus as rising numbers of COVID-19 cases were recorded in Nicosia and Limassol (Press and Information Office, 2020). A main difference between the first and second phase of the pandemic in Cyprus is the gradual implementation of constraining measures during the second phase as opposed to the sudden and unexampled lockdown imposed in March 2020. This element may explain why during the second phase of the pandemic the increase in traffic is significantly lower compared to the one recorded during the first phase. Yet, overall, all three measures (Users, Sessions, Page Views) are significantly higher when comparing the equivalent pro-pandemic period with this one.

Graph 3

Users, Pageviews and Sessions recorded during the 2nd wave of the pandemic – Comparison with 2019



Source: Sigmalive

More specifically, the percentage of Users increased by more than 40% during the last two months of the year as restrictive measures became gradually stricter and the Christmas holidays were approaching. Taking a closer reading of the data, four observations are worth mentioning. First, the imminent impact of the second wave of the pandemic on people's daily lives renewed their interest in relevant coverage (see *Graph 1*). Second, interest in news and subsequent news usage followed the pace of the virus diffusion and the relevant measures imposed; the more the situation aggravated and the government put restrictions into effect, the more news consumption increased (see *Table 5*). Third, despite the significant increase recorded in both Sessions and Pageviews during the second wave of the pandemic, the overall rise when compared with the pre-pandemic period is smaller than the rise documented during the first wave of the pandemic (see *Table 6*).

Table 5

Users per month

	October 2019	October 2020	
Users	1.402.225	1.714.551	↑ 22,27%
	November 2019	November 2020	
Users	1.192.099	1.718.855	↑ 44,19%
	December 2019	December 2020	
Users	1.289.291	1.807.260	↑ 40,17%

Source: Sigmalive

Table 6

**Comparison of Sessions and Pageviews growth
during the pandemic and 2019**

	Sessions %	Pageviews %
09/03/2020 – 31/05/2020 (1st wave of the pandemic)	↑ 77,43%	↑ 64,47%
19/07/2020 – 26/08/2020	↑ 42,05%	↑ 39,05%
12/10/2020-31/12/2020 (2nd wave of the pandemic)	↑ 46,10%	↑ 52,30%

Source: Sigmalive

Fourth, although the number of Users by month increased less than the first period, the engagement of the Users with the content was higher; when comparing Pageviews per User Session and the Average Session Duration between the two phases, the data show a five and ten percent increase respectively. On the other hand, the Number of Sessions per User remained almost the same (see *Table 7*). Taken together these findings may very well suggest that during the second phase some users started avoiding news or limited their news consumption. This explanation corresponds with previous studies pointing to news avoidance (Damstra et al., 2021) or news resistance (Woodstock, 2014). In the case of the coronavirus health crisis, it seems that the initial shock which drove news traffic high, gave way to reduced news usage mainly as a result of news distrust (Nielsen, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos & Simon, 2020), perceived biased and overwhelmingly negative coverage of the health crisis which made people feel anxious and emotionally drained (Bernal-Trivio, 2020; Ytre-Arne & Moe, (2021)). At the same time, our analysis corroborates with Van Aelst's et al. (2021) findings that avid users of news or people that were concerned about the impact and evolution of the pandemic maintained a high appetite for news.

Table 7

Engagement of Users – Comparison of 1st and 2nd wave of the pandemic

	First wave 1/3/2020- 31/05/202	Second wave 1/10/2020- 31/12/2020	
Pageviews/ Session	2,50	2,64	↑5,38%
Avg Session Duration	00:05:00	00:05:31	↑10,30%
Number of Sessions per User	6,66	6,65	↓0,17%

Source: Sigmalive

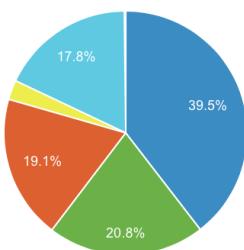
Traffic acquisition

Traffic acquisition is used in order to understand how users end up visiting a website. Within a high-choice news environment, traffic acquisition has gained prominent importance, especially due to increased news consumption through social media (Shearer & Mitchell, 2021). Comparing the acquisition channels during the first phase of the pandemic with the same period of the previous year, the data show an increase in Direct traffic, which rose from approximately 21 to 29 percent and a reduction of traffic coming from search engines (Organic) and social media; more specifically, organic traffic diminished by approximately five percent while social by two percent (see Table 8). These data provide evidence that people in their effort to make sense of the crisis, sought news in legacy and trusted sources. The findings are in line with Newman's et al., 2020 conclusion that the coronavirus reminded people of the value of legacy outlets while levelling off the use of social media for news after a steady rise.

Table 8

Traffic acquisition by channel (1st wave of the pandemic)

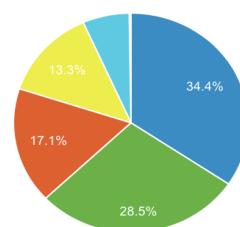
Mar 1, 2019 - May 31, 2019



Top Channels

Mar 1, 2020 - May 31, 2020

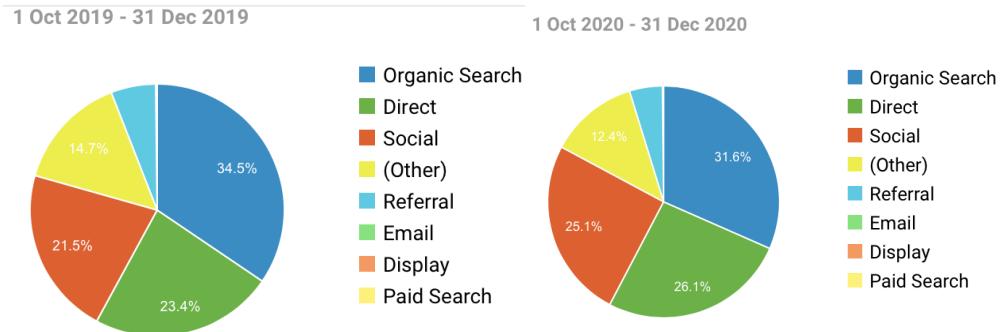
- Organic Search
- Direct
- Social
- (Other)
- Referral
- Display
- Email
- Paid Search



- Organic Search
- Direct
- Social
- (Other)
- Referral
- Display
- Email
- Paid Search

When comparing the three top acquisition channels during the second wave of the pandemic in Cyprus, the data reveal a similar pattern; Direct traffic rose by approximately three percent, Organic Search was reduced by also three percent, whilst Social traffic went up by 4 percent amounting to one quarter of the total traffic (see *Table 9*). This increase of Social traffic -between 2019 and 2020, and also between the first and second phase of the pandemic (17 vs 25%) reveal not only the prominent position of social media as news drivers but also point to a ‘back-to-normal’ trend; as the initial shock faded away and the restrictive measures imposed was not a brand new thing, people (re)discovered their news habits.

Table 9
Traffic acquisition by channel (2nd wave of the pandemic)



A closer look in the growth figures of the three main acquisition channels during the first and second phase of the pandemic reveals the popularity and strength of legacy brands during crises. During the first phase, when the need for COVID-19 related information hit record levels, direct traffic rose by 156% (see *Table 10*). Social and Organic Search also increased substantially by 67,50% and 63 percent respectively. However, during the second phase of the pandemic this trend is significantly reduced paving the way for pre-crisis news habits (see *Table 11*). Traffic through social media went up by almost 55 percent, whilst Direct traffic increased by 48 percent.

Table 10

Main acquisition channels (1st phase) - Comparison with 2019

First phase of the pandemic 1/3/2020 - 31/05/2020	
Acquisition Channels	
1. Organic Search	⬆ 62,81%
2. Direct	⬆ 156,01%
3. Social	⬆ 67,50%

Source: Sigmalive

Table 11

Main acquisition channels (2nd phase) - Comparison with 2019

Second phase of the pandemic 1/10/2020 - 31/12/2020	
Acquisition Channels	
1. Organic Search	⬆ 21,20%
2. Direct	⬆ 47,97%
3. Social	⬆ 54,64%

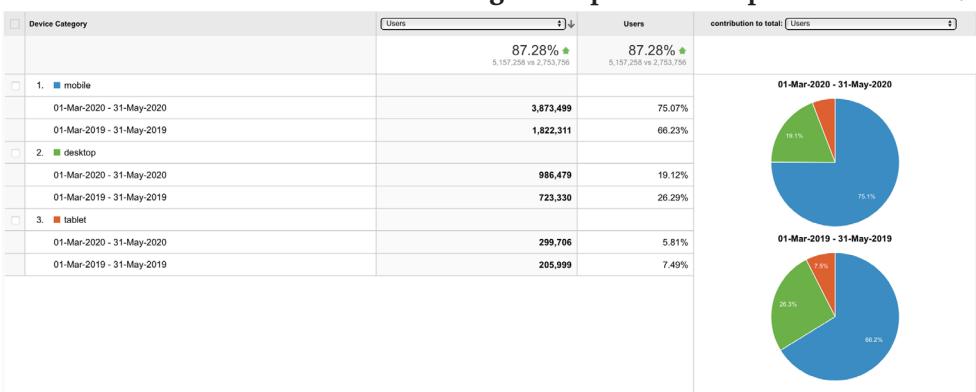
Source: Sigmalive

Devices used during the pandemic

During the pandemic and the acute lockdowns people were forced to work from home while their ability to move from place to place was significantly limited. During the first phase of the pandemic, the data show a sharp drop in desktop devices, from approximately 26 percent in 2019 to 19 percent. Conversely, news access through mobile devices increased from 66 to 75 percent (see Table 12).

Table 12

Use of devices to access the news during the 1st phase – Comparison with 2019



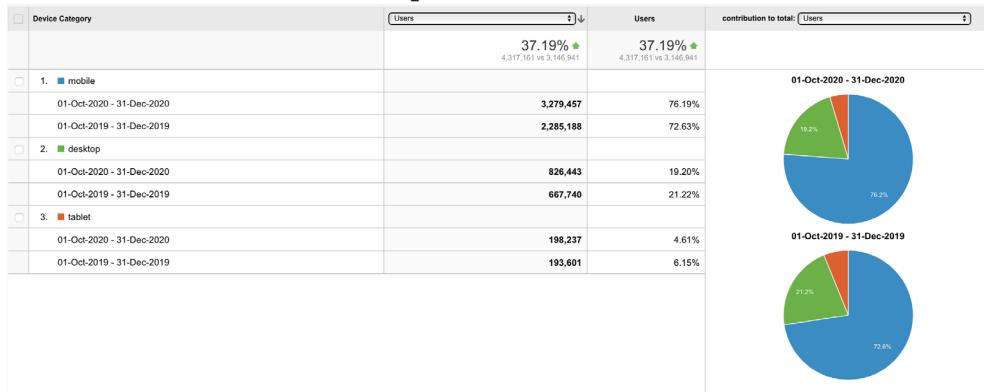
Source: Sigmalive

News consumption patterns during the coronavirus pandemic across time and devices: The Cyprus case

During the second phase of the pandemic the study provides evidence of a limited drop on desktop access (from 21 to 19 percent), whilst the use of mobile devices increased by approximately four percent (from 72 to 76) (see *Table 13*).

Table 13

Use of devices to access the news during the 2nd phase – Comparison with 2019



Source: Sigmalive

In order to test whether the steady increase of smart phones to access the news was a game-changing trend or if the corona crisis reinforced a pre-existing trend, we explored relevant data from 2019 and 2020 divided in quarters. The analysis indicates that from Q1 2019 to Q4 2020 the use of mobile is up by almost 13 percent (from 63 to 76) while computer use to access the news is down by approximately 9.5 percent (from 28.5 to 19). Declining trends are also documented in the case of Tablets as news access was reduced by almost half (from 8 to 4.6) (see *Table 14*).

Table 14

Percentage of devices used per quarter

	2019				2020				2021	
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2
Mobile (%)	63,44	67,30	72,20	72,63	74,31	75,88	77,95	76,19	75,29	74,02
Desktop (%)	28,65	25,36	20,50	21,22	20,14	18,35	17,33	19,20	20,31	21,98
Tablet (%)	7,91	7,34	7,30	6,15	5,55	5,77	4,72	4,61	4,40	4,00

Source: Sigmalive

Data from Q1 and Q2 2021 indicate that the use of mobile and desktop devices to access the news are similar to the level recorded in Q1 2020. Thus, we may assume a crisis boosting effect on mobile access to the detriment of desktops. Tablets, on the other hand are steadily losing ground. The findings corroborate with relevant research showing that smartphones have become critical for discovering and consuming news whilst computer news access by contrast has fallen, yet less in countries which had fewer restrictions on movement (Newman et al., 2021).

Conclusions

The present study explored how the coronavirus pandemic shaped news consumption patterns in Cyprus. During the first phase of the pandemic the need for information and orientation was high and Cypriots en masse turned to news media, as could be expected based on previous research (Nielsen et al., 2020; Van Aelst et al., 2021). The tremendous growth of traffic to Sigmalive, a well-established mainstream website and leading player in the Cypriot landscape indicates that people looked for widely used and broadly trusted news media (Fletcher et al., 2020). However, the ‘rally around the news’ effect, recorded early on in the crisis (March-May 2020) gave way to news fatigue (Kormelink & Gunnewiek, 2021); as the perceived severity of the health crisis diminished, movement restrictions became the new reality, and people achieved a basic level of understanding, news usage returned to pro-crisis levels. Relevant research (Nguyen et al., 2021) suggests that during this health crisis mainstream media around the globe endorsed an ultimately negative narrative causing distress and anxiety to news consumers who chose to either dose their intake of news or even avoid it. Evidence of negative coverage has also been documented in Cyprus (Hatzimilti, 2021). Our findings show that news usage increased again significantly during the last couple of months of 2020 when the second wave of the pandemic hit Cyprus. The intensification of restrictive measures to control the spread of the virus along with a new surge of anxiety as the enemy returned resulted in a flux of traffic toward Sigmalive. During the second phase of the pandemic traffic figures were lower when compared with those at the onset of the crisis, yet engagement metrics were slightly higher; relevant studies support the phenomenon of ‘doomscrolling’ as a divergent effect to news avoidance (Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2021).

Disruptions in social and work life also affected how news consumers access the news. Despite evidence showing that people prefer organic and social gateways to reach news (Newman et al., 2018), direct traffic to Sigmalive,

especially during the first phase of the pandemic, hit record levels indicating that information and monitorial needs drive users directly to legacy outlets. Finally, the study found that the pandemic conditions reinforced the trend towards mobile news consumption confirming displacing effects over other devices (Westlund & F rdigh, 2015), especially the Tablet, raising questions of how the affordances of the smartphone impacts news use and knowledge gain.

The study adds to the literature concerning news consumption habits at times of crises in Cyprus, a country usually left out from comparative research. Despite its merits, it comes with limitations stemming from the limited sample. Future research should use a more extensive sample and include the third wave of the pandemic to offer more comprehensive insights.

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The Greek ‘success story’ on the international media representations concerning the pandemic of COVID-19

Dimitra Stampouli¹

Vassilis Vamvakas

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic concerns the rapid spread of the coronavirus disease that started in late 2019 and has gradually spread across the globe. Prior to the pandemic, Greece had already undergone a decade long financial crisis that had a great impact on the national healthcare system that had been weakened significantly. Along with the second oldest population of Europe and a big number of refugees and migrants living in concentration camps, Greece was not set to have a smooth fight. Against all odds, Greece managed to contain the spread of the virus with the rapid enforcement of a national lockdown. The international media quickly covered the handling of the outbreak from the Greek government and the Greek citizens. The depiction of Greece during the first coronavirus wave was very different to the depiction of Greece during the economic crisis. The depiction of Greece of the pandemic will be analyzed through 35 English and Spanish speaking articles that were published between April and June 2020. The head and sub-headlines of the selected articles will be analyzed and then the analysis will continue with the collection and organization of the metaphors that are used throughout the analysis. A secondary analysis focus on Greece of the past and this analysis will also be centered around the main metaphors that were used to describe Greece of the past. Lastly, the depiction of Greece of the financial crisis will be presented through a literature review. The analyses will then be compared to draw similarities and differences.

¹ Corresponding author:

Dimitra Stampouli, School of Journalism & Mass Communication,
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki 541 24, Greece.
Email: dstampouli@jour.auth.gr

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Pandemic, COVID-19, Greece, media representations, critical discourse analysis.

Introduction

The pandemic of COVID-19 not only took the world by storm, but also affected how the media operate. Greece became the center of attention during the first coronavirus wave in 2020, because it managed to handle the outbreak better comparatively with other countries. News media decided to investigate the country's modus operandi and wrote articles about it. The articles, apart from mentioning the country's method with the handling of the crisis, they also referred to Greece of the debt crisis (2010-2018). During this period, although Greece was not a unique case (Mylonas, 2011) 'the Greek people entered into the epicenter of a ferocious global publicness' (Kaitatzi-Whitlock, 2014).

The depiction of Greece during the first coronavirus outbreak and the depiction of Greece during the financial debt crisis portray differently the country, with the first depiction presenting Greece as a problematic case, while the second presenting it as a role model. These two different portrayals, that are only a few years apart, provoke some question. The first research question that will be addressed concerns the factors that led Greece into having a positive media portrayal during the first lockdown of March 2020. More specifically, which are the critical factors of understanding Greece that led to the country's positive portrayal? The second and final research question that will be addressed are the similarities and differences that arise through the two different portrayals can be explained through the utilization of certain theories such as globalization, europeanization and orientalism.

These questions need to be answered to discover the similarities and differences that arise between the two crises that were covered by the media to better understand the way the media interpret the different crises. It is also imperative to map out the media's depiction of Greece throughout this decade to have a more concise opinion towards the view of the media around the financial debt crisis and the healthcare crisis.

To answer these questions, a short literature review will be employed with the purpose of presenting the depiction of Greece during the debt crisis (2010-2018). The literature review will continue with the presentation and explanation of the main theories that will be used (globalization, europeanization and orientalism). Having concluded with the literature review, the research will focus on the analysis of 35 English and Spanish speaking articles that were written and published between April and June 2020. This period was selected

because the media centered their attention in the Greek efforts to contain the pandemic with the rapid enforcement of a national lockdown. The analysis will focus firstly on the head and sub headlines because the title is what calls the readers to click on the article and read further (Bavdekar, 2016). A secondary analysis will be based on the articles’ metaphors. Through the research it was noted that the articles use metaphors to refer to Greece of the financial debt crisis. The metaphors will be divided into four categories and each one of them will be explained. Lastly, the two analyses will be compared so similarities and differences can be drawn.

The main findings of the study will reveal that Greece was presented as a model state for handling the pandemic of COVID-19 during the first wave of the pandemic (March 2020), with this finding being evident not only in the examined articles’ head and sub headlines, but also throughout the articles. This finding will be further enhanced with the depiction of Greece during the financial crisis. The stark antithesis between the two depictions within the same article will reinforce the notion that Greece handled the pandemic wave well. Another important finding is that although Greece is presented positively, it still faces problems with the most important of which being the limited number of tests, the massive concentration camps of refugees and migrants and lastly, the depiction of Greece during the debt crisis, a depiction that tainted Greece’s success by the reference to the past but at the same time enhanced the achievement. Another important conclusion is that, although the media vary, they use the same metaphorical structures to refer to Greece of the past. Lastly, the media depict the two crises in a very different way and this fact can be explained by the imploration of globalization and europeanization, since during the financial debt crisis, the governments opposed to europeanization and globalization processes and concepts, the current government (that was elected in July 2019) welcomed the possibilities that europeanization and globalization offer. The theory though that seems to be intact in both cases is that of orientalism, considering that Greece in both cases was presented as an extraordinary, unique case.

Greece: The place where theories meet

In an article published in Politico the author is addressing an ambiguous issue which is if ‘Greeks are not Western’ (Patrikarakos, 2015). According to Patrikarakos, who answers the question empathically right from the start, Greeks are not Western, and this can be explained by historical reasons but also from the strong ties between the Greek state and Russia, a country with which share

cultural and religious ties. The author explores this trivial subject with the help of the Director of the Center for International and European Studies, Dimitris Triantaphylloy, who also shares the concerns of the journalist by highlighting the fact that Greece is moving closer to Russia and at the same time distancing itself from the European Union and NATO. According to them, this stance can be explained mainly by the financial crisis that is tormenting Greece but also about the notion that Greeks have concerning where the country belongs.

The exploration of this question brings into question important questions that social scientists have been trying to answer, the main questions that arise is where Greece truly belongs, how Greece is viewed by others but also by the Greek citizens and lastly which are the cultural aspects that draw Greece closer to West and East respectively. To answer these questions and analyze the findings of the different portrayals, it is essential to examine certain theories.

Orientalism

Orientalism as a concept was created by Edward Said with his homonym book *Orientalism* (1978), with the concept centering around the field of European studies. For the creation of his concept, Said is borrowing elements from Foucault, such as the dipole knowledge and power, and from Gramsci the concept of hegemony. Combining these elements, he concludes that East is constructed in western thought or even in western imagination as a counterweight to the West. This construction is being aided by colonialism, imperialism, and eurocentrism. The western culture is deemed culturally superior to the Eastern one and appears to act as a role model, in some cases, this model uses force.

The creator of the term places the scientific object of orientalism in British and French academic intellectual environments because of the growing communication of those with the Near East. Orientalism though soon ceases to be only an academic subject and becomes a lens through which West ‘sees’ East. This lens is closely lined to the dynamics of colonialism and the hierarchical relations that formed its consolidation. The 20th century birthed new versions of orientalism in the American academia, mainly in geopolitical studies programs of universities.

A version of orientalism is believed to be Hellenism, which re-appeared during the Greek debt crisis (2010-2018). Throughout this period, Greece seemed to be insubordinate since there were many images of violent rallies and public outrage circling the media and thus an old phenomenon was revived, the ‘Greek exoticism’. According to Said (1994), Hellenism cannot be compared with orientalism, while Porter (2009) describes Hellenism as a relation that

exists between a particular past that is being imagined differently over time and a present that is constantly changing. The differences that come to surface from the description and definition of Hellenism continue, since Said (1994) points out that orientalism is expressing antipathy towards Islam, while Hellenism expresses sympathy for classical Greece, but this view is not shared by everyone.

Panagiotopoulos and Sotiropoulos (2019) argue that Hellenism is in fact a form of orientalism since it refers to the cultural projections of westerners that have political extensions and thus, affect the country’s image within and outside Greece. Carastathis (2014) also shares the opinion that Hellenism is a form of orientalism since Hellenism is being constructed in the European fantasy and it operates under a western hegemony. It is undeniable that throughout history Greece was rediscovered many times and from the idealistic construction of ancient Greece, Greece came to be a place where travelers saw their hopes shattering when met with Greeks, who were deemed unworthy followers of ancient Greeks (Tziovás, 2019). The rediscoveries though did not end there since travelers were choosing to visit Greece for its natural beauty and realness, with the thread continuing until the Greece of the financial debt crisis, where this ‘Zorba the Greek’ realness was continued by Varoufakis and a new exoticism is born (Karavidas & Papatheodorou, 2019).

Although the creator of the term may not share the view that Hellenism is in fact a form of orientalism, it can be argued though, that Hellenism is orientalist, since there are certain forms of discourses that are understanding Greece’s past but also present in an oriental manner. The idealization of Greece’s ancient past along with the fabricated continuity of Greece, that was consolidated in the 19th century (Koundoura, 2012), seem to be forgotten by the creator of the term. These characteristics that go unnoticed by Said, put Greece in the center of western culture and differentiates Hellenism from Orientalism. Lastly, another important observation that can be used to claim that Hellenism is a form of Orientalism, is modern history. Greece’s entrance to the European Union and the consequent economic crisis (2010-2018) revived Greek exoticism, by putting into the spotlight the discourse of Greece’s insubordinate stance.

Europeanization

Europeanization can refer to different phenomena such as changes in eternal boundaries, the development of institutions at a European level, the penetration of national systems of governance, the export of political organization and a political unification project according to Olsen (2002). Although the phenomena are different, they all belong under this umbrella term. From the enlargement

of the European project to the development of European institutions, the adaptation of different levels of governance (national and sub-national), the export of organizations that exceed the European borders till the political unification. The europeanization process though is not the same for all the participating countries, since some of them choose to push for strategies, others choose to block or delay them and then there are some that align either with the first or the second depending on the subject at hand, with Greece belonging clearly to the third group as far as environmental policies are concerned (B rzel, 2001).

The entrance of Greece in the European Union has reshaped the country, since in an assessment made by Ioakimidis (2000) it has been found that Greece underwent many changes such as the formation of nongovernmental organizations, the creation of developmental plans, the increase in the number of actors in policy making and the creation of administrative regions among others. Apart though from these significant changes, Greece underwent legal changes as well, since it had to adopt the European legal framework (Kalpadakis & Sotiropoulos, 2007).

The impact of europeanization in Greece is a synonym of modernization, since through this process the role of the state concerning the economy has changed and this process also affected the way that civil society operates, with the latter 'freeing' itself from the state's interventions (Featherstone, 1998). The adaptations that Greece needed to make though did not come easy, since Greece participated in a project with advanced democracies and mixed economies (Tsoukalis, 1999).

The Greek debt crisis, except from reviving the Greek exoticism, it also revived the discussion concerning the Greek European integration, a discussion that was limited to academics and politics. The financial crisis revealed negative sentiments towards E.U. (Andreadis et al., 2014) and with the election of Syriza in the government the Euroscepticism only grew stronger, since these concerns were raised by the government party (Hobolt & de Vries, 2016). Syriza's skepticism only grew stronger with the coming of the crisis, although the party still believed that Greece should remain in the European Union (Nikolakakis, 2016). Lastly, this Euroscepticism might have been aided also by the stance of the Greek media and public, which were holding the Germans responsible for the debt crisis (Michailidou, 2015).

During the crisis though, another discourse came into existence, a discourse against globalization, with the riots that erupted in Athens in December 2008 being influenced by the anti-globalization movement (Bratsis, 2010).

Globalization

Just like orientalism and europeanization, globalization is also a complex concept that cannot be defined easily. Rosamond (2000) clarifies that globalization can refer to transformation, uncertainty, and challenge among other things while Giddens (1990) stretches that globalization is in fact relating distant localities and events that are taking place in local level that have been insinuated by events happening miles away. Gilpin (2001) on the other hand highlights the increase in the integration of the world economy while Harvey (1990) stretches more the compression of time and space.

To ensure a better understanding of globalization, it is imperative to observe it as a process, through which it is noted an expansion of social, political, and economic activities that outrun the national frontiers, and thus, are making the events that take place in one place important for regions that are far away (McGrew, 2007). Globalization is not only connected to the corrosion of sovereignty, a characteristic that is important for the existence of the nation-state, but also to the deconstruction of the social welfare state. This does not necessarily mean that the nation-state is rejected as a basic mush of modernity, but that it needs to adapt and reform (Κοτζιάς, 2003). According to Cerdas Cruz (1997), globalization is an accelerated process of change that is taking place worldwide and affects all aspects of life, particularly though affects the military, the economy, trade, finance, information, technology, art, and culture.

When it comes to Greece, the political parties heavily discussed this new concept, and this field became a field of juxtaposition. The parties had different understandings of the concept, with the communist party stating that globalization is a new form of imperialism, whereas the center right party considered globalization a new reality. Overtime though, the two big parties, New Democracy and PASOK, changed their stance, with the latter slowly gaining a more positive outlook, while New Democracy adopted a more neutral approach (Antoniades, 2007). The view of the political parties concerning this phenomenon is imperative to be considered, since it creates the framework in which Greeks view the concept.

Globalization in Greece was achieved through the country’s participation in the European Union and the regional integration in the Balkans. At the same time, Greece experienced the liberalization, with the consequent limitation of the government in the economic field (Zink, 1997). The results of globalization and liberalization are mainly two: small businesses had to adjust to the new reality of big corporations and the Greek governments had to create an environment that would be considered ‘business friendly’ (Zink, 1997). The results of liberalization

and globalization soon became evident. Global corporations could move their businesses according to taxation policies and low-cost labor. The Greek debt crisis that soon followed was partially attributed there.

The Greek debt crisis: timeline and coverage

The collapse of the mortgage market in 2007 in the United States triggered an international financial crisis and for Greece to avoid default, it was deemed necessary to agree to a bailout program by the International Monetary Fund and the European Union in 2010 (Ardagna & Caselli, 2014). This bailout program, and the next ones that followed suit, came along with austerity measures such as tax increases, cuts in pensions and salaries. The completion of the second bailout program and the election of a left-wing party as the governor party in January 2015, leads to a controversial referendum in July. On June 30th Greece misses its 1.55 billion Euro payment to the IMF and becomes the first developed country to default to the Fund (Amadeo & Boyle, 2020). On July 5th 2015 the referendum takes place with Greeks turning down the proposed deal. The overturn of the citizens' decision was followed by continuous talks, not only with the international creditors, but also with the Greek parties. The unprecedented crisis throughout this time gained international media attention.

Although the Greek debt crisis was not a unique case, since other countries faced similar difficulties (Mylonas, 2011), the Greek citizens but also the Greek crisis was in the spotlight (Kaitatzi-Whitlock, 2014). The German press seemed to be working on a smear campaign, with the tabloid Bild Zeitung and periodical Focus using negative adjectives to describe Greeks (Kaitatzi-Whitlock, 2014) with the attention by the financial German press being more intense (Tzogopoulos, 2011). The coverage of Bild created a culturalization pattern and moved away from the global economic crisis, stressed that the Greek crisis was a result of certain policies and did not communicate an alternative path (Mylonas, 2012). In contrast, Der Spiegel from 2009 till 2014 used more arguments and distanced itself from racial stereotypes, although it still was not able to address the source of the problems (Mylonas, 2015). The German and English press covered the crisis in an aggressive manner and supported the option of a 'Grexit' (Bickes et al., 2014).

The stance of the media changed in 2012 (Kaitatzi-Whitlock, 2014). The coverage of the crisis became less offensive (Bickes et al., 2014; Kaitatzi-Whitlock, 2014) and the media portrayed Greece as a dependent country and a country that was responsible for the crisis (Bickes et al., 2014). The press in this second phase of the crisis focused more on the repercussions the financial crisis

had on the Greek citizens, and thus, became more sympathetic to the Greek people (Kaitatzi-Whitlock, 2014).

Overall, the Greek crisis was presented in a tense way by the European media but still, Greece, was not portrayed as a failed state (Papathanassopoulos, 2014). Another interesting conclusion is that the framing that was used to cover the crisis was deemed racist and was a product of neocolonialism (Kaitatzi-Whitlock, 2014; Van Vossole, 2016).

What is undeniable though is that the media coverage of the Greek debt crisis had a direct negative effect on the Greek economy, since the events that were covered by the media affected the bond yield on the same day or the coming days, whereas the uncovered events did not have such an impact (Daniel et al., 2018). The fluctuation of the market is therefore partly caused by the media (Volker & Peters, 2018) since the confidence of the investors is shaken by the media coverage (Juko, 2010).

The media coverage of the pandemic during the first wave of COVID-19 in early 2020, became very apparent in the international media, which focused on Greece. The pandemic not only revealed the revived interest in Greece, it also sparked a conversation within the country about the country’s media. The two main issues that arose was that of the presentation of the pandemic, which according to an analysis conducted during January till March 2020, 30% of the articles at the forementioned period, were misinterpreting the topic by incorporating in the articles either misleading or deficient information (Veglis et al., 2020). The second problem that was raised concerned the media’s funding by the Greek government. During the first lockdown in March 2020, the Greek government distributed to the media outlets twenty million for them to carry out a public health campaign with the main message being ‘Menoume Spiti’ (Stay at home). The distribution of these funds was made by a private media company. This move was heavily criticized for lack of transparency since it did not abide by the rule that all public transactions that are conducted need to be made public. The International Press Institute (2020) claims that the arisen issue only highlights the partisan identity of the Greek media, while the ThePressProject.gr (2020) points out that the media that are judgmental towards the government received less than 1% of the fund. The problems that revealed the pandemic contribute to the existing problems such as the political affiliation of newspapers, or the lack of reporting of possibly embarrassing stories for state officials (Papathanassopoulos, 2013) and the commercialization that has contributed to a lack of factuality and the reinforcement of freedom of expression over objectivity, factuality, and neutrality (Touri et al., 2017). The weaknesses

of the Greek media are not completely counterbalanced by the strengths that the media appear. The deregulation that happened in the 1980s has helped the media by introducing new technologies, diversifying the ownership status.

Having concluded the investigation with the coverage of the Greek debt crisis, it is imperative to investigate the materials and the methodology that was used to examine the coverage of the pandemic when it comes to Greece and then, compare them and draw conclusions.

Materials and methodology

In order to proceed with the selection of the material, it was imperative to identify the most read English and Spanish speaking newspapers as well as the most visited news websites in English and Spanish. This important information came from Statista (2021) and 4imn.com (2019). After that, the most read and visited news websites were researched to detect the articles that would be selected and analyzed. The material that was selected by these media was not efficient for the purpose of the research and more articles that came from less read and visited sites was incorporated in the research. All articles had to be published between April and June 2020 and refer to pandemic Greece. This period was selected because the results of the strict lockdown that was imposed were starting to show, and this generated a positive media reaction. The examined articles were selected throughout the studied period. The English-speaking media were selected because they attract a larger audience, whereas the Spanish-speaking media were selected because the research, when it comes to Greece, is more focused on the German speaking media and this research would shed light in a less researched field.

The analysis will be focused on the titles, because the title is what calls the readers to click on the article and read further (Bavdekar, 2016). Apart from that, through the title the readers get a glimpse of what will be discussed further on and how the author will present and approach the issue at hand (Jamali & Nikzad, 2011). The methodology used for the titles' analysis is the Critical Discourse Analysis, which is the research method that is used to analyze texts and their production, distribution, and consumption while at the same time, analyze the institutional and discoursal practices (Fairclough, 1995). This method examines 'the realization of social structure' through language (Halliday, 1978). Basically, CDA's goal is to detect the relations that exist between language-text and social relations and the adoption of critical objectives (Halliday, 1978). This analysis therefore aims to find the representations of social reality that exist in communication with the end goal being the change of society (Fairclough, 1995).

The used metaphors that refer to Greece of the past in the articles published about pandemic Greece will be analyzed with the Conceptual Metaphor Theory, which supports that metaphors are the ‘vehicles for understanding’ (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). This theory (Lakoff, 1993; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999) supports that metaphors are not a purely linguistic phenomenon, but also a conceptual one and is highlighted that ‘they define in significant part what one takes as a reality’ (Chilton & Lakoff, 1995).

The results from the analyses will be explained with the theories of globalization, europeanization and orientalism.

Results

The spread of the COVID-19 was closely followed by the international media. Greece, for yet another time stood in the spotlight because of the swift handling of the pandemic. With the first case of the coronavirus appearing on February 26th 2020 in Thessaloniki, the government quickly decided to impose severe measures. On March 10th and with only 89 confirmed cases, all the educational activities were suspended and three days later, this measure was extended to cafes, restaurants, shopping centers and sports facilities. On March 22nd it was announced that the country would enter a national lockdown.

The restrictions were decided upon the state of the national healthcare system that would not have been able to handle a major number of incoming patients. Another reasoning was the aging population of Greece that has the oldest population in the Union (Bouloutza, 2018). Finally, the large number of migrants and refugees living in concentration camps would also worsen the healthcare crisis. The rapid and strict measures of the government soon worked and caught the international media attention, since neighboring countries that faced a larger number of infections and deaths were not ready to impose such measures.

The articles that will be analyzed come from different media, so the analysis would enclose different media and thus, different points of view. The analyzed articles can be found in the table, along with their title, publication date and the link.

Table 1
Articles: Medium, Title, Publication Date & Link

	Medium	Title	Publication Date	Link
1	Al Jazeera	How Greece flattened the coronavirus curve	April 7 th , 2020	https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2020/4/7/how-greece-flattened-the-coronavirus-curve
2	Independent	How Greece managed to flatten the curve	April 8 th , 2020	https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/coronavirus-greece-cases-deaths-flatten-curve-update-a9455436.html
3	Bloomberg	Greece shows how to handle the crisis	April 9 th , 2020	https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2020-04-10/greece-handled-coronavirus-crisis-better-than-italy-and-spain
4	Deutsche Welle	How Greece's crisis is helping it bend the COVID-19 curve	May 2 nd , 2020	https://www.dw.com/en/how-greeces-crisis-is-helping-it-bend-the-COVID-19-curve/a-53280532
5	Bloomberg	Humbled Greeks show the world how to handle the virus outbreak	April 16 th , 2020	https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-04-17/humbled-greeks-show-the-world-how-to-handle-the-virus-outbreak
6	Time	Greece has an elderly population and a fragile economy. How has it escaped the worst of the coronavirus so far?	April 23 rd , 2020	https://time.com/5824836/greece-coronavirus/
7	ITV	How Greece has emerged an unlikely success story of the coronavirus pandemic	April 23 rd , 2020	https://www.itv.com/news/2020-04-23/how-greece-has-emerged-an-unlikely-success-story-of-the-coronavirus-pandemic

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8	New York Times & Independent *Same article published in 2 different media	Greece has defied the odds in the pandemic & Greece's handling of outbreak is a surprising success story	April 28 th , 2020 & April 29 th , 2020	https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/28/world/europe/coronavirus-greece-europe.html and https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/coronavirus-greece-response-success-test-economy-reopen-a9489391.html
9	Institut Montaigne	Greece, an unexpected model	May 20 th , 2020	https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/blog/europe-versus-coronavirus-greece-unexpected-model
10	The Guardian	To manage the COVID-19 crisis, look to Greece.	April 27 th , 2020	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/27/to-manage-the-COVID-19-crisis-look-to-greece
11	Telegraph	How Greece moved quickly and decisively to keep COVID-19 out	May 27 th , 2020	https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/science-and-disease/greece-moved-early-decisively-keep-COVID-19/
12	Fortune & Brookings.edu	How Greece can reopen without ruining its coronavirus containment success	May 27 th , 2020 & June 2 nd , 2020	https://fortune.com/2020/05/26/greece-coronavirus-lockdown-reopening-tourism/ and https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/06/02/how-greece-can-reopen-without-ruining-its-coronavirus-containment-success/
13	EU Observer	Why is Greece an outlier in EU's COVID-19 response?	May 19 th , 2020	https://euobserver.com/opinion/148397
14	Bloomberg Quint	Greece looks like a safer destination now	June 17 th , 2020	https://www.bloombergquint.com/gadfly/greece-is-no-longer-bottom-of-euro-zone-class-as-italy-struggles

15	Financial Times	Greece anxiously prepares for a socially distanced beach life	May 15 th , 2020	https://www.ft.com/content/380f6cb4-d061-48f4-8150-d4bd593d312f
16	South EU Summit	Greece beats back coronavirus	April 20 th , 2020	https://southeusummit.com/europe/greece-beats-back-coronavirus/
17	The Guardian	How Greece is beating coronavirus despite a decade of debt	April 14 th , 2020	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/14/how-greece-is-beating-coronavirus-despite-a-decade-of-debt
18	El Español	El Milagro de Grecia: el país que cerró el paso al coronavirus tras el primer muerto	April 15 th , 2020	https://www.elespanol.com/mundo/20200415/milagro-grecia-pais-cerro-coronavirus-primer-muerto/482453025_0.html
19	Libertad Digital	El 'milagro' griego frente al coronavirus	April 6 th , 2020	https://www.libertaddigital.com/opinion/cristina-losada/el-milagro-griego-frente-al-coronavirus-90436/
20	RTVE	La anomalía griega o como gestionar bien la crisis del coronavirus contra pronóstico	April 16 th , 2020	https://www.rtve.es/noticias/20200416/anomalía-griega-como-gestionar-bien-crisis-del-coronavirus-contrapronostico/2012132.shtml
21	El Confidencial	La paradoja griega: cómo el país que lo tenía todo en contra ha logrado contener el COVID	April 23 rd , 2020	https://www.elconfidencial.com/mundo/europa/2020-04-22/misterio-grecia-coronavirus_2558703/
22	20minutos.es	Grecia se convierte en un modelo de gestión del coronavirus: ¿qué han hecho allí que no ha hecho España?	April 16 th , 2020	https://www.20minutos.es/noticia/4229221/0/grecia-se-convierte-en-un-modelo-de-gestion-del-coronavirus-que-han-hecho-alli-que-no-ha-hecho-espana/

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23	Consalud.es	El modelo griego: un ejemplo de gestión anómalo frente al coronavirus en la asolada Europa	April 20 th , 2020	https://www.consalud.es/pacientes/especial-coronavirus/modelo-griego-gestion-frente-coronavirus-anomalo-asolada-europa_77863_102.html
24	Huffington Post	Grecia, el modelo ejemplar ante el coronavirus que pende de un hilo	April 26 th , 2020	https://www.huffingtonpost.es/entry/grecia-un-modelo-ejemplar-frente-al-coronavirus-que-pende-de-un-hilo_es_5e9f05cbc5b6a486d07f8ddf
25	GNDIARIO	Grecia, un gran ejemplo de país en confinamiento	April 25 th , 2020	https://www.gndiario.com/grecia-ejemplo-gestion-COVID
26	Marca	Coronavirus en Grecia: un ejemplo de respuesta temprana	April 14 th , 2020	https://www.marca.com/tiramillas/actualidad/2020/04/14/5e957a07268e3e7d3b8b4645.html
27	Clarín	Confinamiento estricto. Coronavirus en Grecia: lejos de anarquía habitual, ahora es modelo de gestión de la pandemia	April 17 th , 2020	https://www.clarin.com/mundo/coronavirus-grecia-lejos-anarquia-habitual-ahora-modelo-gestion-pandemia_0_GkAE-ksYz.html
28	Finanzas.com	Coronavirus. Grecia da una lección a España	April 13 th , 2020	https://www.finanzas.com/coyuntura/coronavirus-grecia-da-una-leccion-a-espana_20053221_102.html
29	Periodista Digital	La comparativa entre España que ‘sepulta’ al Gobierno de Sánchez	April 7 th , 2020	https://www.periodistadigital.com/politica/gobierno/20200407/coronavirus-comparativa-espana-grecia-sepulta-gobierno-sanchez-noticia-689404288975/
30	Business Insider	Por qué Grecia tiene muchos menos fallecidos por coronavirus que España o Italia	April 22 nd , 2020	https://www.businessinsider.es/grecia-tiene-muchos-menos-fallecidos-coronavirus-625871

31	Cope.es	Cómo ha contenido Grecia la epidemia: confinamiento temprano para evitar el colapso de la sanidad	April 17 th , 2020	https://www.cope.es/actualidad/internacional/noticias/como-contenido-grecia-epidemia-confinamiento-temprano-para-evitar-colapso-sanidad-20200417_684760
32	Agenda Pública	Grecia gana el primer asalto contra la 'COVID-19'	May 2 nd , 2020	https://www.cope.es/actualidad/internacional/noticias/como-contenido-grecia-epidemia-confinamiento-temprano-para-evitar-colapso-sanidad-20200417_684760
33	Cambio16.com	Grecia y la COVID-19, más ciencia y menos política menuda	April 17 th , 2020	https://www.cambio16.com/gestion-de-grecia-de-la-COVID-19/

As it can be seen by *Table 1*, the first big hit came from Al Jazeera that mentions in the headline that the lockdown was effective, since the author refers to the flattening of the curve, a goal that all states had at the time. The title's choice reveals that Greece is examined as a good example; a case that needs to be looked at. The sub-headline also helps the readers to better understand the headline because it refers to the reasons of this choice. As the author mentions, the fast enforcement of the lockdown was a production of the nation's economic fragility and the subsequent loss of ICU beds. The explanation that is provided by the sub-headline and the wording that is used ('forced') reveal to the readers, that according to the author, there was no other choice. A day later, The Independent chooses to cover the flattening of the curve that seems to be occurring in Greece and for the sub-headline the journalist refers to the effort that was being made by the government to augment the number of ICU beds but does not shy away from referring to the refugee population that could pose a healthcare threat. These two articles, although from different media, they are examining in the same way how Greece managed to keep under arms the number of COVID-19 cases. Greece is being looked at as an exemplary model of the healthcare crisis, while the sub-headlines refer to the thorns that Greece had to handle.

Following these two articles, another article was published, this time from Bloomberg. Yet another time, Greece is being seen as an exemplary case with the journalist mentioning in the sub-headline that Greece imposed the sever measures much sooner than other countries. In this case though, the author

does not mention anything negative about the country’s state (number of ICU beds or the number of the refugee population) and is strictly characterized as a good manager of a healthcare crisis. The wording of the author (Greece shows how to handle the crisis), Greece becomes a straight A student, a student that needs to be looked at so the other countries can do the same. This word hides a hierarchy, a hierarchy that is created by the journalist and is only meant to enhance the good image of Greece. The second article that was published in this medium only a week later, chooses also to portray Greece positively but this time, the authors choose to refer to Greeks as ‘humbled’ , a word that means humiliated or degraded and makes a clear reference to Greece’s past.

The Guardian throughout this period published two articles. The first article although supports in the headline that Greece is ‘beating coronavirus’ at the same time refers to Greece of the past by saying ‘despite a decade of debt’. This reference stains the positive headline since there is a reference to a rather dark period for Greece. The verb beating makes the title more vibrant with the readers imagining Greece punching the virus back. This is an athletic metaphor that refers to the struggle of Greece with the containment of the virus. This fight becomes even greater since Greece is winning the fight. The same verb is also used in an article published in South EU Summit. The author highlights that Greece is beating back the virus, while in the sub-headline she mentions that Greece is leading the EU by keeping the number of deaths low. This sub-headline coincides with the one from Bloomberg, since both, create a hidden hierarchy. Lastly, the article of Deutsche Welle the journalist attributes this success to Greece’s past. Although the explanation and the reasoning are right, the success of the country is belittled by this reference. In the sub-headline there is for yet another time a hierarchical scale that reveals where Greece used to stand.

Time magazine mentions right from the beginning the issues that Greece had to deal with: the aging population and the fragile economy. This headline informs the readers about the problems that Greece had to face and poses a rhetorical question (‘how has it escaped the worst so far?’). The question calls the readers in, while at the same time, creates a mental image, one of a play that Greece wins. This unlikeliness that is implied by the article, is highlighted clearly by ITV’s headline that refers to the country’s unlikability and describes the country as a success story. Although a scale is created, this scale is result-driven, not hierarchical. In this scale, Greece was doomed to fail considering its past but against all odds, managed to make it to the top. This is clearly stressed by the article in the New York Times that point out this unlikely success by characterizing it ‘surprising’, something that went ‘against all odds’. Although

the country has managed to avoid the seemingly inevitable, the danger is still omnipresent. Finally, an article that falls in the category is the article by Institut Montaigne which describes Greece as an ‘unexpected model’.

Another category that is of interest is the one that presents Greece purely as a role-model. In this category belong the second article that was published in The Guardian and compares in the sub-headlines Greece to Germany and UK that are ‘outperformed’ by Greece. The second article that belongs in this category is the one by Telegraph that states that ‘Greece has moved quickly and decisively’. This article though refers to the possible disasters that Greece could have faced, but it still managed to avoid them.

The last category that was observed in the English-speaking media is the one that concerns the steps ahead. Some of these articles were published after the end of the lockdown. An article of this kind is the one that was published in Fortune and then in Brookings.edu. In this case, the headline offers a very positive message since Greece is a successful case study, with the authors giving more details about this success. The journalists in the article are trying to find a safe way for Greece to re-open. The contrast that is created by the word ‘ruin’ and ‘success’ is very intense, with the first word referring to an absolute disaster and the second one referring to a triumph. These next steps are also examined by The Financial Times that support that the country although is a success story, it still faces a big financial hit without tourism. This reference belittles the success considering that the focus stands more on the steps that lie ahead.

Two articles that could not fall under any of these categories are the ones from EU Observer and Bloomberg Quint. The first article describes Greece as an outlier for help and holds a judgmental view and does not critique Greece in a positive way for the handling of the pandemic. The second article presents Greece as a safe destination and since there is no sub-headline the readers could not understand a lot about the handling of the pandemic. In contrast to other articles that clearly mentioned that Greece did well in the containment of the virus, this article chooses to refer to Greece’s past in the lead paragraph and mentions the feelings that Europeans had towards the ‘indebted Greeks’. The reference that follows and describes Greeks as ‘aggrieved’ for being judged prematurely implies that the handling of the outbreak was good.

When it comes to the Spanish-speaking media, lots of similarities can be drawn as well. The first category was that of the Greek miracle. In this category falls the article by El Español that in the headline states that the country closed before even the first death. The word miracle is a synonym to something that is surprising and unexpected, an excellent achievement that does not follow the

usual events. The headline explains how this miracle was achieved while the sub-headline refers to the steps that were taken to achieve it. The word miracle reveals the thoughts of the journalist who did not see it coming and because of that there is such a characterization. In this category also belongs the article by Libertad Digital that in the headline as well, described the handling of the crisis as a miracle. In the sub-headline though the writer chooses to compare Greece to Spain and the U.S. when it comes to deaths per millions. In this case, the ‘miracle’ wording is interesting because there is a comparison with countries that are significantly bigger than Greece, and the result is that of success.

Another category that was identified was that of the ‘Greek anomaly’. In this case, the word anomaly is used in a positive manner since Greece is differentiating itself in a positive way. The article from RTVE belongs in this category with the author choosing to describe Greece as an anomaly or how to handle the coronavirus crisis well against all odds. The paradoxical title makes Greece’s success even greater and with the sub-headline focusing on the small number of cases in contrast to other countries, this success is even greater. The same structure is followed by another article this time published in El Confidencial. In this case, there is a slight change in the used term, since Greece is described as ‘paradox’ meaning that it combines contradictory features. The paradox is not explained but one can assume that it refers to Greece’s past. The sub-headline in this case focuses on Greece’s characteristics that are discipline, resilience, fastness, and the understanding of its limitations of the healthcare system. The special characteristics are compared to other countries which had the available resources to conduct massive testing (Germany) or had advanced technologies (South Korea, Israel).

Another category is the one that presents Greece as an exemplary model. Just like in the English-speaking articles, such a category could be found in these articles as well. The first article that belongs in this group is the article published in 20minutos.es and uses a very positive headline by describing Greece as appositive case of study. In the sub-headline more data is given concerning the outbreak (number of cases and deaths) and this reference along with the comparison of Greece to Spain justifies the stance of the author. The second article that was published in the Consalud.es follows the same formula. The headline speaks of a Greek model but the explanation that soon follows talks about a divergent management against coronavirus. The characterization of the Greek case as a model and then the divergent description could have had a negative connotation, but in this case, the divergence is a positive one. In contrast to the first article of the same category, this one, does not refer to

official data and the author explains the title by referring to the sub-headline to Greece's weakened healthcare system. The third article of the category also displays Greece as an example but at the same time this success is 'hanging by a thread'. The Huffington Post article decides to stretch that the success can be easily ruined. Also, the article published in GNDIARIO portrays Greece as an example and with the elliptical headline – since it misses a verb – this description is very strong and with no explanation to how Greece managed to make it work this success becomes mysterious. The penultimate article of the category describes Greece as an example that decided to act quickly and does not provide the readers with any further clues in the head and sub-headline. The Marca article focuses on the swift response in its titles, although while reading one can observe the references to the national healthcare system that could possibly not have handled the incoming of patients. Lastly, in Clarín they are focusing on the strict confinement. This is something that is not apparent in the other articles, since the comparison that is presented is between Greece of the past and Greece of the pandemic. The old Greece was taken over by anarchy whereas Greece of today acts as a role model. The article falls in this category because it presents Greece as an exemplary case.

The last category consists of three articles. The first one is published on Periodista Digital and compares Greece with Spain. The journalist decides to compare the two countries in the headline and decides to comment it by mentioning that this comparison is 'burying the Spanish government'. The strong headline sets the tone for the rest of the article and the readers can understand that the Spanish government will be judged heavily. The sub-headline, just like in another category, refers to statistical data. The second article that was published on Finanzas.com also compares Greece to Spain. In the headline Greece 'gives a lesson to Spain' and in the sub-headline the author mentions that Greece imposed severe measures before the Spanish government. Lastly, on the Business Insider article Greece is compared to Spain and Italy with the comparisons favoring Greece, since it managed to contain the number of cases and deaths.

In the Spanish-speaking category there are also articles that could not be categorized easily. The first one is published on Cope and addresses how Greece managed to handle the epidemic. The journalist interviews a Greek citizen to get answers. This form of analysis is very different, since the journalist does not choose to analyze or bring statistical data but interviews a Greek to get answers. The penultimate article also chooses a different point of view by mentioning that Greece stayed away from politics and chose science. The Cambio16.com

article uses a unique way to explain this, since this was an unexplored territory for the media, which chose to attribute the deciding factors by either providing statistical data or simply referring to Greece’s past. The last article published in Agenda P blica takes a clear stance concerning how Greece handled the crisis by mention that it has won the first attack again COVID-19. This article sets straight the opinion of the journalist and is justified by the provision of data.

The last part of the findings focuses on the metaphors that were used to refer to Greece of the debt crisis. After the examination of the titles, it was observed that the articles were using a set of metaphors to refer to Greece of the past. The categories that were found were four.

The first category was that of the ‘ailing healthcare system’. This metaphor was used in 20 articles, and it was the most used one. It was combined with ‘Greece, problem child’ and it was presented with variations since the healthcare system was described as crippled, ravaged by the crisis, weak, teetering and asphyxiated. This metaphor can be described as a catastrophic metaphor since it produces fear to the readers. When talking about a healthcare crisis and then referring to a healthcare system that seems to be beaten down, it is inevitable for the readers to feel fear. This description most of the times is not justified by data. The authors do not provide data for such a description. Apart though from the fear that imposes to the readers, it also creates a great antithesis between the broken-down healthcare system and the handling of the pandemic. The journalists in this way manage to portray Greece even more favorably, with the achievement becoming of higher importance.

The second most used metaphor is that of the ‘fragile economy’. With this metaphor the journalists chose to refer to Greece of the past and this metaphor, just like the previous one, presented a great variation. The economy was described as ‘fragile’, ‘weak’, ‘ravaged by austerity’. This metaphor though is not a ‘clear’ one, unlike the previous one, since the language that is used to describe the Greek economy has a great penetration to the language. This metaphor yet again provokes negative sentiments and paints a negative image for Greece. It also produces a stark antithesis between Greece of the pandemic and Greece of the past. This metaphor is used as a justification for the country’s rapid, restrictive measures.

The last two categories are metaphorical images. The first metaphorical image is that of ‘Greece: problem child’. This metaphor is deemed a metaphorical image because it merges two images together, the image of Greece and the image of a problematic child. In this case, Greece appears to be the counter opposite of the other European countries and thus, a double hierarchical antithesis is

created. Greece is contrasted to the other Member States but also to Greece of the economic crisis. From this metaphorical image it is evident that Greece was not taken seriously in the past, since it was used alternatively with ‘Greece, the bad student’. The last metaphorical image is that of ‘Greece, black sheep’ that in this case as well merges two images. This metaphor only appears 3 times and it has a completely negative connotation. This characterization only comes after mistakes are made and thus, it is a very judgmental metaphor.

In general, it is difficult to conclude whether the authors believe if the metaphors are true or not. It can be argued that the authors wanted to remind their readership about Greece’s past and highlight the huge gap that is produced between the two cases. Although Greece is a ‘problem child’, ‘a black sheep’, has an ‘ailing healthcare system’ and a ‘fragile economy’ managed to handle the outbreak.

Conclusions

From the findings, it can be argued that in both cases (Greece of the debt crisis and pandemic Greece) Greece was presented in an orientalist manner, with the first case depicting Greece as a unique, bad example while the second, as an exemplary case. The political setting might have played an important role in that direction, since Greece of today seemed to coincide more with globalization and europeanization, after following through with reforms and the change in government. The containment success is only tainted by the lack of massive testing, the large number of refugees and migrants that are concentrated in camps and the description of Greece of the debt crisis, which appears to be the counter opposite of Greece of the pandemic. Greece of the past is mentioned with the worst colors not only by the used metaphors, but also by the simple reference to the events that were taking place and the effects that they had. The two depictions are very different, not only because of the harsh coverage Greece has had during the first phase of the Greek debt crisis, but also afterwards. Of course, the stance of the media changed, and Greece managed to gain a more favorable coverage, but this coverage is still very different to the coverage that Greece had during the pandemic.

Lastly, when it comes to the similarities and differences that arise across the titles, it is evident that there is a recurring theme across the English and Spanish-speaking articles and that is the handling of the crisis. The English-speaking articles chose two different titles to depict that (‘how to handle the crisis, role-model’) while the Spanish-speaking media preferred to portray Greece as an exemplary model. The second similarity is that of the ‘unlikely success story’

and the ‘miracle case’. The two categories present the handling of the pandemic in the same way, but they choose a different wording to portray that with the second one stretching more the unlikeliness of this success.

When it comes to the differences, the English-speaking media referred to the flattening of the curve and the next steps that Greece would have to follow whereas the Spanish-speaking media compared to Greece to other countries and did not focus on the next steps. Lastly, the word ‘anomaly’ that was used in the Spanish-speaking media and was not found in the English ones, refer to a positive deviation, although the wording is ambiguous.

This research highlights that although the media varied, they still portrayed the Greek healthcare crisis in a similar way with the homogenization being more evident in the English-speaking articles. Lastly, another conclusion that can be drawn is that globalization has not only affected the products we use, but also our news, since the media that were selected although varied in forms, language, and political affiliations, they still portrayed the healthcare crisis in a similar manner.

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