Infotainment and the Pandemic

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Infotainment and the Pandemic: A comparative content analysis of the infotainment during consecutive waves of the COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract

Media coverage of health issues tends to have a significant impact on health policies by directing public attention to some issues and not others. News coverage of public health cannot remain unaffected dramatisation of the news, while the Media are used to present a health issue in a way that is both entertaining and engaging. The purpose of the current research is to determine whether the infotainment practices observed on the news bulletins under research became more intense in the third wave of the pandemic compared to the second. More specifically, it highlights specific technical aspects of dramatisation (music and sound effects, metaphors and evaluative adjectives) as well as negativity and it crosstabulates them with the news period. The research method implemented is quantitative content analysis considering the news item as unit of analysis. The main finding of the research is that in the Greek case, news dramatization was found to be less intense in the third wave of the pandemic, despite the rise of deaths.

Keywords: pandemics, infotainment, news dramatisation, content analysis.

Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic began February 26, 2019 in the city of Wuhan, China. In Greece, it began to spread from February 26, 2020 onwards. The initial COVID-19 outbreak spread rapidly, and on March 11, 2020 the International Health Organization declared it as a pandemic (Pleios & Poulakidakos 2021: 36). The pandemic, as an event that affected society in all aspects, is particularly mediated. In other words, people form a "synthetic experience" about the pandemic, which is a combination of their personal experience and the information and images disseminated by the media, while at the same time "the aesthetics of journalistic coverage (dramatisation, personalization, fragmentation) affects the way recipients perceive the health crisis" (Demertzis & Eyerman, 2020: 430).

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Media coverage of public health issues, so in this case the COVID-19 pandemic, is important as it has a direct or indirect impact on individuals' relative behavior (Thoma et al. 2021: 115). The coverage of public health issues can't remain unaffected by the news dramatisation and the attempt to present a health issue in a way that is both entertaining and attractive (Minotakis, Vasilakopoulou & Pleios 2021: 145). Dramatisation is considered to be the most important element of infotainment ("pleasant information"). The practices of infotainment and dramatisation are widespread media practices worldwide, yet their use is motivated commercially and ideologically (Thoma et al. 2021: 116-117). The media always had a commercial dimension. For Thussu (2008: 3) as television news have been commercialized, the need to make it entertaining has become a crucial priority for broadcasters. Therefore, there is a widespread media culture, which focuses mainly on commercialization and advertising. Dramatisation is related to these practices, as it aims to keep the audience's interest undiminished (Thoma, Tastsoglou & Koutsikos 2023: 24).

During periods of crisis the media tend to make an extensive use of dramatisation techniques. This research aims to compare the extent to which media used dramatisation techniques to cover COVID-19 pandemic-related news between two consecutive periods of the second and the third wave. For the needs of this research, content analysis was implemented in a sample of 120 news stories. The sampled news bulletins were broadcasted from November 7, 2020 until November 16, 2020 for the second wave of the pandemic, while for the third wave, news bulletins were broadcasted between November 7, 2021 and November 16, 2021. The dramatisation techniques investigated in the two periods were music/sound effects, metaphors and evaluative adjectives and negativity. In other words, it was investigated whether the dramatisation was more intense in the third wave of the pandemic, compared to the second, as it was expected, due to the higher number of coronavirus cases and deaths.

Media Coverage of Health Crises

Pandemics controvert conventional assumptions about health as well as the role of media (Lee & Basnyat 2013: 121). During a pandemic, citizens' understanding of the issue and therefore their compliance with the proposed safety measures is related to the management of the communication dimension of the crisis (Minotakis, Vasilakopoulou & Pleios 2021: 142). Mass media have the power to reach significant percentages of the audience, while they are an important health news source for lay audiences (Marinescu & Mitu, 2016: 110), as the public lacks expertise on critical medical issues, particularly when they are unprecedented, such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Pleios & Poulakidakos 2021: 37). Media have been considered to be the most frequent source of information for citizens, in conditions of crisis, so their ability to prioritize public debate and influence citizens' perception of events becomes even more important (Papathanasopoulos, Armenakis & Karadimitriou 2021: 254). Therefore, health news coverage can have a significant

impact on health policies, by drawing people's attention to certain issues and not others (Marinescu & Mitu 2016: 110).

Health news is an important vehicle of health education but generally a "flawed" one, whose main effect on the circulation of health information is understood as "distortion". This "distortion" in health journalism is due to commercial pressures, as the "two cultures" of science and journalism are intertwined (Briggs & Hallin 2016: 30, 71). A potential pandemic suits perfectly almost all criteria for news values, such as unexpectedness (sudden outbreak) as well as agreement with predictions/expectations (a new pandemic was long predicted), increase in intensity (increasing number of cases and deaths), negativity (probability of disaster), importance/significance (fear of epidemic, personal risks), ambiguity (influenza is known), continuity (daily updates) and unpredictability (will it be a severe pandemic?). This latest news value is crucial for reporting new hazards. After a new virus emerges, it's difficult to predict how quickly it will spread, the severity degree of symptoms and how many people may die. In general, experts discuss many different options, but the media have a bias in favor of worst-case scenarios, as these have a higher news value (Vasterman & Ruigrok 2013: 437-438). Consequently, the coverage of public health issues cannot remain unaffected by the news dramatisation and the attempt to present a health issue in a way that is both entertaining and attractive (Minotakis, Vasilakopoulou & Pleios 2021: 145).

Infotainment and News Dramatisation

News today can be characterised as "exotic" and "deliberately impressive" compared to the news of even the past decade or twenty years (Bennett 1999: 34 & Pleios 2011: 241). Informative news is a synthesis of "hard" news -purely informative news- and "soft" news -of human interest-. This distinction mainly concerns the dimension of infotainment, not that much in the field of information, but in entertainment. The term infotainment is a neologism that appeared in the late 1980s and is perhaps the most typical, and therefore most widespread, form of "information" (Pleios 2011: 172-173, 241, 250-251). It refers to a way of transmission that incorporates real information and entertainment ("pleasant information"), meaning, that it combines information with drama and human interest. The practices of infotainment and dramatisation are widespread media practices worldwide. Their use though is motivated commercially and ideologically (Thoma et al. 2021: 116-117). This trend, in the era of globalisation and neoliberalism, is observed on a global scale, as the media increasingly adopt commercial practices, to the point that Thussu (2008: 134) talks about "global infotainment". Television news is more inclined to "tell a story" and is "essentially melodramatic accounts of current events" (Schudson 1999: 1003). Infotainment is considered as a generalized strategy used especially in the news, achieved by organizing news in the form of a story, that is, a narrative with beginning, middle and end (Pleios 2011: 173).

The most important element of infotainment is dramatisation. Since the turn of the century, there is a widespread media culture, which focuses mainly on commercialization and advertising. Dramatisation is related to these practices, as it aims to keep the audiences' interest undiminished (Thoma, Tastsoglou & Koutsikos 2023: 24). Dramatisation is about every form of communicative content that may attract attention, stimulate or irritate the emotions of the audience (McQuail 2003: 564). An event that has the potential to be dramatized has a good chance of becoming an important story in the news (Bennett 1999: 113). A subject is considered to attract the attention and interest of the audience if it is presented in a dramatized way, including elements of human interest. It is also maintained in the subject matter of public debate as long as it is renewed with symbolism and dramaturgical performances and narratives which make it a story with beginning, middle and end (Demertzis 2002: 349). Every story in the news must be within the limits of integrity and responsibility, to present the characteristics of novel and drama. It must have structure and conflict, problem and final outcome, climax and then retreat of action, beginning, middle and end (Bennett 1999: 113). By adopting this way of presentation, the media aim primarily at impressing, motivating and promoting the protagonists of the news event (Demertzis 2002: 349). News doesn't describe the world, but portrays an "arena of dramatic forces in action" (Grabe & Zhou 2003: 314). News is often defined by the dramatic element, while the interspersion of a news story with dramatisation influences its reception, perhaps to a greater extent than the event itself (Thoma et al. 2021: 116). That being so, dramatisation takes place when there's an element of exaggeration in terms of the existing risks, if public attention is drawn to an issue that doesn't pose a real threat, or if the presentation depicts a health crisis aiming at the emotional stimulation of the recipients using evaluative determinations, emphasizing situations and aspects of the subject that exalt the emotion rather than actual events (Klemm, Das & Hartmann 2016: 2).

The second and most important element of infotainment is the morphic elements used for the aesthetic (entertaining) dimension of the message. The key categories of these elements in television news, are the following four (Pleios 2011: 243-247 & Thoma, Tastsoglou & Koutsikos 2023: 26): a) the extraverbal elements that accompany the spoken language in the news. The use of literary forms of discourse is intended to relate a fact to events derived from public or private sphere or the use of nouns that reproduce meanings other than their literal meaning. With this technique, the journalists can give sharpness, vividness, and liveliness to their words. This category includes the tone of speech (negative, positive, neutral or mixed), the type of speech, evaluative adjectives, metaphors and metonyms and the density of spoken speech. In particular, the use of metaphors and similes, on the one hand, gives eloquence and imagination to speech, and therefore a different tone of sentimentality in the news, elements that are not consistent with the real reason. Even more so, during the coverage of health crisis, the media often use metaphors in order to describe infectious diseases (Vasterman & Ruigrok 2013: 438). On the other hand, with the use of evaluative adjectives, the journalist's discourse becomes semantic, assuming subjective

dimensions, so the journalist can highlight the protagonists of the news by creating different images of people, from the "hero" to the «scapegoat». b) The non-verbal elements, that is, the existence of music, the type of music, the music genre and music as part of the event. The use of music sound effects in the news in the news has a psychological dimension, as it can cause specific emotional effects, such as anxiety, fear or curiosity. According to Grabe, Zhou and Barnett (2001: 643) music and sound effects are often used by journalists in order to intensify the dramatisation of the news. c) The theatrical elements of the television image. This includes how the news or story is delivered in terms of the reporter's posture, movement, or fixed position in the studio of the news or place of reporting, the gestures of journalists and their grimaces. d) The elements of directorial nature. More specifically, it includes the use of graphics during the presentation of news and the reading of the report, the caption, the slow motion of visualized actions of one or more persons or an event, the repetition of a virtual representation of the actions of one or more people or an event, which may be slow or normal, changes in shooting angle and footage used in pronunciation and projection, and finally the changes in lighting. The frequency of use of each of the above elements and the combination between them, the guide at different levels dramatisation.

Lastly, negativity, the so-called "bad news", is amenable to dramatisation (Demertzis 2002: 347). We tend to pay attention to negative news. Negative information gives a kind of "stamp" to the human brain, which is not easy to erase. These negative trends affect the way we process news (Tsekeris & Zeri 2021: 364). Increased unpleasantness and fear beget increased attention, as well as an increased perception of importance (Young 2007: 1690). Fear has now become a commodity. The media have widened its exploitation, often presenting horror images and horror-inducing phrases (Vryzas 2015: 115). News directors have conceded that as much as the news media is a business, fearful news is often used to attract an audience. Fear serves as an emotional factor that automatically cues individuals' attention toward potentially threatening stimuli, toward news stories that portend some potentially noxious consequences. It has been observed that the most compelling, vivid images in the news are often "intensely negative", prompting fear in the viewer, although viewers continue to be captivated by these images as if they were an indication of immediate danger (Young 2007: 1674-1675). This contributes to intense "attraction" and media coverage of fear issues. Shared knowledge about the social world in a mass-mediated society tends to be about "bad news" (Altheide 1997: 658).

Research hypotheses

1st research hypothesis

The use of music sound effects in the news in the news has a psychological dimension, as it can cause specific emotional effects, such as anxiety, fear or curiosity (Pleios 2011: 243-247 & Thoma, Tastsoglou & Koutsikos 2023: 26). According to Grabe, Zhou and Barnett (2001: 643) music and

sound effects are often used by journalists in order to intensify the dramatisation of the new For this reason, it is expected that TV news about the coronavirus, during the third wave of the pandemic to include louder background music, compared to the second wave.

The variables that will be analyzed are the music during the presentation of the news, the titles music and sound effects of the news.

2nd research hypothesis

With the use of literary forms of discourse, journalists can give sharpness, vividness, and liveliness to their words. On the one hand, the use of evaluative adjectives, the journalist's speech becomes semantic, assuming subjective dimensions, so the journalist can highlight the protagonists of the news by creating different images of people. On the other hand, the use of metaphors gives eloquence and imagination to speech, and therefore a different tone of sentimentality to the news (Pleios 2011: 243-247 & Thoma, Tastsoglou & Koutsikos 2023: 26). Especially, during the coverage of health crisis, the media often use metaphors in order to describe infectious diseases (Vasterman & Ruigrok 2013: 438). For this reason, it is expected that the media, will make a more widespread use of metaphors and evaluative adjectives in the third wave compared to the second, as they give an additional dramatized character to the news.

The variables that will be analyzed are metaphors, evaluative adjectives and the caption.

3rd research hypothesis

Negativity, the so-called "bad news", is susceptible to dramatisation (Demertzis 2002: 347). We tend to pay attention to negative news. Negative information gives a kind of "seal" to the human mind, which is not easy to erase. These negative trends affect the way we process news (Tsekeris & Zeri 2021: 364). For this reason, it is expected that news about the pandemic will be negative to a greater extent in the third wave compared to the second wave.

The variables that will be analyzed are the news (in terms of risks, consequences and whether it is negative) and the tone of speech.

The research method

For the research needs, content analysis was chosen, as it leads to systematic quantification of qualitative parameters which analyzes with the help of statistical analysis tools. Through the statistical process of data, statistical correlations are discovered on the basis of which theoretical research hypotheses are tested or new theoretical explanations emerge (Kiriazi 2011: 283). The quantification element enhances the systematic and objective application of neutral rules (Bryman 2017: 323). Also, by encoding the information of specific categories and collecting the information in this way, content analysis allows the

researcher to examine not only the obvious content of the information investigations, but also the latent one, that lies «behind» the obvious information encoded (Poulakidakos 2013: 118-119). So, content analysis is a research technique, suitable for making replicable and valid inferences from texts or other meaningful matter to the contexts. In these means, it is a scientific tool (Krippendorff 2004: 18 & 2008: 208-209).

In this research, the unit analysis is the news item. The research sample consists of 1.033 news items in total which were broadcasted on television by six national television channels (ERT1, ANT1, ALPHA, SKAI, MEGA, STAR). In the second wave of the pandemic 583 news items were collected and 450 in the third. In the following table the news items collected are divided into television channel ownership and pandemic period:

Table 1: News items per television channel ownership and pandemic period

Channel	Second Wave	Third Wave	Total
ERT1	66	57	123
ANT1	116	70	186
ALPHA	107	88	195
ΣΚΑΪ	71	73	144
MEGA	90	74	164
STAR	133	88	221

The results were analyzed using SPSS 26. The Pearson Chi-Square test was used at a 95% confidence interval for the presence or absence of statistically significant results. The results show one type of graph that cross-tabulates the four dramatisation techniques (music/sound effects, metaphors, adjectives and negativity) with the variable of period (second-third wave). In total, eight graphs appeared in the results section. The graphs included in the results section are the statistically significant ones, whereas the results that didn't show any statistical significance are only commented.

Content analysis' results

Use of music or sound effects

In the presentation of the results, we focus on the parameters of dramatisation in the coronavirus-related news. We start with the use of music and sound effects, i.e. the music that the producers add to the news and not the music that may be present in the event itself. The first research hypothesis, the existence of background music in the news about the coronavirus, is refuted, as there wasn't a more intense use of inline music in the opening titles and during the presentation of the news by the media during the third wave compared to the second. More specifically, the use of titles music (i.e. the music playing before the presantation of the news) during the second wave, was spotted in 43.6% of the analysis units, as opposed to 56.4% of the units that didn't contain this

element, as they did not have opening titles. During the third wave there is a slight decrease in these percentages with 43.3% of the units of analysis containing this element and 56.7% not having it. On that account the use of music or sound effects in the titles of the news was slightly less intense during the third wave, meaning there was a lower predesposition of dramatisation before the presentation of the news, yet it didn't show any significant change over the two periods, as shown by the value of the Chi square test p value (.94).

Moving to the use of music during the presentation of the news, there is a significant difference recorded from the first to the second investigation period. According to Figure 1, during the second wave 56.1% of the analysis units contained this element of dramatisation, in contrary to 43.9% of cases where this element was not recorded. During the third wave there was a decrease in music use, with 43.3% of the units of analysis containing this element and 56.7% not containing this element. As shown by the value of the Chi square test p value (.00), the media made a less intense use of music when presenting the news, so the dramatisation was lower in this element during the third wave.
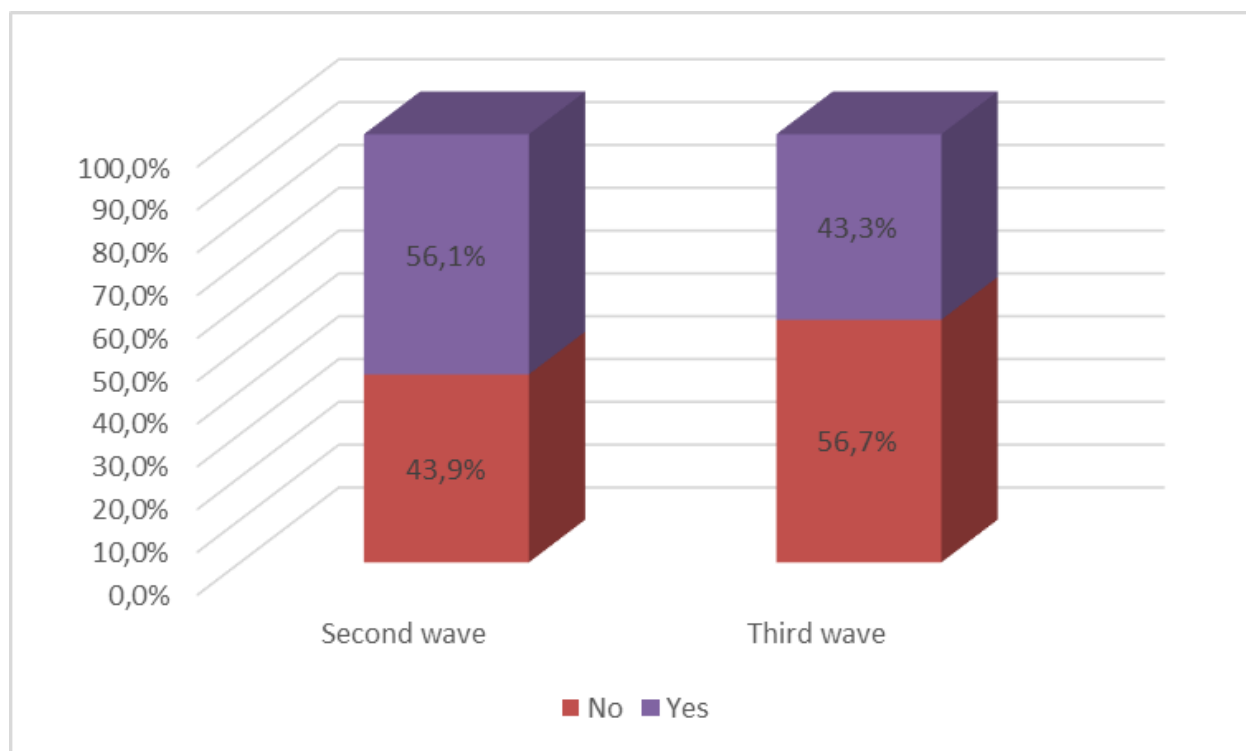

Figure 1: Use of music during the news presentation per pandemic wave (Chi square test p value= .00).

Use of metaphors and evaluative adjectives

Moving on to the discursive elements of infotainment, it must be noted that the use of more than two metaphors/evaluative adjectives parameter was used because dramatised news usually includes evaluative and sensationalist discourse. Every news bulletin contained at least one of metaphor/adjective but not more than two, especially during the third wave. More specifically, there was a decrease during the third wave in the use of (more than two) metaphors in the news. During the second wave 22.6% of the units of analysis contained this element of dramatisation, as opposed to 77.4% of cases where this element wasn't present. In the third wave there is a drop in the use of metaphors, with 18% of units of analysis containing this element and 82% not having it. The Figure confirms the research's theoretical framework, which implies that metaphors are common for describing a pandemic. The decrease though during the third wave of the pandemic in this element, as shown by the value of the Chi square test p value (.07), isn't statistically significant in the two periods.

Regarding the use of (more than two) evaluative adjectives, there is a decrease during the third wave. In particular, according to Figure 2, in the second wave 35.5% of the analysis units contained this element of dramatisation, in contrast to 64.5% of cases where this element wasn't observed. During the third wave there is a decrease in the use of evaluative adjectives, with 28.8% of the analysis units containing this element and 72% not having it. As shown by the value of the Chi square test p value (.01), the difference in the use of evaluative adjectives between the two periods is a statistically significant feature.
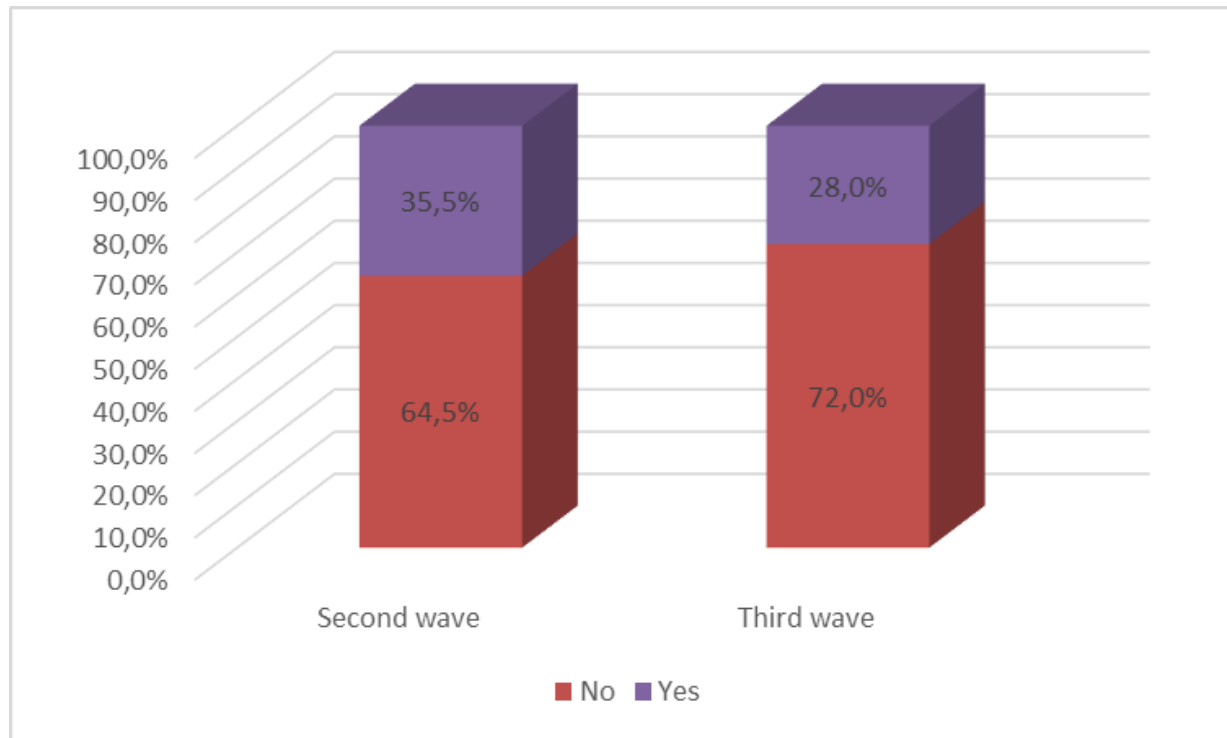
Figure 2: Use of more than two evaluative adjectives in the news item per pandemic wave (Chi square test p value= .01).

Next comes the use of (more than two) metaphors and/or evaluative adjectives in the news bulletin caption. According to Figure 3, in the second wave, the use of metaphors and/or evaluative adjectives in the caption of the news was recorded in 54.2% of the analysis units, while in 45.5% of cases it wasn't found and in 0.3% had no caption. During the third wave there was a decrease in the frequency of this element, with 52.7% of the units of analysis reproducing this element and 44.2% not having it, while 3.1% have no caption. So, the second research hypothesis isn't confirmed with regard to this variable either. As shown by the value of the Chi square test p value (.00), this is a statistically significant feature. So, the media showed a lower tendency to use metaphors and/or evaluative adjectives in the caption of the news during the third wave of the pandemic compared to the second. Therefore, the second research hypothesis (use of metaphors and evaluative adjectives in the news) is refuted, as the media under research showed a lower tendency in using metaphors to describe and comment on the pandemic using evaluative adjectives during the third wave of the pandemic compared to the second.
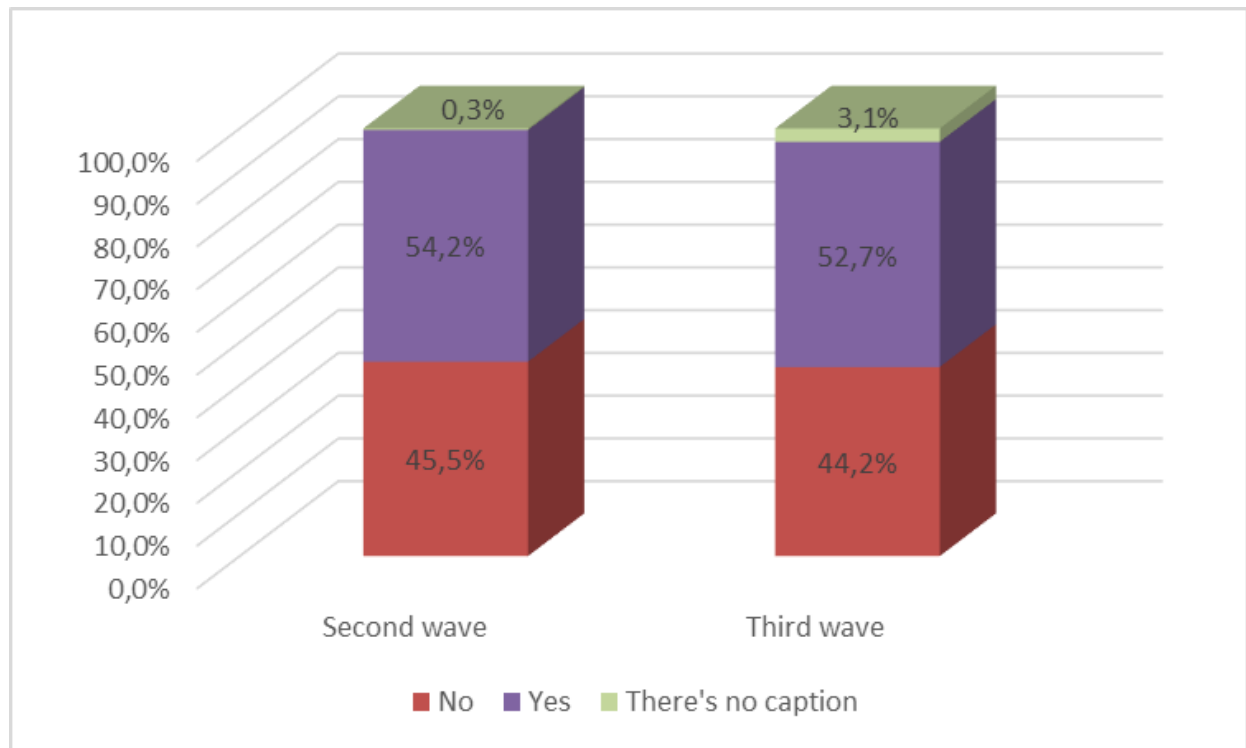
Figure 3: Use of more than two evaluative adjectives or/and metaphors in the caption of the news item per pandemic wave (Chi square test p value= .00).

Prevalence of negativity

The third research hypothesis (prevalence of negative news) is partially confirmed, since not all the variables (five out of six) that were investigated showed an increase in the negativity during the third wave compared to the second. The following Figures confirm the research's theoretical framework, which states that negativity, the so-called "bad news", are commonly found in the news insofar as the media have a bias in favor of worst-case scenarios. During the second wave, 29.3% of the analysis units reported the number of cases/deaths, while in 70.7% of cases they did not. During the third wave, a slight decrease was observed while the cases/deaths reported at 28.4% of analysis units and 71.6% not. As shown by the value of the Chi square test p value (.76), the reporting of the number of cases/deaths didn't show any significant change over the two periods.

According to Figure 4, in the second wave 34.8% of the analysis units referred to the dangers (symptoms, death rate etc.) of the coronavirus, while in 65.2% of cases they didn't. During the third wave there was an increase in the risks reported at 48.7% of analysis units and 51.3% not. The dangers were mostly refering to hospitilization and death. The value of the Chi square test p

value (.00) shows a statistically significant increase in the reference to the risks of the coronavirus during the third wave of the pandemic.
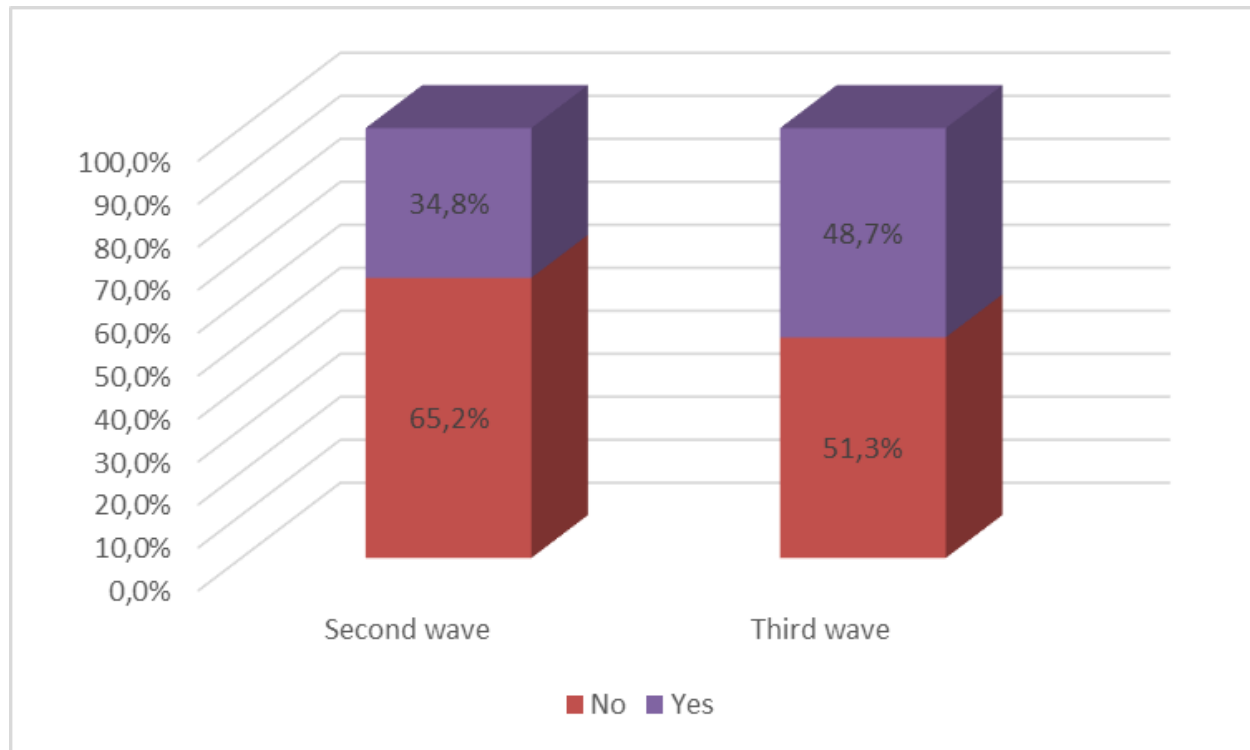

Figure 4: Reference to the dangers of coronavirus in the news item per pandemic wave (Chi square test p value= .00).

According to Figure 5, in the second wave, 18.5% of the analysis units referred to specific consequences for those who didn't comply with the measures or are hadn't been vaccinated, in 39.6% of cases the measures and vaccination were mentioned in general but not any consequences, while in 41.9% did not. During the third wave there was an increase in reporting of consequences with a percentage of 54.7%, while 24.9% didn't refer to consequences and 20.4% did not refer to such cases. As the value of the Chi square test p value (.00), the reference to specific consequences for those who didn't comply with the safety measures or didn't get vaccinated, was found to be higher in the third wave compared to the second wave of the pandemic. This increase is statistically significant and is related to the consequences such as fines, hospitalization and even death, since there wasn't a lockdown at that time and people had to follow the safety measures in order to eliminate the spread of the virus and the protection on public health.
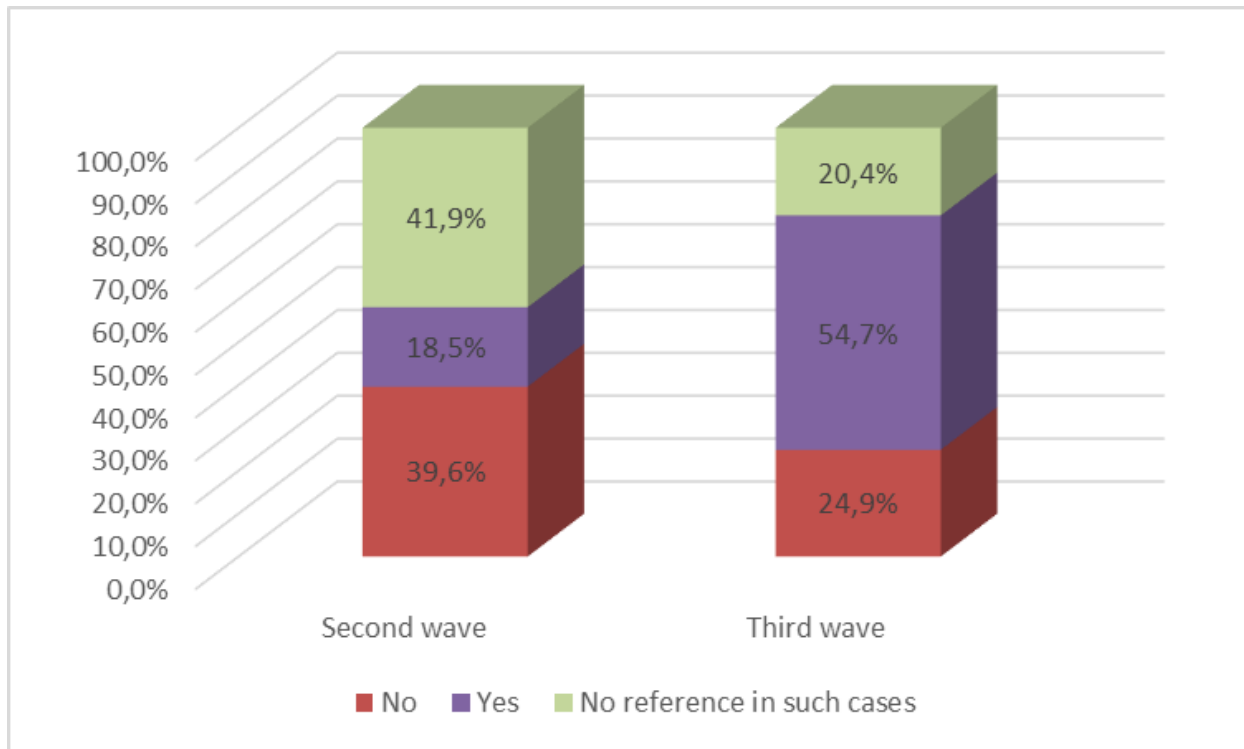
Figure 5: Reference to spesific consequences for those who don't follow the measures or don't vaccinate in the news item per pandemic wave (Chi square test p value= .00).

As shown in Figure 6, in the second wave 70% of news were negative, only 14.4% of news were positive and 15.6% were neutral. In the third wave, the corresponding percentage of negative news was found to be even larger (79.6%), while positive news was detected in 6.9% of the sample and neutral news in 13.6%. The negative news prevailed in both periods, whereas the positive ones were very few. As shown by the value of the Chi square test p value (.00), negative news was the most prominent news type in the third wave of the pandemic compared to the second and this is a statistically significant feature.
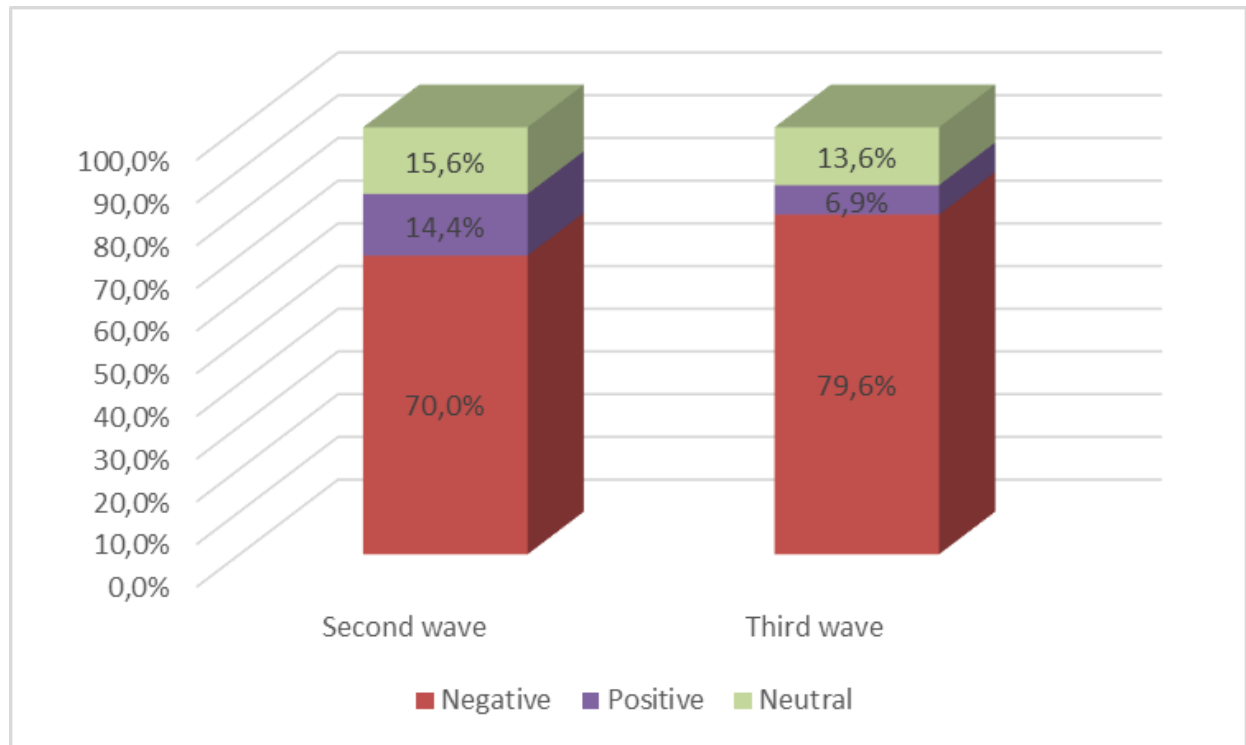
Figure 6: News type (positive, negative or neutral) per pandemic wave (Chi square test p value= .00).

According to Figure 7, in the second wave the speech tone of the presenter was negative in 62.3% of the analysis units, in 10.5% it was positive and in 27.3% it was neutral. In the third wave, an increase in negative tone was observed at 75.1%, while positive tone was observed at 4.4% of analysis units and neutral tone at 20.4%. As shown by the value of the Chi square test p value (.00), the speech tone of the presenter was less negative in the third wave of the pandemic. This is a statistically significant feature and shows a decrease of the dramatisation in this element.
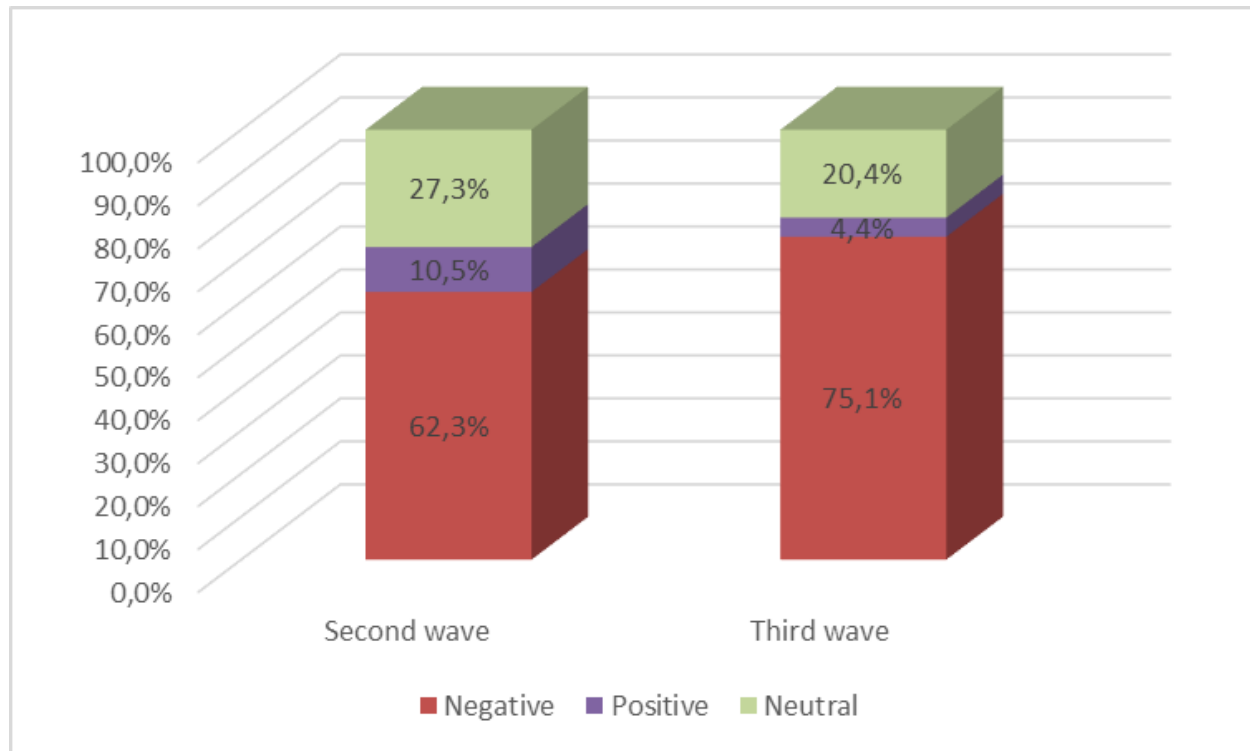
Figure 7: Speech tone of the news presenter per pandemic wave (Chi square test p value= .00).

Finally, according to Figure 8, in the second wave the speech tone of the rest speakers was negative in 42.2% of the units of analysis, in 5.5% it was positive, in 31.2% it was neutral and at 21.1% it was mixed (due to the presence of many speakers). In the third wave, an increase in negative tone was observed with a percentage of 62%, while positive tone was observed at 2.7% of analysis units, neutral at 26.4% and mixed at 8.9%. The value of the Chi square test p value (.00) shows that the speech tone of the rest speakers was more negative in the third wave of the pandemic and this is a statistically significant element.
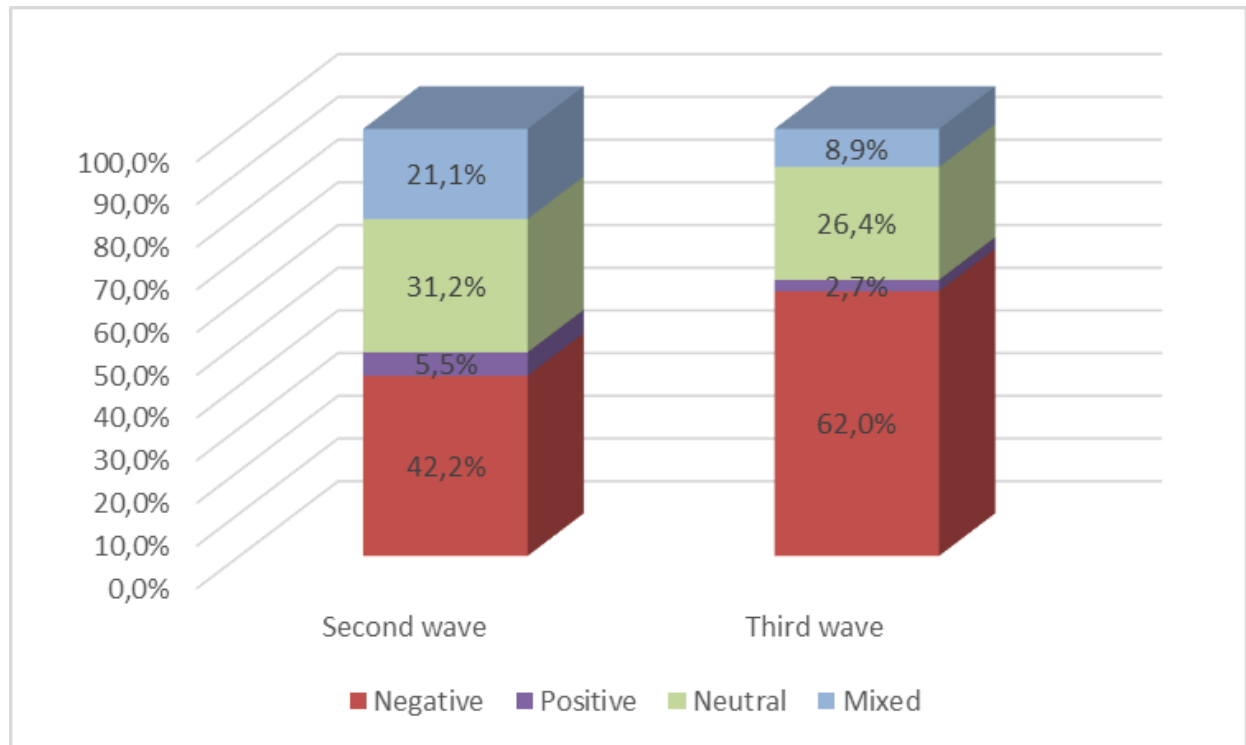
Figure 8: Speech tone of the rest speakers in the news item per pandemic wave (Chi square test p value= .00).

Conclusions

This research attempted to compare the intensity of dramatisation between the second and the third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose was to explore if dramatisation became more intense in the third wave of the pandemic compared to the second, as it was expected due to the more coronavirus daily cases and deaths. In general, the elements of dramatisation were found to be frequent in both periods investigated, with at least one element of dramatisation in all news bulletins of the media under research. As far as the research hypotheses are concerned, the first research hypothesis, which referred to the use of music and sound effects, which is often employed by journalists in order to intensify the dramatisation of the news, was not confirmed. The vast majority of the news bulletins didn't have opening titles. Therefore, there was no predisposition of news dramatisation before its presentation. There was a decrease of this dramatisation element in the third wave, but there wasn't a significant difference found between the two periods. As far as the use of music during the presentation of the news, is concerned, there was a decrease from the second wave to the third, which was statistically significant (p value= .00) and it showcases that dramatisation was decreased.

With regard to the second research hypothesis, which concerned to the use of literary forms of discourse, it was not confirmed as well. The findings on the use of metaphors didn't confirm the

hypothesis, as the media under research made a less intense use of metaphors during the third wave of the pandemic compared to the second. Yet there wasn't a significant difference between the two periods. As far as the use of evaluative adjectives is concerned, there was a less intense use during the third wave compared to the second and this decrease is statistically significant (p value= .01). Regarding the presence of metaphors and evaluative adjectives in the caption of the bulletins, it was spotted in the vast majority of the news of both periods investigated. The frequency of use of this element though, showed a statistically significant decrease (p value= .00) in the third wave of the pandemic. Consequently, the second hypotheses was also refuted.

Finally, the third research hypothesis which refered to the prevailance of negativity, the so-called "bad news", which is susceptible to dramatisation, was partially confirmed, with five out of six variables showing an increase during the third wave of the pandemic. The news about the pandemic in the third wave, were more negative than in the second wave, due higher number of new cases and deaths and this increase is statistically significant (p value= .00). As noted, the coverage of the number of cases/deaths reported didn't show a statistically significant difference between the two periods, yet during the third wave there was a small decrease of this variable in the news bulletins. In addition, there was an increase in the frequency of reporting the risks of coronavirus in the third wave, which had to do with the dangers of getting infected by the virus, hospitalization and death. Furthermore, the reporting of the consequences for those who didn't follow the safety measures or weren't vaccinated, was significantly increased (p value= .00) during the third wave of the pandemic, indicating higher dramatisation in this variable. Especially in the third wave, where there wasn't the imposition of the lockdown but there were safety measures and the recommendation for vaccination, news bulletins often referred to the dangers of the coronavirus as well as the consequences for those who didn't align with the measures imposed by the government. As far as the speech tone of the news presenter is concerned, it was more negative in the third wave and indeed the increase of this element between the two periods was statistically significant (p value= .00). Lastly, the tone of the rest speakers was negative in most cases in the third wave and it was a statistically significant feature too (p value= .00).

To sum up, two out of the three research hypotheses were refuted, while the one was only partially confirmed. Therefore, the answer to our main research question, whether dramatisation became more intense during the third wave of the pandemic compared to the second, is that no, it didn't become more intense, as it was initially expected. On the contrary, the dramatisation was found to be in a lesser extent in the third wave. Essentially, health journalism somehow became "better" in the third wave of the pandemic. Better though in a "suspicious" way. If one considers the circumstances of the two periods, this reduction raises questions. During the period of the second wave, with the imposition of a lockdown, possibly the purpose of dramatisation, was to influence the behavior of citizens in order to comply with the measures, as media coverage has a direct or

indirect impact on the behavior of individuals (Thoma et al., 2021: 115). During the third wave, the country wasn't in a state of lockdown. while the vaccination of the general population was progressing. Coronavirus cases and deaths though, were the most recorded on a daily basis since the beginning of the pandemic. According to the testimonies of health officials in the bulletins analyzed, the situation was more serious than that of the second wave. The government though was against about imposing a new lockdown to the citizens, especially when the vaccine was available. Based on these circumstances and given that the use of the practices of infotainment and dramatisation involves commercial and ideological motives (Thoma et al., 2021: 116), the same motives must be recognised regarding their decrease in the third wave. The issue of political engagement of the media has been present in the coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic and is combined with the intensity of dramatisation and the entertainment character of the news (Minotakis, Vasilakopoulou & Pleios, 2021: 159). Our findings lead us to assume that there is a form of media instrumentalization. The media weren't used exclusively to communicate news about the coronavirus, but also to spread ideas and promote particular behaviors, a finding that is aligned with the existing literature (Briggs & Hallin 2016, Thoma et al. 2021). The embellishment of a news story with dramatisation affects its reception (Thoma et al., 2021: 116). Indeed, dramatisation was found to be the main "instrument" of this form of instrumentalization. As long as the government required citizens' discipline to follow the measures in the second wave, dramatisation was intensified, while in the third wave when government didn't need it as much as before, while the vaccination of the general population was progressing, dramatisation was decreased and the media began to cover the news better. That would seem be a good thing for health journalism, but it's not because of the increased number of cases. Essentially, the media functioned as an ideological mechanism at the service of the state, explaining the pandemic and "teaching" what is good (such as vaccination) or bad (such as non-complience with the measures). With all these being said, this research implies that the media instrumentalisation observed, has affected the way Greek news media covered the COVID-19 pandemic.

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