

# Envisioning the Future of Communication

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# ENVISIONING

THE FUTURE OF COMMUNICATION

CHALLENGES · TRENDS · OPPORTUNITIES

**2021  
SCIENTIFIC  
CONFERENCE**

📍 KASTORIA, GREECE

Proceedings  
**EFoC, Vol. 1**  
2023

EDITORS:  
S. Poulakidakos, M. Matsiola, A. Yannacopoulou  
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# **Envisioning the Future of Communication**

## **Conference Proceedings**

### **EFoC – Vol. 1**

Editors: Stamatis Poulakidakos, Maria Matsiola, Anastasia Yannacopoulou

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## Foreword

Stamatis Poulakidakos

Maria Matsiola

Anastasia Yannacopoulou\*

The Department of Communication and Digital Media of the University of Western Macedonia organized and conducted the 1st International Conference entitled “Envisioning the Future of Communication” (EFoC), which took place in the premises of the Department in Kastoria on December 11-13, 2021, including a wide range of presentations seeking to map the latest advancements in the field of Communication Studies and its various sub-fields, both in Greece and abroad.

The conference aims to provide a forum for academics, researchers, and professionals to share their latest research endeavors and discuss the challenges, trends, and opportunities of the existing communication landscape with the common goal of shaping the future of Communication. The conference explores a variety of themes related but not restricted to:

- Crisis, disaster, and risk communication
- Uses of social media and mass media during crises
- Social media landscape
- Publics, fake news, and citizens’ misinformation,
- Corporate communications and public relations
- Political and public communication
- Role of mass media in shaping public perceptions
- Challenges in mass media and social media industries

Dedicated to advancing the public and academic debates, and exchange of ideas, the Department of Communication and Digital Media aspires to organize EFoC conferences on a regular basis, in order to provide academics, researchers and professionals with a tribune to present their work, share their experiences and discuss the present and future of communication.

The first Envisioning the Future of Communication (EFoC) proceedings include some of the thought-provoking presentations included in the conference program, highlighting important aspects of the studies conducted in the field of contemporary communication science.

In the first paper, Mary Karafotia examines the Prespa Agreement, which is connected with the Macedonian issue, a long-standing, intricate and controversial issue within the Greek public

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\* All three authors are Assistant Professors at the Department of Communication and Digital Media of the University of Western Macedonia.

sphere. In the academic debate it is widely recognized that the Macedonian issue has been covered not only in a nation-centred way in/by the Greek media, but furthermore in a strongly nationalistic one. Thus, the subject of the present effort is to study the ideology and the discourse of nationalism through their manifestations in the Greek news websites concerning the Prespa Agreement. According to the author's analysis, which is based on qualitative research methods, the changes detected throughout the research sample regarding the media coverage of the subject under investigation are mainly attributed not to a profound transformation of the way media cover the foreign policy affairs in Greece so far, nor to the internet as a new medium, but to the fact that the Greek media have realized that the Macedonian issue is not the proper one to demonstrate the ideology and the discourse of nationalism through it anymore.

In the second paper, Ioanna Thoma, Michalis Tastsoglou and Loukas Koutsikos focus on the news dramatization of the Covid-19 pandemic: Mass media largely construct our perceptions of the world through their representations. However, the boundaries between the actual conveying of information and the way it is presented by the media are blurred due to infotainment. The purpose of the current research is to analyze the dramatization elements of the news related to the pandemic. It also highlights specific technical aspects of dramatization (music, images, similes/metaphors, adjectives) and correlates them with the news release period, the news length, and whether or not a number of cases is reported. The research method implemented is quantitative content analysis considering the news item (for news bulletins) and the article (for news sites) as unit of analysis.

In the third paper, Georgia and Fotini Gioltzidou focus on the refugees'/immigrants' representations in the Greek Press. In recent years, there has been a sharply distorted perception of the refugee and migration phenomenon. Due to the media's often skewed presentation of the separate issues of immigration and refugee, many have difficulty even understanding the definitions of these two situations. Citizens cannot perceive the difference between immigration as a choice and refugee as a one-way street and coercion. As a result, citizens consider the boundaries of the two situations indistinguishable. The present study investigates the way in which refugees and immigrants are represented in the Greek press, in times of crisis. Through a comparative study on the front pages of Greek political newspapers, the authors seek to analyze how refugees and immigrants are portrayed by Greek journalists. The research question is whether a newspaper's political positions influence the way it portrays refugees. Methodologically, the study is based on the framing theory, which has become a dominant tool for describing, understanding, and evaluating media content.

In the fourth paper of the proceedings, Vasilis Tzotzis attempts to investigate the role of the mass media in shaping public perceptions of the Greek-Turkish conflict in the Aegean and the Southeastern Mediterranean. The purpose of the paper is to analyze the messages conveyed in the light of Ideology and Nationalism, to present the ideological functions of journalistic discourse, the presence of ethnocentric discourse as a coherent element and to highlight the

relations between the above notions. The study derives its theoretical base from the literature referring to the approaches to Ideology and the theoretical Schools of Nationalism. The methodology utilizes Critical Discourse Analysis and Content Analysis (quantitative & qualitative). The research demonstrates the dense existence of ideological discourse, as well as the existence of ethnocentric discourse in the transmitted messages. Furthermore, it analyzes both qualitatively and quantitatively, the relations and sequences between the ideological functions and the theoretical approaches of the study of Nationalism. The paper suggests that there is a strong presence of ideological functions in the transmitted messages, a permanent presence of nationalist discourse, a discriminatory construction of national identity, but also a necessary decoding of ethnocentric rhetoric regarding social practice in the protest about peace.

In the fifth paper, Stella Margaritidou and Maria Matsiola examine how digital media created the framework for the evolution of new communication and storytelling forms and their connection to public awareness. The paper attempts to shed light upon the genre of interactive documentary as a new hybrid genre of documentary that employs various multimedia tools that promote audience participation during the evolution of the narrative. The key issue that was addressed was whether this genre can promote public awareness and intention for behavioral change through its inherent potential for audience participation. The experimental part of the study included an audiovisual production of mini documentaries that incorporate different interactive elements, such as quizzes, images, hyperlinks, etc. Quantitative research was carried out to identify audience's perspectives on the genre of interactive documentary, as well as its impact on their awareness. The findings revealed a positive effect on public awareness, while the interactive features enhanced participants' engagement, memory, and active thinking.

In the sixth paper, Nikolas Kouloglou and George Georgarakis focus on public support for European disintegration in Greece and Italy. Since the 2008 financial crisis and the subsequent immigration crisis, public opposition to European integration has increased in southern European countries. This disaffection against European integration has coincided with public support for far-right ideologies and parties in Greece and Italy, two southern countries that were hit hard by both crises. However, it is still unclear whether public attitudes toward European integration are driven by economic hardship or cultural concerns. To explore this question, they draw on data from the Eurobarometer between 2012 and 2019. This study aims to provide further evidence about the cultural and utilitarian foundations of the European public opinion.

In the seventh paper, Michalis Tastsoglou scrutinizes the dominant ideas that emerged alongside Efood's labor issue. The food delivery company attempted to achieve a new labor agreement with its employees, but the project fell down as the platform's users objected to the company's practices and they massively started to unregister. His research objective is twofold. First, to analyze and categorize Greek news sites reports according to the readings they suggest. Second, to analyze and categorize the Facebook users' comments in the pages of the same news sites. The research scrutinizes discourses of journalists and citizens in order to enlighten the ideologies hidden behind their positions. The main research question is what ideas can be found

in each discourse and how they are intertwined with the labor nature of the issue. The reports under analysis come from four different news sites and their Facebook pages.

In the eighth paper, Anna Podara and Emilia Kalliri approach the concept of "watching TV", which means different things to different age groups. Even though it has barely changed in the first 50 years of the medium's history, the way we watch TV nowadays is under discussion. Changes in viewing practices derive from technological convergence but also from a set of parameters, that include industrial changes, socio-economic factors, lifestyle, culture & ethics of each generation. This research uses qualitative tools to investigate which are the viewing habits of young viewers (RQ1), which are the differences in the way they consume TV content compared to their parents (RQ2) and how psycho-social factors influence their perceptions of television viewing (RQ3). According to the findings, coexistence with new media and social media offers new psychological and emotional experiences to people of Generation Z (born after 1996). However, several traditional features of the television experience have not changed and seem to be a comparative advantage of traditional television over platforms.

In the ninth paper, Nikolaos Liazos focuses on Turkish Media. Media ownership in Turkey is concentrated in the hands of a few large private groups, which are often part of heterogeneous conglomerates controlled by businessmen. In addition, companies use their influence to support the financial interests of their owners, by also seeking friendly relations with the authorities, which limits any free opinions. The media have also a strong influence on public opinion in Turkey. This research aims to highlight the radical transformation of the Turkish media from 2002, after the Justice and Development Party AKP, led by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, took over the power, to the present day. This kind of transformation on media has been aligned with the transformation of the Turkish society as well over the last 20 years. The Turkey's media has undergone a radical transformation since 2002 and this media transformation is reflected in ownership and control relations, as well as in the ideological approaches to media broadcasting. This research addresses the subject of this transformation, considering the social cohesion. It also examines the relations between power and the media from 2002 until today, which is analyzed in the context of the historical approach. The current paper focuses at the beginning on the change in the structure of media ownership and control during the period of the Justice and Development Party, based on the party's hegemonic strategies. Moreover, this paper explores how this change is reflected in the reporting news and aims to illustrate this change, by setting the media as a starting point. Finally, this study discusses how the change in the ownership and control structure of the media is also reflected in the sphere of ideology.

In the tenth paper, Stamatis Poulakidakos and Loukas Koutsikos focus on the online political marketing of Greek politicians. Through social media communities, politicians communicate professional, personal or even private information and try to "connect" with influential figures or ordinary people. More specifically, the use of Instagram by politicians can be approached as a way of producing "visual flows" of professional, personal and private moments. The present research is a comparative study of the ways in which the leaders of the three largest - based on

their electoral percentage - political parties in Greece (New Democracy, SY.RIZ.A., KIN.AL.) shape their "image" through their posts on Instagram during the "multiple" pre-electoral period of 2019 (European elections, Local Regional elections, Parliamentary elections) and a non-pre-electoral period (first half of 2018), in order to identify similarities and differences in the communication strategies of the aforementioned political figures per period.

In the eleventh paper, Chrysopigi Vardikou and Agisilaos Konidaris explore the path of a social media campaign that became viral and to shed light on the reasons why this particular content drove thousands of shares and comments amidst an extensive online dialogue about Facebook's change of logo. The authors have explored the time course of post reactions and new followers and analyzed the post comments with a text analysis software (LIWC) to identify the emotions generated among users.

In the twelfth paper, Athanassios Papadimiriou presents a system, named EaSI that consists of an android application, the DA14583 IoT Sensor adapted to user glasses and a pair of headphones. It uses novel ways of interaction such as head gestures and relies on auditory feedback in order, to reduce user's time and effort, to identify points of interest (POIs) and obtain information about them. System evaluation showed that our prototype significantly reduced user's time and actions in identifying points of interest compared to a conventional application that uses visual interface. Attractiveness and realistic and hedonistic quality were rated with an average score of more than 2, with excellent 3.

## **Foreign Policy on the Internet. The Case of the Prespa Agreement**

Maria Karafotia\*

### **Abstract**

The Prespa Agreement is connected with the Macedonian issue, which has been a long-standing, intricate and controversial one within the Greek public sphere so far. In the academic debate it is widely recognized that the Macedonian issue has been covered not only in a nation-centered way in/by the Greek media, but furthermore in a strongly nationalistic one. Thus, the subject of the present effort is to study the ideology and the discourse of nationalism through their manifestations in the Greek news websites concerning the Prespa Agreement. According to my analysis, which is based on qualitative methods, the changes detected throughout the research sample regarding the media coverage of the subject under investigation are mainly attributed not to a profound transformation of the way media cover the foreign policy affairs in Greece so far, nor to the internet as a new medium, but to the fact that the Greek media have realized that the Macedonian issue is not the proper one to demonstrate the ideology and the discourse of nationalism through it anymore.

**Keywords:** Prespa Agreement, nationalism, foreign policy, internet.

### **Introduction**

The Prespa Agreement was signed on the 17<sup>th</sup> of June 2018 as a result of the most recent and common try between Greece and the Republic of Northern Macedonia aiming to arrange the differences between the two states. It relates to the Macedonian issue, which has been a decades-old, intricate and contentious one within the Greek public sphere so far (Ellinas, 2010; Pleios & Frangonikolopoulos, 2010; Skoulariki, 2007; Zeri et al., 2018), as well as a matter of great political and symbolic importance for both foreign policy and domestic affairs in Greece ('national issue', Pleios & Frangonikolopoulos, 2010). Thus, the main subject of the present effort is to study the ideology and the discourse of nationalism throughout their manifestations in the Greek news websites concerning the Prespa Agreement. The main goal is, first, to trace the mainstream perceptions about national identity, the national 'other' and the relation between them in the research sample; second, to detect the probable changes in the way new media covered the Macedonian issue recently in comparison with the way legacy media have done so during the previous years; third, to study the various conditions under which the representation of the Macedonian issue has been shaped within the Greek media.

The choice of the Prespa Agreement to study both the ideology and the discourse of nationalism is not a random one. First, the broader public debate over the Macedonian issue has been a

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representative case of a strongly nationalistic coverage in the old Greek media (newspapers and television) (Armenakis et al., 1996; Demertzis et al., 1999; Ellinas, 2010; Madianou, 2008; Panagiotopoulou, 1996; Pleios & Frangonikolopoulos, 2010; Skoulariki, 2007; Terzis, 2007). Moreover, the Macedonian issue is regarded as a crucial factor of both the construction and the spread of a new type of the nationalistic discourse in Greece in the nineties (Skoulariki, 2007). It is also related to the crisis of the Greek national identity and perceived as the Greek version of the re-emergence of the nationalism throughout the Balkans after the rapid and profound political transformations in the region and in Europe as well, towards the dusk of the twentieth century (Armenakis et al., 1996; Skoulariki, 2007; Zeri et al., 2018). Consequently, since the Macedonian issue, on the one hand, is discussed in the public debate during the early nineties (1991-1993) mainly in terms of nationalism, national identity, history, language and tradition and, on the other hand, returns in the public debate through the journalistic accounts as the most important issue of the Greek foreign policy in specific times ('the daily national issue', Pleios & Frangonikolopoulos, 2013), then the Prespa Agreement, as a part of the Macedonian issue, is regarded as an appropriate case study concerning the manifestation of the nationalism in the Greek media.

Another dimension considering in this effort is connected to the internet as a new medium and the possibilities of it either to go further than the national prism and present a broader, cosmopolitan outlook towards international affairs or to follow the dominant – in legacy media – ethnocentric/nationalistic model of coverage over foreign topics and events. This question derives not merely from the initial connection of the internet with the technological innovation (Qiu, 2019; Snowden, 2019), but is furthermore a result of the broader political, social and cultural conditions which contributed to the emergence of the internet as a medium of resistance towards the strong alliance between the political and the communicational establishment of that era (Pleios, 2011; Smyrniaios, 2018).

In the following sections, I try to shape the general outline of the corresponding public debate. I start with a literature review, then proceed with methodology and finally discuss my findings before presenting my conclusions.

## **Foreign policy in the media**

The subject under investigation is placed within the broader context of the public debate about the representation of social reality in the media in general and the coverage of foreign policy in particular. The discussion is connected with a wide range of topics, e.g. the relation between the political system and the media (Papathanassopoulos, 2017); the specific characteristics of the system of communication in a society (Hallin & Mancini, 2004); the type and the political orientation of the medium, as well as the current stage of the political event under investigation (Pleios & Frangonikolopoulos, 2010); the journalists' political orientation (Tiliç, 2000); the level of the development of the civil society and the type of nationalism within the political culture in a society (Demertzis et al., 1999).

In this work, initially, I focus, on the fact that ethnocentrism is widely recognized as a common characteristic of the journalistic narratives over foreign policy internationally (Curran et al., 2013; Demertzis, 1996; Paterson & Sreberny, 2015). What is different, however, in the Greek case is the fact that the foreign affairs are covered not only in an ethnocentric way, but, moreover, in a strongly nationalistic one (Pleios & Frangonikolopoulos, 2010). Furthermore, it seems to be a self-evident situation, not a problematic one, and the media are thought to have largely contributed to this (Pleios & Frangonikolopoulos, 2010). Since the nationalistic ideology can be traced in the content and through the verbal elements of the journalistic narratives as well, then it is of utmost importance to examine both (Galasińska & Galasiński, 2003).

Second, according to the assumption of the ‘mediatization of politics’ (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014), the journalistic accounts over foreign affairs are not considered to match, more or less, the real world, as the model of the ‘watchdog’ argues (Pleios & Frangonikolopoulos, 2010). What these accounts tend to do, however, is rather to project the dominant ideology in a society. As a result, foreign policy is perceived as a composition of policy and diplomacy in conjunction with the media coverage of them (Pleios & Frangonikolopoulos, 2010).

An additional factor which fuels – and is fueled by – the coverage of foreign affairs in/by the media is the broader historical and ideological context in which the media content is produced, distributed, and perceived within. In Greece this context is largely dominated by the cultural – rather than the political – nationalism (Demertzis, 1996). In addition, it is a long-term shaped, concrete, and cohesive narrative, which focuses on the national identity as the most important identity of all and, as well, on the priority of history, language, religion and tradition, all perceived unambiguously and regarded as the most important criteria of both shaping and applying the foreign policy. The media seem to align with the dominant national narrative due to their dependence from the political and financial elites, and this dependence has been intensified even more especially after the recent economic crisis (Pleios, 2013).

Since the old media are sufficiently recognized, first, as agents both of the ideology and the discourse of nationalism and, second, as crucial factors in the shaping of the national identities according to cultural nationalism (Anderson, 1991; Demertzis, 1996; Madianou, 2008; McLuhan, 1990; Pleios & Frangonikolopoulos, 2010), then there are two important questions to be addressed subsequently. The first one deals with the representations of the Macedonian issue in the old Greek media from 1992 up to 2018. The second one investigates whether the internet as a new technology and a global medium follows the strongly nationalistic model of coverage in the traditional Greek media concerning the Macedonian issue or offers an alternative view on it. It is to the first question I now turn to.

## **Nationalism and the media. The Macedonian issue in the traditional Greek media (1992-2018)**

The decision of the people of the Federal Socialist Republic of Macedonia to establish an independent state under the name ‘Republic of Macedonia’ in December 1991 resulted in the revival of the Macedonian issue in the early nineties. It also caused international diplomatic mobility, much public debate, and massive mobilization on both the Greek and the Northern Macedonian side (Skoulariki, 2007). The tension was reduced in April 1993, when the neighboring state was recognized temporarily by the United Nations Organization as ‘Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia’ (FYROM). The emergence of the Macedonian issue in the public sphere at that time coincided with enormous social, political, and financial changes not only in Greece, but also in Balkans and internationally as well (Armenakis et al., 1996; Skoulariki, 2007). Under these circumstances, a diplomatic/political affair was diverted into a subject of severe danger against the national identity in the public debate in Greece (Skoulariki, 2007).

The research over the coverage of the Macedonian issue at that time (1991-1993) trace numerous similarities in the political and the journalistic narratives. To begin with, the main subject of the relevant publications refers mostly to the Macedonian issue, rather than the more general topics concerning the war in former Yugoslavia and the broader context of international affairs (Armenakis et al., 1996). Since, first, the approach to the subject is strongly sentimental (Armenakis et al., 1996; Skoulariki, 2007), second, the relevant publications focus mostly on the main characteristics of the cultural nationalism (e.g. history, language, national symbols, tradition) rather than the Greek national interest (Skoulariki, 2007), third, the national ‘other’ is represented as an enemy and thus a threat against the Greek national identity (Skoulariki, 2007; Terzis, 2007), fourth, the journalistic narratives are dominated by offensive adjectives against the neighbouring state and its people (Pleios & Frangonikolopoulos, 2010; Skoulariki, 2007), then, it is argued that the Greek media abstain from treating the Macedonian issue as an opportunity for reasonable thinking based on political arguments and the rules of the contemporary international law (Panagiotopoulou, 1996).

The nationalistic heat in the Greek media was gradually replaced by more neutral publications from 1993 up to 1995, when negotiations took place within the United Nations Organisation which resulted in an interim accord between the two states. According to Demertzis et al. (1999), the new Agreement was not of primary importance in the Greek press. In addition, the ethnocentric approach was replaced by a rather polycentric view. Since these changes did not result from a profound transformation within the Greek press, they were attributed rather to the political circumstances, which fostered the diplomatic solution.

After the aforementioned accord (1995), the negotiations of 2008 during the NATO Summit in Bucharest gave Greek media the chance to treat the Macedonian issue not only as a ‘national issue’, but, moreover, as ‘the daily national issue’. In other words, not only was it the most

important topic among all the ‘national issues’ and international affairs in general, but it also operated as an agent of nationalistic ideology (Pleios & Frangonikolopoulos, 2013, p. 16). In addition, the traditional Greek media emphasized mainly the conflict, the suspicion and the threat, leaving no space for approach and collaboration between the two states, since the relevant accounts focused more on the topics of dispute rather than the wider political, economic, social and cultural context. Thus, according to Pleios and Frangonikolopoulos (2010), the coverage of the negotiations both in the press and on television remained ethnocentric/nationalistic, though indirectly.

It was not earlier than 2018, when the Macedonian issue returned in the Greek media narratives due to the Prespa Agreement. According to Demetriades (2018), the subject under investigation remained ‘the daily national issue’ and was once again covered in an ethnocentric and nationalistic – though indirectly – way. It is also remarkable that the media narratives of that time seem to be sometimes neutral, in comparison with the nationalistic heat of the 1991-1993 era, maybe because the Greek media took under consideration the wider political conditions which fostered the approach between Northern Macedonia and Greece.

If the Macedonian issue in general has been covered in the old Greek media so far in an ethnocentric and strongly nationalistic way, either directly or indirectly, then the time has come to examine the second question addressed above concerning whether the internet as a global medium follows the strongly nationalistic model of coverage in the old Greek media as far as the Macedonian issue is concerned or offers an alternative, more outward-looking view over the subject. As Curran et al. (2013) argue, online news is strongly national-centered, since the vast majority emphasizes domestic affairs, the financially and politically powerful states, and the neighboring countries. Additionally, the Greek websites like legacy media, cover international affairs to a limited extent and tend to relate foreign news to domestic concerns explicitly. This convergence is attributed, on the one hand, to the ‘colonization’ of the new media by the leading media conglomerates (Curran et al., 2013; Meyer & Hinchman, 2008) and, on the other hand, to the wider political and ideological context across all the media in a specific society (Curran et al., 2013). Consequently, online news over the Prespa Agreement is expected to be much like news in the old Greek media.

Based on the aforementioned studies, the main topics traced in the coverage of the Macedonian issue in the old Greek media so far are connected, first, with the notion of cultural nationalism as the dominant ideological context of the correspondent representations; second, the prevalence of the ‘national issues’ view; third, the connection of the Prespa Agreement with the crisis of the Greek national identity; fourth, the construction of the national ‘other’ as an enemy and a threat towards the Greek nation. With my research I aim, first, to detect any possible change in the topics above and, second, to find the possible reasons for these changes.

## Methodological note

Based on the definition of the subject under investigation and the theoretical context I have examined so far, the main question of my research is ‘In a time of approach between Northern Macedonia and Greece, is the coverage of the Prespa Agreement in/by the Greek news websites constructed in an ethnocentric/nationalistic way? If this is the case, which notions and perceptions construct it as such?’ It is divided into two sub-questions. The first one is ‘Which are the dominant representations in my sample regarding the national identity?’ and the second is ‘Which are the mainstream representations that construct the Prespa Agreement as a political/diplomatic event in the publications under investigation?’\*

The sample online articles were published within the period which started on the 12th of June 2018 – when it was announced that the two states had come up with an agreement – and finished on the 21st of June 2018 – when the Agreement was no more of top priority in the news bulletin on the Greek television (Demetriades, 2018).

With respect to the sampling strategy, I first excluded online versions of printed newspapers since I aim to examine the internet view on foreign affairs. Then, I searched for the top Greek news websites according to alexa.com (alexa.com, 2020) during the period of the research, which was the summer of 2020, since there was no possibility for access to the percentages of visits during the period mentioned above (12<sup>th</sup> of June 2018 - 21<sup>st</sup> of June 2018). Additionally, I selected news websites with accessible files of publications and a search engine. Thus, my sample consists of news247.gr, newsbeast.gr, and newsbomb.gr. I also included The Press Project, since, although is not placed high in the visits list, it covers hard news more often than the other websites do.

Having chosen the news websites, I visited them, used the search engine and entered various key words like ‘Prespa Agreement’, ‘Macedonian issue’, ‘FYROM’, ‘Skopje’, and ‘Northern Macedonia’. The results of the search are organised in Table 1. My sample thus consists of 25 articles from four Greek news websites. Since my sample derives from Greek websites and the selected articles are therefore written in Greek, I have translated the quotations in the following section into English.

**Table 1:** Sample of the research

	Name of website (in alphabetical order)	Number of articles (Date of publication: 12/6/2018 – 21/6/2018)
1.	news247.gr	5
2.	newsbeast.gr	6
3.	newsbomb.gr	9
4.	The Press Project	5
Total	4 news websites	25

\* This paper presents a part of a wider research with four sub-questions. Due to practical considerations, however, the present effort is based only on two of them.

It was important to select the research method which best suited the aims of my work. The first step was to identify the main topics which the articles dealt with; the second was to understand which meanings and perceptions they embodied on the subjects of national identity and national ‘other’; and the third was to make connections with theory (Guest et al., 2012). Furthermore, appreciating that social reality derives from social and cultural experiences and is the result of a discursive, historical, and social construction (Burr, 2006, pp. 31–41), I chose qualitative research methods. More specifically, I applied thematic analysis (Guest et al., 2012) to the collection and scrutiny of my data. I also used critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995) as a means of more detailed investigation.

## **The construction of the national identity**

In this subsection my aim is to trace the prevailing accounts over national identity in the sample which I have presented above (Table 1). I then try to investigate whether these specific accounts fit with those traced in the academic debate presented in the relevant sections of my work. I choose the following quotations because in my view they are representative of the trends traced in the original sample.

Concerning the construction of national identity there are two trends traced in the sample. On the one hand, the first trend is detected in those publications which construct ‘national self’ on the base of language, history and the past as the only source of glory for the contemporary people. In other words, national identity is constructed on the base of the main ingredients of the cultural nationalism (Demertzis, 1996). Moreover, it seems that the journalistic accounts aim to the nationalistic reflexes of the Greek society, changing the issue of national identity into a pretext for political controversy (Ellinas, 2010).

The following quotation is taken from an article regarding the reactions of the opposition leader at the time in Greece, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, after the Prespa Agreement was signed and approved by the parliament of Northern Macedonia (20/6/2018). Additionally, the article is followed by a photo of the Greek politician who is accompanied by an army officer during his visit to the Balkans War Museum at Kilkis, a small town in the Greek Macedonia (Image 1).



**Image 1:** K. Mitsotakis’ visit to the Balkans War Museum at Kilkis (source: <https://cdn1.bbend.net/media/news/2018/06/21/895022/main/4489105.jpg> newsbomb.gr, June 21, 2018)

Mr. Tsipras (the prime minister of Greece at the time) and the parliamentary majority ceded Macedonian nationality and Macedonian language to the neighboring country. The Prespa

Agreement is a ‘bad’ agreement as far as the name of Skopje is concerned. My party will vote against it when it will be discussed in the Greek parliament’. (newsbomb.gr, June 21, 2018)

The negative comments over the Prespa Agreement in the aforementioned quotation derive from the fact that the Greek side ceded in topics of great importance according to the cultural nationalism (Demertzis, 1996), which are the language, the name of the new state, and history. All of them contribute to the cohesion of the society and, therefore, their absence could threaten its coherence. The quotation above is representative concerning the revival of the threat, which is a dominant implication in the corresponding accounts during the era of the nationalistic heat (1991-1993) (Armenakis et al., 1996; Skoulariki, 2007; Terzis, 2007). This may be a probable reason why the quotation is accompanied by a photo (image 1) in which the Greek politician can be seen in the Balkans War Museum together with an army officer.

Moreover, although the term ‘Skopje’, first, has never been a formal one for the neighboring state as it happened with the term ‘FYROM’ and, second, lacks scientific basis, still it is used – against the international law – in the Greek public sphere as the quotation above shows. It is also remarkable that the vast majority of the examined publications are tagged with this term, and it is evidence of nationalism, though indirectly (Pleios & Frangonikolopoulos, 2010). Furthermore, the disapproval of the Agreement transforms an issue of foreign affairs into a subject of domestic political controversy, which is a common trend in the public debate in Greece (Ellinas, 2010; Pleios & Frangonikolopoulos, 2010).

The notion of giving up concerning the rights of the Greek side returns in the following quotation through which a very popular in the media representative of the Greek Church, Amvrosios, is given the opportunity to express himself over the Prespa Agreement.

Mournfully ring the bells of the churches in the region of Kalavrita today under the instructions of Amvrosios due to the naming of Skopje. ‘Macedonia belongs to Greece, not to Skopje’, he argues adding at the same time that accepting the Agreement is a national betrayal. (newsbeast.gr, June 13, 2018)

In the quotation above, Amvrosios, a highly placed representative of the Greek Church, expresses his opinion not over a subject of his own responsibilities, but over a pure political one. However, being engaged in foreign affairs is a highly demanding and complicated activity which demands scientific knowledge, interdisciplinary approach, careful planning, diplomatic experience, political arguments (Skoulariki, 2007), in other words knowledge and abilities not accessible to everyone. Giving the speech to popular athletes, artists and priests, rather than to politicians, diplomats, scientists specialized in relative fields and journalists with the proper knowledge, the media seem to regard them all as capable enough to contribute to shaping and applying the foreign policy. Thus, it seems that the point of utmost importance concerning the media representations of international relations is not the understanding of the affairs under investigation, but the projection of the dominant ideology in a given society – the cultural

nationalism in the Greek society in particular – through the media coverage of these affairs (Pleios & Frangonikolopoulos, 2010).

The focus on the ingredients of the cultural nationalism seems to fade in the publications which refer to the politicians in favour of the Agreement. In the following quotation, Alexis Tsipras, the prime minister of the time, makes a general evaluation of the Agreement.

The Agreement takes back our history. It is sustainable and serves the mutual interest. I am addressing people who feel annoyed due to the term ‘Macedonia’ to ask themselves which they think is the patriotic national interest. When you are engaged in foreign policy, then your first priority is the interests of the country. I am not afraid of the citizens’ reactions, I respect them. Arranging a long-standing harassing issue is a pure patriotic interest. (The Press Project, June 14, 2018)

The quotation above is, in my view, a representative one regarding the transition from the cultural to the political nationalism in the coverage of the Macedonian issue. It happens, since, first, the repeated use of the term ‘interest’, either the national or the mutual one, indicates the change from the ‘national issue’ view into the ‘national interest’ sight, which is the current trend in the international relationships (Heraclides, 2001, p. 74). Second, since the interest is mutual, the national ‘other’ is neither constructed as a threat anymore, nor as a financially and politically inferior, as it was very common during the nationalistic heat of 1991-1993 (Skoulariki, 2007). On the contrary, he is treated as an equivalent partner, who enters the dialogue accepting the rules of international law. Third, the main goal of foreign policy is claimed to be the arrangement of a long-standing controversial issue rather than the conflict. Fourth, together with the notion of interest, the home nation is fueled by the notions of citizenship. In my view, such references sign an indication of the media proceeding from the cultural nationalism towards the political nationalism (Demertzis, 1996). Even though this trend has been also noticed earlier in the coverage of the Macedonian issue (Pleios & Frangonikolopoulos, 2010), there is no sufficient evidence that it indicates a profound transformation of the Greek media. What can be said, however, is that it is attributed to the current political conditions, which encourage the approach between Northern Macedonia and Greece. Moreover, this change sheds light on the possibilities of the media having a minor role in shaping and applying of foreign policy, when political authorities are determined to follow a specific schedule (Pleios & Frangonikolopoulos, 2010).

### **The construction of the Prespa Agreement as a political/diplomatic affair**

In the sample websites there are two trends traced concerning this topic. On the one hand, the affair under investigation is treated in terms of political cost/political benefit. On the other hand, it is contextualized not only as a binary issue but also as a political/diplomatic affair with international dimensions.

The following quotation is a representative one regarding the first trend and is taken from an article about the reactions of the Greek opposition parties towards the Agreement. The quotation refers to a specific political party, PASOK, placed at the centre of the political spectrum.

People in charge in PASOK argue that it is now the golden opportunity to make profit against SYRIZA (the political party of the prime minister of the time). They think that, if they vote against the Agreement, Tsipras will lose a lot of his voters in the forthcoming elections and that they will gain largely. They also pay little attention to the criticism that they align with New Democracy (the leading opposition party of the time). Additionally, they don't care about the disapproval of the European Social Democrats, and they finally think that they will benefit a lot if they show a negative attitude towards the Skopje issue. (news247.gr, June 14, 2018)

According to the aforementioned quotation, the Agreement is a significant matter in the context of domestic policy and political controversy (Ellinas, 2010). In my view, what the quotation reveals is the national-centered focus of the Greek media rather than the emphasis on the international dimension of the event. This is what Pleios and Frangonikolopoulos (2010) call 'domestication of the foreign affairs' and deem as a main ingredient of the Greek media coverage of international news.

According to the second trend traced in numerous sampled articles, great emphasis is given on the importance of the Agreement not only for both signatory countries, but also for the wider region of Balkans and the complicated relations within supranational organizations like NATO, United Nations Organization, and European Union. Representatives of these organizations, leading politicians of the Balkan countries as well as of powerful ones, like United States and Germany, evaluate the Agreement very positively talking about 'a historical step', 'a historical achievement', 'a historical agreement' and 'a historical moment'. The following quotations are the titles of different websites articles:

Dithyrambs by NATO over the Agreement of FYROM (The Press Project, June 13, 2018)

Rama: Balkans is now a better place to live in. Tsipras, Zaev, thank you (newsbeast.gr, June 13, 2018)

The silent diplomacy of the US concerning the naming of Skopje. The Brookings Institute analysis over the name 'Democracy of Northern Macedonia' (newsbeast.gr, June 13, 2018)

In the vast majority of the sample articles, the quoted politicians treat the Agreement as a result of a common try of both Northern Macedonia and Greece. However, by giving the speech to numerous officers in favor of the Agreement and, additionally, referring to a great deal of media worldwide (e.g. Deutsche Welle, Der Spiegel, Le Monde, France Soir, France 24, Independent, Guardian, BBC, El Pais, World Street Journal, Washington Post, Associated Press, ABC, and USA Today), show, in my view, that the sample articles deem the Prespa Agreement as an affair of great international interest and importance. The following quotation is representative of this

trend: “According to Spiegel, the Agreement supports stability and security in Balkans and reduces the influence of Russia and Turkey” (news247.gr, June 13, 2018).

What I have tried to investigate in the present subsection is the construction of the Prespa Agreement as a political/diplomatic affair. According to the analysis above, the Agreement under investigation is covered, on the one hand, in terms of political benefit/political cost within the context of the political arena in Greece (Ellinas, 2010). This trend is deemed as a sign of the national-centered view of the media coverage on the foreign affairs both worldwide and in Greece (Curran et al., 2013; Pleios & Frangonikolopoulos, 2010). On the other hand, the Prespa Agreement is represented not only as an important binary issue, but also as a significant, complicated affair with multiple international dimensions (Demetriades, 2018). This may be an indication that the media deal with foreign affairs in a realistic way, when the political authority has a specific goal to achieve and moves towards it with no deviation (Pleios & Frangonikolopoulos, 2010).

## **Conclusion**

What I have so far tried to investigate is the coverage of the Prespa Agreement in the Greek news websites through the theoretical prism of nationalism. Although it seems that the nationalistic bias is reduced in comparison with previous stages of the Macedonian issue, especially the early nineties, when strong and blatant nationalism was extensively detected in the Greek media, still the national-centred and nationalistic view remains present, though inexplicitly.

However, there are remarkable changes detected in the coverage of the subject under investigation: first, a transition from the cultural towards the political nationalism; second, a movement from the crisis of national identity towards the logic of approach between Greece and Northern Macedonia; third, a conversion from the concept of ‘national issues’ to the notion of ‘national interest’; fourth, the coverage of the Macedonian issue not only as a binary one, but also as a subject of international interest. In my view, the aforementioned changes are mainly attributed not to a profound transformation of the way media cover foreign policy affairs in Greece so far, nor to the internet as a new medium. What it seems, instead, is the fact that the media present a realistic attitude, due to the fact that the broader political conditions foster the approach between the two states. It also seems that the Greek media have realized that the subject under investigation is not the proper one to demonstrate the ideology and the discourse of nationalism anymore, in a time when other topics emerge as more appropriate for this task, such as the coverage of the refugee/migration flows.

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# **Aspects of news dramatization during the first wave of the pandemic: Content analysis by time period, news coverage, and reference to the number of COVID-19 cases**

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## **Abstract**

Mass media largely construct our perceptions of the world through their representations. However, the boundaries between the actual conveying of information and the way it is presented by the media are blurred due to infotainment. The purpose of the current research is to analyze the dramatization elements of the news related to the pandemic. It also highlights specific technical aspects of dramatization (music, images, similes/metaphors, adjectives) and correlates them with the news release period, the news length, and whether or not a number of cases is reported. The research method implemented is quantitative content analysis considering the news item (for news bulletins) and the article (for news sites) as unit of analysis.

**Keywords:** health communication, content analysis, pandemics, news dramatization.

## **Introduction**

The research at hand aims to document the current trends in the dramatization of SARS-CoV-2-related news on television and on the internet. So, mainly, to investigate which dramatization techniques and to what extent were preferred by the television broadcasters and the journalists of the news websites during the presentation of news related to the pandemic caused by COVID-19.

For the needs of this research, content analysis was implied on a sample of television news stories and news articles. The sampled news was broadcasted or published from February 1, 2020, when the spread of the virus in China began to worsen, until April 30, 2020, when the quarantine ended after the first lockdown in Greece. Therefore, the research covers the period that has been widely described as the first wave of the pandemic.

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Its purpose is to investigate the extent to which the media used dramatization techniques to cover pandemic-related news. However, on the one hand, this is quite broad research. On the other hand, one should bear in mind that each of the four dramatization techniques investigated here (repetition of images, use of music and sound effects, use of metaphors and similes, and adjectives) is correlated with other variables that could influence the use of these techniques.

The first variable under investigation is the *time period of the pandemic*. The research period (1/2/2020 to 30/4/2020) is divided into two-time intervals. The first extends from February 1, 2020, to March 15, 2021, when there was no death in Greece, and the news of tragic events was coming from abroad. The first case in Greece was hospitalized on March 2, 2020, and was intubated on the 6th of the same month. The 66-year-old man did not make it and died in the early hours of March 12, 2020. Amid the rapid spread of the cases and the fear of more deaths, the Greek government, on March 16, 2020, imposed a quarantine on the entire Greek population except for specific exceptions. The government also established a daily afternoon broadcast for giving information about the response to pandemic under the auspices of the Ministry of Health. This daily information was covered live by all national television stations and concerned the evolution of the pandemic in Greece and abroad, as well as the government's decisions in response to the pandemic's hazards.

Meanwhile, on March 11, the World Health Organization had already renounced COVID-19 as a pandemic. Therefore, the second timeframe in which the survey's sample is divided extends from March 16, 2020, to April 30, 2020, and concerns the period during which the Greek people had to stay confined at home and not leave, except with a text message (SMS) or a written form and only for specific reasons. As a result, in this second time period, the media's role gained prominence as they were the primary source of information for people who couldn't leave their homes.

The second variable correlated with the dramatization techniques in this research is the *duration or the extent of the news*. Very eloquently, an attending colleague of mine had noticed that we attempt to count apples with oranges. For this reason, news on television is measured in seconds, while news articles on the internet are measured in words. If an article on the internet also contained a video, every second was counted as a word, as we assumed that every word needs a second to be said. The length and duration of the words were classified into six classes. However, because the vast majority of articles belonged to two or three classes, it was preferred to classify the relevant numbers based on the distribution percentage of the relevant values. The six classes are not equal in numbers but are equal in the percentage of the articles that belong to their range. The duration or extent of the news is related to the framing of a news item. To be as thematic and comprehensive as possible, it requires a larger area, spatially or temporally.

The third variable is *the number of cases or deaths in the news* from any country or worldwide. If a story contained either a number of cases or a death toll, it was coded as news containing

the relevant reference. Tragic events are an excellent opportunity for the use of dramatization. So, this variable may provide statistically significant data when correlated with dramatization techniques.

## **News Dramatization**

A news dramatization occurs even when one of the following three parameters is present to a news item (Klemm, Das, & Hartmann, 2016: 2). First, if the reported risk is magnified, it is described as more dangerous than it actually is. Second, if the media emphasize the information under presentation misleadingly and disproportionately, they portrait it as much more threatening than it actually is. In that case, it may be ranked high on the media agenda (Dearing & Rogers, 2005), without this being based on the actual risks involved. Third, the represented threat is presented through emotionally charged language and related features, which divert the journalist from the pragmatic discourse. That is, the journalist tries to frame the news through evaluative elements that he uses in his speech and not by standing attached to what really happened (Pleios, 2001: 63).

News dramatization is studied mainly for two reasons, with the second of them involving two components. First, to compare different transmitters, to analyze the characteristics that a medium adopts or rejects. Of course, this separation may concern individual media or whole categories of media. Second, to defend an "ideal type" of journalism. The relevant discussion is timeless (Thussu, 2008: 7, Briggs & Hallin, 2016: 100) and is distinguished for its pessimism, as well as its regulatory tendencies. However, it is not entirely rejected. Public health risks, in particular, produce news that should be presented since they hold public interest. And this is a fitting discussion with the objective approaches to journalism. In this case, discussing risks related to public health might contribute in the opposite direction to the "ideal type" of journalism, since a health crisis and a coming danger are not offered for objective approaches, mainly when the threat's size is discussed.

Since the beginning of the century, Hallin & Mancini (2004: 251) had noted the tendency of the media's liberal model to spread worldwide. For Thussu (2008: 68), this tendency is manifested through the adoption of specific practices, which can concern both the media content and also how these programs are organized. Thus, there is a widespread media culture, which focuses mainly on commercialization and advertising. Dramatization is related to these practices, as it aims to keep the interest of viewers, listeners, and visitors undiminished. In these cases, media discourse tends to prevail over political discourse. As a result, dramatization practices are more and more normalized when it comes to information (Pleios, 2001; Thussu 2008; Briggs & Hallin, 2016).

A typical example is *hard news*. Dramatization now comprises an integral part even of the most eminent news, which concerns the whole society. Public risks, including the current global pandemic, fall into hard news. The use of dramatization in hard news occurs for three reasons.

First, viewers and website users are attracted to the drama (Lee, 2014: 298), which the media utilizes for this purpose. Second, nowadays drama shapes political news (Lee, 2014: 298). Indeed, dramatization is not just a way of framing, but it is a broader process that forms the presentation of information, as well as information itself. The viewers experience a collective trauma and various other incidents in a mediated manner based on relevant rituals developed by the media industry (Cottle, 2006: 415). Third, the media act as a "booster" of risk (Kasperson et al., 2003: 23). They can either calm the viewers or spread panic by the way they present a news item. Because of their nature, it can be also observed that they contribute to the spread of moral panic, since a situation, an event, a person, or a group of people are presented stereotypically. Then, it is easy for a viewer to label them as a threat to social values and social interest (Cohen, 1972).

### **Dramatization techniques**

Despite the increasing use of dramatization in the news, the relative range of techniques seems a little bit stagnated (Pleios, 2011). This paradox, of course, may be related to a broader trend of the media, especially in Greece, not to allow radical changes in terms of the presenter, broadcast time, or duration of a program.

Therefore, in this case, four specific techniques are explored. Their following definitions demonstrate the way they are investigated in this research. The first of these is the *repetition of images*. Repetition of images is defined as the repeated presentation of images or videos within a specific news item. This practice makes the framing of an event much more straightforward. Images are a visual tool that allows the medium to maintain the viewers' attention and favor specific interpretations of events (Ben-Porath & Shaker, 2010: 470). Combining the above with the timeless proverb "repetition is the mother of all learning" used by the ancient Greeks and Latins ("*repetitio est mater studiorum*"), it is understood that the journalist frames an event based on the images he/she desires to show, but also can repeat them, to consolidate the specific perspective he/she reproduces. The censoring of projected images in the news has occupied various public services or figures who try to launch a particular image for themselves (Albritton & Mannheim, 1985: 44).

The second technique is *the use of music or sound effects in the news*. It is defined as the reproduction of unnatural sounds or music during the presentation of a news item to emphasize its specific elements or rouse specific emotional effects (anxiety, fear, curiosity, etc.). Television news often uses tunes that sound similar to compositions in mystery movies, adventure, thrillers, or horror. Grabe, Zhou & Barnett (2001: 642) argue that music can cause specific effects, reactions, and interpretations. Therefore, its use in the news has a psychological dimension.

The third technique is *the use of similes and metaphors*. The use of literary discourse forms is intended to relate a fact to events derived from public or private life, history or tradition, or the

use of nouns that reproduce meanings other than their literal meaning. With this technique, the journalists can, and does, give sharpness, vividness, and liveliness to their words. Simultaneously, the news is enriched with elements that are not in line with the pragmatic discourse (Pleios, 2001: 63) when presented without trying to frame it. On the contrary, similes and metaphors can give a different tone of sentimentality to the news. The use of metaphors is every day when presenting public health news (Wallis & Nerlich, 2005: 2630; Briggs & Hallin, 2016: 166).

The fourth and final technique is *the use of evaluative adjectives when presenting a news item*. The use of evaluative adjectives intends to evaluate an event, a person involved, a public service, or a process. With such adjectives, the journalist's speech becomes semantic (Pleios, 2001: 63), unique in its meaning, assuming subjective dimensions. By evaluating objects or subjects, the journalist can and does highlight the protagonists while creating different images of people, from that of the hero to that of the scapegoat.

The main finding of this research suggests that these four techniques can be grouped in pairs according to whether they occur in a spontaneous manner or they have been programmed before the start of the show. This, of course, mainly concerns television news. Repetition of images and the use of music and sound effects are two techniques in editing, which have been pre-decided and performed before the news bulletin is displayed. In contrast, on the internet, where videos and images are more limited than television news, their use is somewhat more nested, as they are inside the text or at the end of the article. On television, the program director has a say in use or not of these two techniques. Simultaneously, their use is related to the bulletin's general philosophy, which has usually been formed since October, when the television season begins in Greece. Therefore, we can characterize these two dramatization techniques as *directorial*.

On the other hand, the use of similes/metaphors and adjectives can occur spontaneously on the flow of news by the journalist or by anyone who presents a news item or comments on it. Both techniques are verbal. However, their use also serves specific journalistic functions, as mentioned earlier (Pleios, 2011). Therefore, the other two dramatization techniques can be described as *journalistic*.

## **The research method**

For the research needs, content analysis was chosen, as it is suitable for quantifying qualitative parameters researched in media texts (Stokes, 2003: 56). Content analysis helps to convert qualitative info, as in our case news, into quantitative data. That is why content analysis has been identified as the most accurate media research method (Kyriazi, 1999: 283). According to Dearing & Rogers (2005: 72), content analysis is defined as the quantification of content in a variety of items.

In this research, the unit of the research is the news item. The survey sample consists of 2389 news items in total. 1189 were broadcasted on television by six television stations of pan-Hellenic scope (ERT1, MEGA, ANT1, SKAI, ALPHA, and STAR). The remaining 1200 news were published in six of the most popular news websites in Greece (protothema.gr, in.gr, iefimerida.gr, news247.gr, newsit.gr, lifo.gr). These sites were chosen through the SimilarWeb application, which presents website traffic.

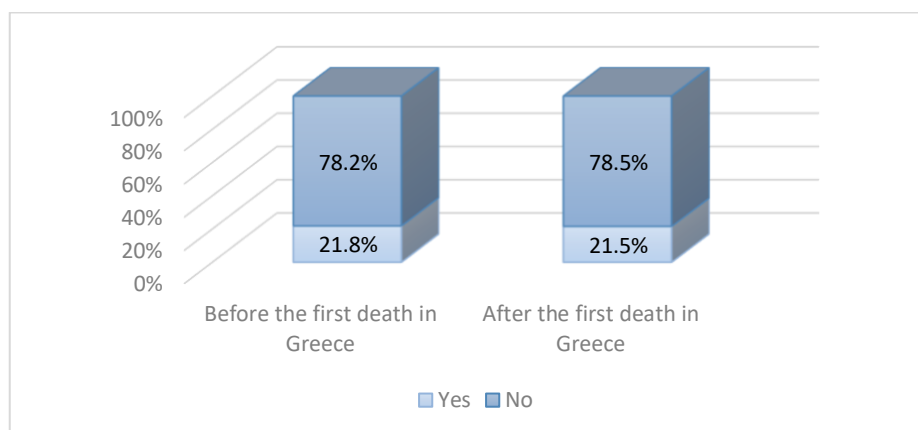
As was analyzed in the introduction, the research sample's date starts from 1/2/2020 to 30/4/2020, a period we divide into two equal, consecutive subperiods. In the first one (1153 news items), the pandemic occurs mainly abroad, while in the second (1236 news items), which starts on March 16, 2020, the first death from coronavirus has already happened in Greece, and the Greek population is under lockdown.

The results were analyzed with the use of SPSS 26. The Pearson Chi-Square or Fisher's exact test was used at a 95% confidence interval for the presence or absence of statistically significant results. The results show three types of graphs that cross tabulate the four dramatization techniques (image repetition, music/sound effects, simulations/metaphors, adjectives) with the three variables mentioned in the introduction (period, duration/extent of the news, report cases or deaths). In total, twelve graphs appeared in the results section.

## Results of the research

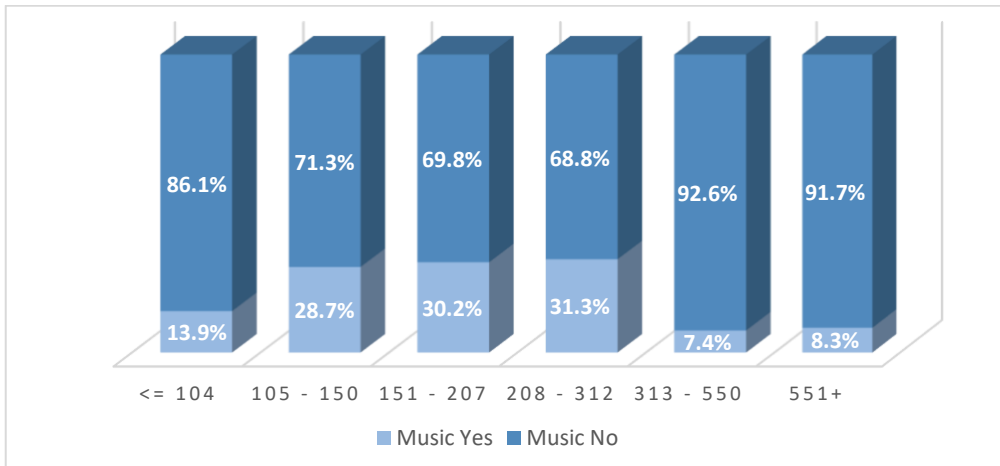
### *Use of music or sound effects*

By correlating the use of music and sound effects with the period of the first wave of the pandemic, i.e., before or after the imposition of quarantine on the whole population, we see that the results are not statistically significant since the relative value in the caption of Figure 1a is more than 0.05. We see that this practice is slightly more intense before the quarantine. Therefore, music seems to be an element that does not show any significant change over the examined timeframe.



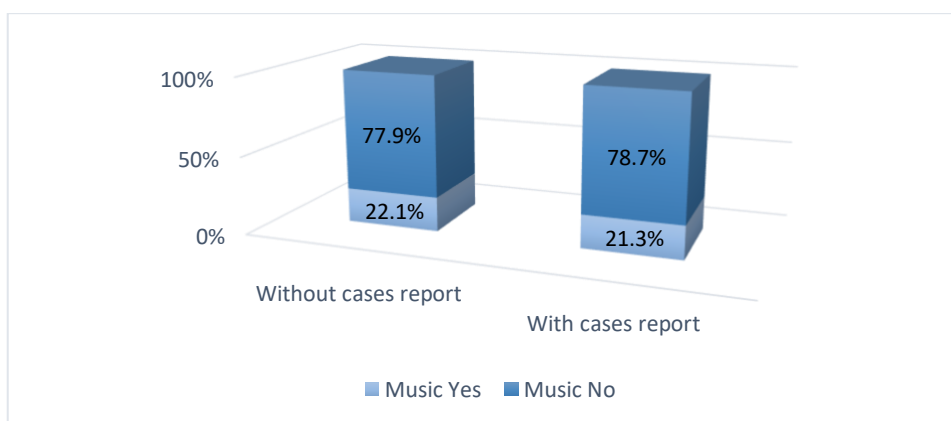
**Figure 1a.** Use of music by time period (Fisher's exact test p-value = .903).

Figure 1b shows that music or sound effects are used more in the news of five minutes duration or 312 words. It is observed that this dramatization technique is more common in the first and middle classes, especially in the latter. On the contrary, this technique is less common when news items/articles are longer by duration or extent. In contrast to the correlation between music and timeframe, the correlation between music and news duration/length classes is statistically significant.



**Figure 1b.** Use of music per class of news duration/length in seconds/words (Fisher's exact test p-value = .000)

Figure 1c shows that this specific dramatization feature with the number of cases or deaths in the news is not statistically significant since the relative number in the caption is greater than 0.05 set limit. There may be a slight deviation (0.2%) when the number of cases or deaths is reported, but it is still not significant. We see that the use of music depends only on the extent and duration of the news, and not on the other two variables that were correlated with. Neither the date of presentation/publication, nor the reporting on the number of cases were found relevant.

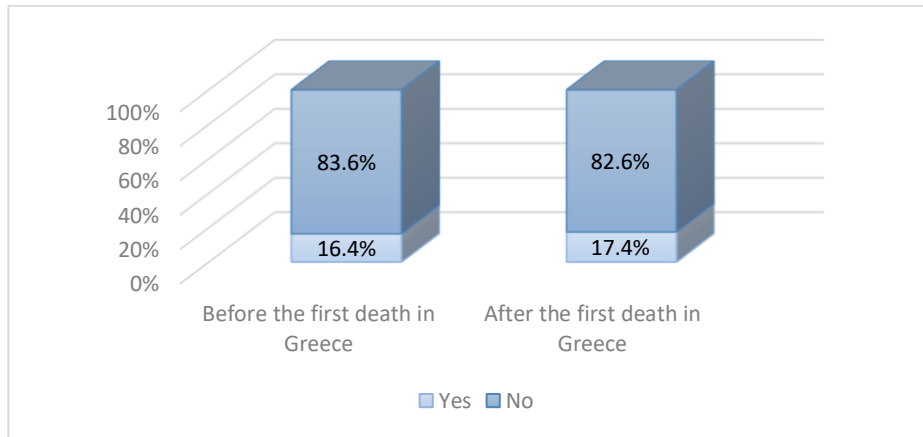


**Figure 1c.** Use of music depending on whether a number of cases is reported (Fisher's exact test p-value = .702).

### *Images Repetition*

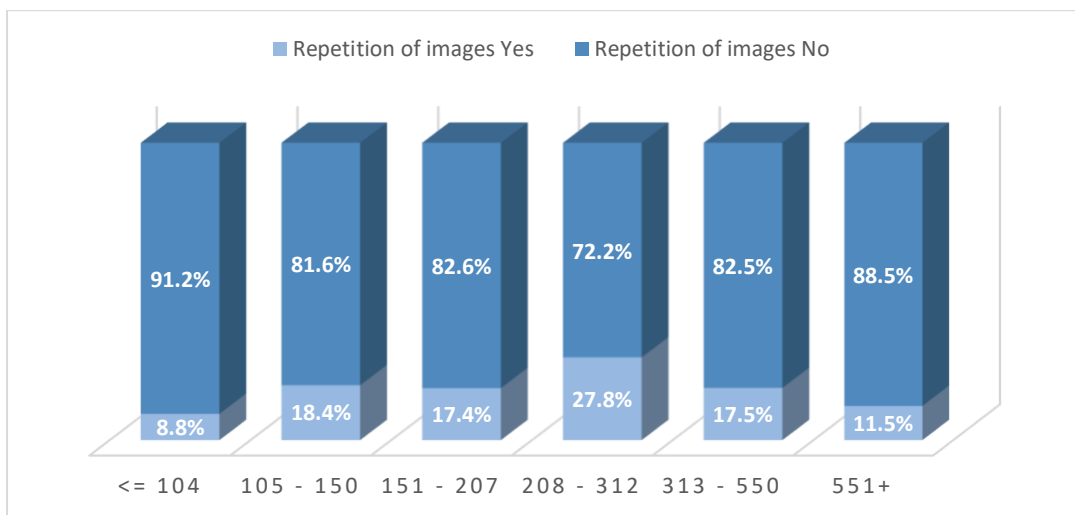
The repetition of images shows a slight increase in graph 2a (1%) during the quarantine period, i.e., after Greece's first death from COVID-19. However, this correlation is not statistically

significant, as the number in the caption is greater than 0.05. The repetition of images and the use of music or sound effects is a dramatization technique that falls into the directional methods based on the theoretical framework. We see that both the use of music and the repetition of images are not related to a specific timeframe.



**Figure 2a.** Repetition of images per time period (Fisher's exact test p-value = .452).

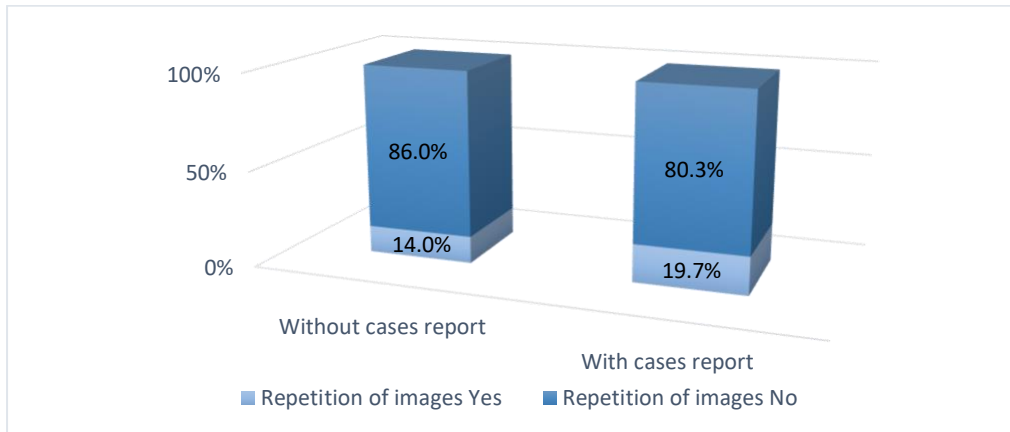
Figure 2b shows that the projection of images is more frequently found in the middle classes of the news duration or extent. When the news is from 105 to 550 seconds/words, the relative dramatization technique is more common. Combining graph 2b with the corresponding 1b, we conclude that both directorial dramatization techniques show a similar trend: they are more common in the news's middle classes.



**Figure 2b.** Repetition of images per class of news duration/length in seconds/words (Fisher's exact test p value = .000).

Figure 2c shows a statistically significant change in the repetition of images when the number of cases or deaths is reported in the news. The relative percentage rises by 5.7% (14% to 19.7%) when the said number is mentioned in the news. Based on this graph, for the first time, we see the two directorial techniques behave differently. While in Figure 1c, the use of music or sound

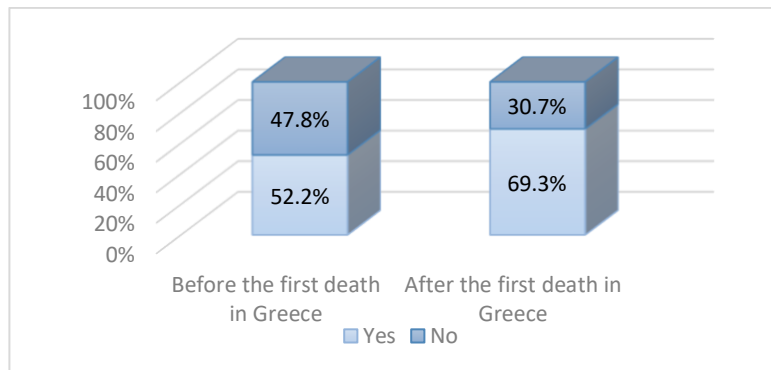
effects was independent of the mentioned number of cases or deaths, the repetition of images seems to be affected by the reference of that number.



**Figure 2c.** Repetition of images depending on whether a number of cases is reported (Fisher's exact test p value = .000).

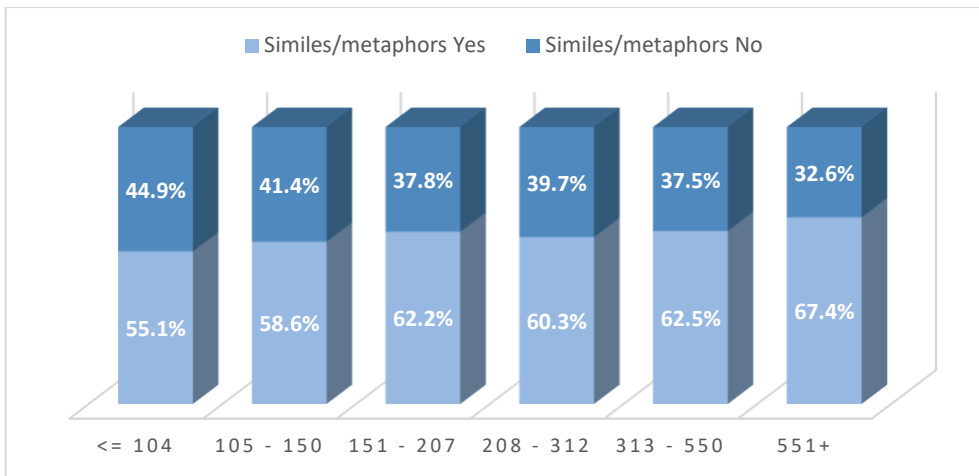
*Use of similes or metaphors*

The following six figures move on to the study of journalistic dramatization techniques, which, as it was referred to in the theoretical framework, are also subjected to the main journalist's, or another participant's, spontaneity in the bulletin or article. Figure 3a shows that the use of similes and metaphors confirms the research's theoretical framework, which states that metaphors and similes are common during a pandemic. We see, therefore, an increase of 17.1% in this technique after the first death in Greece, which means that journalists tend to use much more metaphors and similes after March 16, 2020, when the population is also in quarantine.



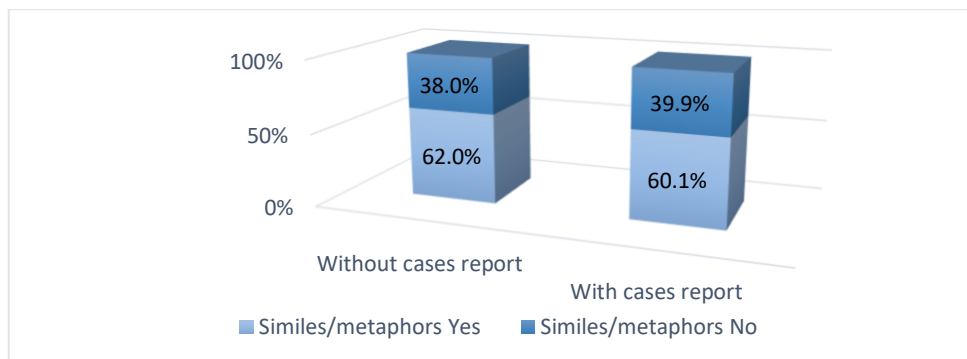
**Figure 3a.** Use of similes/metaphors by time period (Fisher's exact test p value = .000).

Figure 3b shows that metaphors or similes tend to increase along with the duration or extent of the news. The only exception appears between the third and fourth classes, where this technique is presented more frequently in the third class than in the fourth. Unlike the two previous directorial methods, similes or metaphors have an increasing tendency depending on the news's extent or duration, which is a statistically significant feature.



**Figure 3b.** Use of similes/metaphors per class of news duration/length in seconds/words (Fisher's exact test p value = .014).

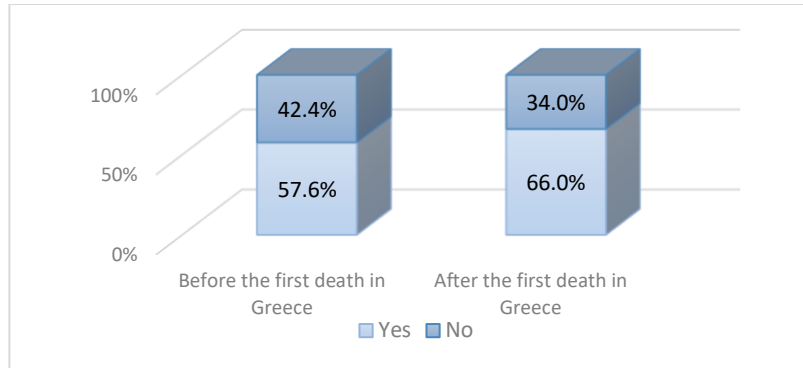
In Figure 3c, on the one hand, a downward change (1.9%) of the relative value is observed when the number of cases or deaths is reported. On the other hand, the number in the graph's caption shows that the correlation is not statistically significant, as it is more than 0.05. Therefore, this result is not statistically significant. Therefore, although a death or an illness is an excellent opportunity to construct a dramatic event, this specific technique (use of similes or metaphors) seems to be independent of this reference.



**Figure 3c.** Use of similes/metaphors depending on whether a number of cases is reported (Fisher's exact test p-value = .356).

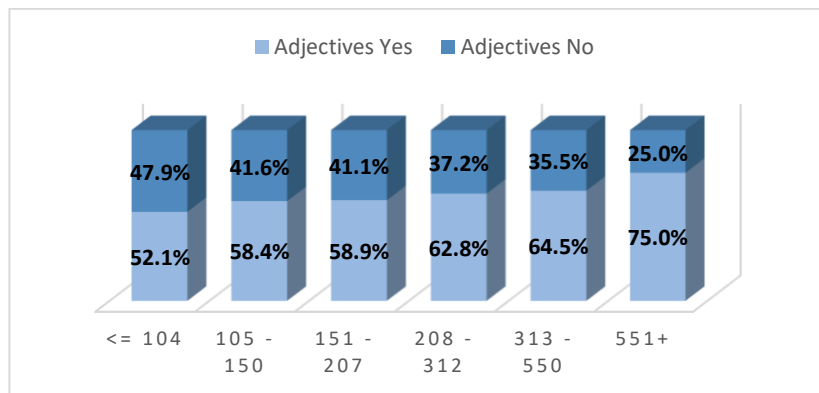
### *Use of adjectives*

Figure 4a shows that after the first death in Greece, the use of adjectives increases significantly. Journalists seem to obtain a more emotionally charged speech, as demonstrated by the increased rate of this dramatization technique from 57.6% before the first death to 66% after. As we saw in Figure 3a, the use of the relevant method increases during the quarantine period. Therefore, we can say that journalistic dramatization techniques (use of metaphors or similes and adjectives) are related to the broadcast or publication time. This result was found statistically significant, according to the Pearson Chi Square test.



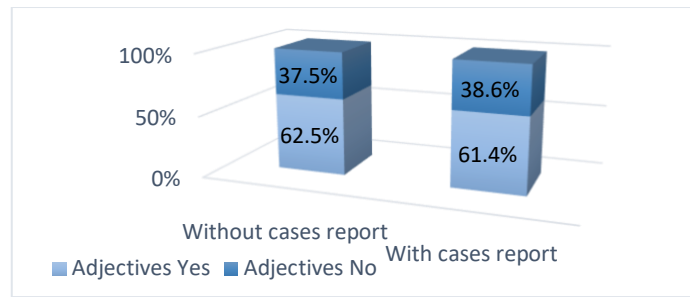
**Figure 4a.** Use of adjectives by time period (Fisher's exact test p-value = .000).

In Figure 4b, we see that adjectives' use becomes more often when the news' duration or extent is also bigger. The relative percentages seem to increase progressively per class. A similar trend is observed in graph 3b. Therefore, it appears that both journalistic dramatization techniques show similar behavior when correlated with the class of news duration/length in seconds/words. However, the use of similes or metaphors ranged from 55% to 67.4%, while that of adjectives ranged from 52.1% to 75%.



**Figure 4b.** Use of adjectives per class of news duration/length in seconds/words (Fisher's exact test p value = .000).

In Figure 4c, it is observed that the correlation of adjectives regarding the number of cases or deaths in the news does not show any statistically significant change since the relative number in the caption is greater than 0.05. Indeed, there is a relative reduction in the use of adjectives when the number of cases or deaths is reported in a news item. The same trend was noticed in graph 3c regarding the use of similes or metaphors. There the deviation was 1.9% (62% to 60.1%), while in the use of adjectives, it is 1.1% (62.5% to 61.4%).



**Figure 4c.** Use of adjectives depending on whether a number of cases is reported (Fisher's exact test p-value = .597).

## Conclusions

This research attempts to correlate four dramatization techniques with three independent variables (period, duration/word number of the news item, reference to COVID cases). Some techniques might be influenced more or not at all by the three independent variables of our research. Also, they might show similar or different behaviors. However, these deviations were to be expected.

As to whether these techniques are utilized, the answer is that journalistic practices seem much more common than the corresponding directorial one. Specifically, in the first six graphs of the presentation, relevant to the directorial dramatization techniques, the news percentages that use them were found less than 35%. In the respective last six graphs, which concern journalistic dramatization techniques, the minimum percentage was found more than 52%. Therefore, it seems that in quantitative terms, the use of journalistic techniques is much higher. These are relevant to the first part of the research.

As for the second part, which requires a more detailed presentation, the crosstabulations showed quite valuable but different elements. Regarding the time of the broadcast or publication of the news, the use of metaphors/similes and adjectives increases after the first announced death in Greece, in contrast to the use of music/sound effects and repetition of images. The repetition of images shows a slight increase after the first death (1%) but is not statistically significant. Music and the repetition of images show a greater tendency to appear in the middle classes of the news duration or extent. Simultaneously, the use of similes or metaphors and adjectives increases as the duration/extent of the news item grows.

Regarding the number of cases or deaths in the news, if we look at the graphs, we will notice that only the repetition of images is associated with it. This is shown by the relative percentage increase of 5.7% when this number is mentioned in the news. On the other hand, paradoxically, in relation to the theoretical framework, the other three dramatization techniques are less common in the news when referring to the number of cases or deaths from coronavirus.

Judging by the study's findings as a whole, the main result is that some dramatization techniques exhibit similar behavior to others when associated with this variable. The initial

distinction between directorial and journalistic variables is confirmed, as they seem to be similarly influenced by the three variables with which they are associated.

When correlated with the time period and the extent or duration of the news, both directional variables show similar trends. The use of music and repetition of images remain unchanged over time, while their presence is intensified in the middle classes of duration or extent of the news. On the contrary, they show different behavior when the news reports numbers of cases or deaths. As mentioned again earlier, the music remains almost unchanged in these instances, and the repetition of images increases when the number of deaths or cases is mentioned.

The two journalistic variables show similar behavior in all three examined correlations. The utilization of the relevant techniques becomes more intense after the first death in Greece, increases per class of duration or extent of the news, and remains unaffected by the reported number of cases or deaths in the news.

Therefore, we can assume that the use of directorial dramatization techniques remains relatively more static than journalistic techniques. The directorial techniques seem to be more predetermined and stable during the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic. On the other hand, journalistic dramatization techniques become more common after the first death in Greece and as the duration or extent of the news increases.

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## **Diversity in the media: The case of the refugees' representation in the Greek newspapers at a time of crisis**

Georgia Gioltzidou

Fotini Gioltzidou\*

### **Abstract**

In recent years, there has been a sharply distorted perception of the refugee and migration phenomenon. Due to the media's often skewed presentation of the separate issues of immigration and refugee, many have difficulty even understanding the definitions of these two situations. Citizens cannot perceive the difference between immigration as a choice and being refugee as a one-way street and coercion. As a result, citizens consider the boundaries of the two situations indistinguishable. The present study investigates the way in which refugees and immigrants are represented in the Greek press, in times of crisis. Through a comparative study on the front pages of Greek political newspapers, we seek to analyze how this news is covered and mainly how refugees and immigrants are portrayed by Greek journalists. The research question is whether a newspaper's political positions influence the way it portrays refugees. Methodologically, the study is based on the framing theory, which has become a dominant tool for describing, understanding and evaluating media content. The idea of the research is partly based on Hall's positions (1981: 64, 87) that the media “not only distort reality, but also define it”.

**Keywords:** immigration, crisis, refugees' representation, newspapers, Greece.

### **Immigration and diversity**

Among other things, diversity has an etymological interpretation related to the "adoption of an alternative way of life, perception, mentality and thinking" but also to the "respect for each person's perception and mentality standards, having in mind that any different aspect and perspective is accepted as something equal and not superior or inferior" (Papataxiarchis, 2006). At the same time, diversity is associated with "respect for other cultures and in particular for the elements that make up each different culture" (Markou, 1998). Having these concepts in mind, cultural diversity refers to the concept of different cultures, in contrast to the homogeneity of cultures (Spanos & Haidogiannou, 2013). In simpler terms, while diversity is valuable and necessary for humanity, it is important to emphasize that diversity can also be defined as the internal process of accepting the other, which means that it is a situation that requires effort (Papataxiarchis, 2006).

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Diversity and heterogeneity have become much-discussed concepts, mainly due to the intense social phenomena that plague European citizens. The refugee and immigrant issues belong to these phenomena. However, it is necessary to clarify the definitions of "refugee" and "immigrants", as this understanding could allow us to have an accurate view of the differences between these two groups characteristics and needs. As Bernard (1976) notices, "A basic and age-old characteristic of man is that he often moves from one place to another. Generally, because he wants to. Sometimes because he has to. These two conditioning factors mark the fundamental difference between immigrants and refugees. The former are predominantly voluntary migrants. The latter are involuntary ones". In addition, the social base of the European countries has changed rapidly due to the mass entering flows, while attention has not been given to the proper education of the citizens and the proper preparation, for a smooth reception, integration or assimilation of immigrants. Alongside, the information that the citizens of the host countries have about the definition of the terms "refugee", "immigrant" and "asylum seeker" is quite incomplete, resulting in misunderstandings and misinterpretations regarding the rights of each group.

The lack of accurate knowledge about European and international hospitality, but also about reception programs for refugees and immigrants intensifies feelings of fear, insecurity, threat and hostility, which often outweigh the inherent hospitality of peoples such as the Greeks. Because both kinds of migration have profound effects upon everyone involved - the country of origin, the host country, and the migrants themselves - it is important to know the similarities and the differences, of immigrants and refugees (Bernard, 1976). Adding to it, we have to take into consideration the dissatisfactory immigration policies of European countries, the serious inability to process asylum seekers and the prolonged economic crisis that has hit Greece and has financially weakened Greek citizens, making it impossible for them to manage the new reality, as they might have found easier to do under different circumstances (Kalfeli, 2020).

### **Immigration and diversity in the media**

Amid all this fluid new situation that the citizens of the host countries are called upon to experience, migration has become one of the top issues on the global media agenda, taking on the crucial role of transmitting information, as well as interpreting complex and sensitive issues. In addition, the media have the power to offer their own version of a reality that can eventually be transformed. The perception of social reality is increasingly shaped by an interplay of representations in the media. Media representations also influence the public perception of immigrants and refugees as well as immigration policies. Thus, the way in which migration, immigrants, refugees, or ethnic and religious minorities are represented across different types of media is certainly one of the most prominent themes in European media and communication studies (Smets and Bozdağ, 2018). Reality can become a product of fiction through the pen of the journalist. Even a few words of a title or a photo can promote views and tendencies about refugees who in most cases are unjust for them. Especially in the case of

photographs which are usually used as "evidence" of verbal claims or even explanatory aids, reading them indiscriminately can lead to distortion of the truth. In any case, the media can portray the phenomenon of immigration, immigrants, and refugees in a completely stereotypical term (Van Gorp, 2005).

Additionally, media have, by definition, the power to shape perceptions and tendencies, influencing not only citizens' thoughts, but also their actions. Recent, extensive academic research has shown that the media cover the phenomenon of migration in a variety of and often contradictory ways, greatly differentiating issues of refugee diversity. For example, they approach and describe immigration as a phenomenon that poses a threat to public order and a risk to public health, as a phenomenon that creates constant conflict, but also as a phenomenon in which migrants are portrayed as victims of war, inequality and in need of compassion and help (Benson, 2013; Van Gorp, 2005; Kalfeli, 2020). In addition, there are cases in which immigrants are framed by the media with a narrative of "illegality" which, as expected, is perceived as a threat by the inhabitants of each host country (Kim et al., 2011; Benson, 2013).

Ultimately, the media play a central and powerful role in contemporary experiences by shaping attitudes and opinions and at the same time, providing a point of contact between different groups. The media can contribute to quality public debate as well as to defining perceptions of minorities and intergroup relations (Spoonley and Trlin, 2004). Also, although media coverage can help in shaping public opinion, there is a potential reciprocal effect on policymakers, as the media themselves can be an essential element of policymaking (Hodgetts and Chamberlain, 2006). More specifically, in addition to creating stereotypes among citizens about issues of diversity, a misconception of the collective view stemming from biased media coverage could also prove particularly detrimental to public policymaking (Thompsett et al., 2003; Hodgetts, Chamberlain, 2006). In line with the dominant strand in the literature, several studies point at the overall negative stereotyping of migration and immigrants in the media and its potential menace for constructive public debate. In fact, as much as the media create stereotypical or even obscure thoughts and tendencies that are sometimes adopted by the citizens, they essentially create the conditions for nationalist and outdated policies that have a purely national perspective, ignoring the globalized version of the phenomenon and moving away from humanitarian logic (Smets and Bozdag, 2018). Therefore, the role of the media in shaping the view of otherness in relation to refugees and migrants is extremely important.

### **The framing role in the Mass Media**

As Gamson and Modigliani (1989:157) argue, events make sense when incorporated into a framework that organizes them and gives them coherence, illuminating some aspects and ignoring others. Realizing that every piece of journalistic material is essentially a story/narration, we understand that the media must be selective in what they present to their audience, how they present it, and whether they ultimately tell a story that contains actual/accurate facts (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989). According to Entman (1993), selection

and localization are two key features of framing. In addition, the role of the media in the way in which reality is perceived by the public is proving crucial. Especially in conditions of insecurity and uncertainty, the media find the opportunity to express but also to inflate fears and insecurities to attract the attention of the public. (Gale, 2004:325, 335). In this case, their role becomes strongly mediating, while the way in which the news is selected and presented becomes of major importance.

As Iyengar and Kinder (1987) claim, frameworks are always consistent, because they lead the public to interpret issues in different ways, that is, frames can make an event remarkable or not, as they can also shape public opinion or change the attitude of citizens. The deliberate misuse of a photograph or the deliberate misuse of specific words in an article title can create conditions of hatred, enmity, racism, nationalism, but also fear, insecurity and a false sense of threat (Zaller, 1992). For all these reasons, the framing theory is considered extremely useful in order to study the front pages of political newspapers, both quantitatively and qualitatively. The positions of Fiske and Taylor (1991) partly explain why the application of framing theory in this study was considered valuable. As they mentioned, frames are consequential, because they lead the audience to interpret issues in various ways. When elevated in salience, a piece of information is more likely to be "noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audiences". In the case of news related to scientific and medical data, this element is of particular interest to the dissertation. Indeed, the framing process is an influential way through which the media may shape public opinion or alter citizens' attitudes (Fiske and Taylor, 1991).

## **Methodology**

The main research question of the study is whether the political positions of a newspaper influence the way they portray refugees, while the main working hypothesis is that the political orientation of a specific media can distort the vision and presentation to such an extent that even a humanitarian issue can be projected as purely political, completely removing from it any humanistic tone.

The paper attempts a comparative study of four political newspapers, limited to observing and processing data extracted from their front pages. The selection of newspapers was mainly based on their circulation data, as they are published by the Argos Distribution Network and by the Association of Daily Newspaper Owners of Athens.

In addition, the selection was based on the newspapers' political orientation, in order for the political trends to be prevailed, as to ensure the partial representativeness and objectivity of the research results. Newspapers were not selected from all political areas in Greece, since the purpose of the study is to investigate the political attitude of a newspaper in relation to government positions, and not for a thorough political representation to take place. Thus, newspapers that are characterized as pro-governmental, as well as newspapers that are in favor of the opposition side are chosen. The government-affiliated newspapers selected are

"Kathimerini" and "Ta Nea", while the opposition newspapers are "Efimerida ton Syntakton" and "I Avgi".

The duration of the sampling is from 29/2/2020 until 10/3/2020 and the choice for the beginning of the study was based on the day when the Kastaneon Customs in Evros closed (28/2/2020) and thousands of refugees were crowded at the border. On the same day, the Athenian-Macedonian Agency published for the first-time information and photos from the gathering of immigrants and refugees at the border crossing point, while Turkish media, foreign media and international agencies began to report extensively on this major political, diplomatic and above all humanitarian issue. At the same time and on the same day, representatives of the Greek political and military leadership went to the spot, in order to propagate the political and military positions of Greece. From that day on, this issue settled in the Greek journalistic agenda.

This research is based on both quantitative (frequency and number of publications) and qualitative data (image analysis, title content analysis). Methodologically, the work is based on the framing theory, which is described as the way in which a specific "reading" of the message presented by the media is proposed (Zaller, 1992). The first part of the research is based on quantitative data which is collected with strict numerical criteria, such as the number of published articles on the refugee issue that refer to the front pages, in the limited time frame. The second part of the research is based on qualitative criteria. Initially, the method of content analysis is applied to the titles of the articles. In this context, we investigate whether the newspapers focus on "border security" or "human security", but also whether the headlines "use" refugees to cultivate political aggravation at the level of internal or external relations.

## **Quantitative and qualitative research results**

Out of the total of 244 articles that appear on the front pages of the newspapers under study during the limited period, only 25 relate to the issue of the crisis in Evros. It is clear that the volume of published articles on such an important issue, both in terms of its political dimension and in terms of its humanitarian dimension is relatively limited. This can be partly explained by the fact that at the time of the study, worldwide, the Covid-19 pandemic had already begun to spread, and for this reason several of the headline articles refer to information on the Covid-19 pandemic. In any case, however, the media have the potential to build social consensus on issues that they present as important. So, they can turn public opinion on the major humanitarian issue that has emerged (Chong and Druckman, 2007: 104).

The data related to the issues published by the newspapers of different political orientation are of major interest. The pro-governmental newspapers, "Kathimerini" and "Ta Nea", published a total of 13 relevant articles, while the opposition newspapers published a total of 12 relevant articles. A first conclusion that we can draw, is that the opposition newspapers did not choose to downgrade the issue to a major one, while they could do so, either in order to promote an

important humanitarian issue, or even as a political tool of pressure on the Greek government or political upheaval to Turkey. Eventually, the governmental newspapers rushed to cover the crisis in Evros to the same extent and slightly more intensely, leaving the newspapers of the Left behind.

In the second level of research, the method of qualitative content analysis is applied to the headlines of the research articles. In this case, among other things, we investigate whether the newspapers focus on "border security" or "human security", but also whether the headlines show that the media "use" the refugees to cultivate political escalation. The data we come to are:

Out of the 25 articles in total, the topic under consideration appears as main / central only on 11 front pages. Out of these, 7 are front-page newspapers affiliated with the government, while 4 are those of newspapers that support the opposition. As observed, the opposition forces of Greece did not focus on the major political / humanitarian issue as much as they could, since most of the references, are made with small texts, often single-column and even without photos, which are "hidden" under the central issues. According to the data, the newspapers which are close to the Government did not cover the issue in a satisfactory way quantitatively speaking.

Out of the 25 articles in total, 18 have titles which refer to "border security" and 7 have titles which refer to "human security". For example, we notice titles as: "Mr. Mitsotakis, here is your national guard" (Efimerida ton Syntakton, 7/3/2020) "Increased vigilance on Aegean islands, for fear of Turkish provocation under the pretext of rescuing immigrants" (Kathimerini, 5/3/2020) and "Asymmetric threat of duration at the border" (Kathimerini, 3/3/2020) These titles make a very clear reference to the security of the borders. On the other hand, there are titles such as "Warehouse of souls with the backs of Brussels" (Efimerida ton Syntakton, 4/3/2020), and "New facts about the dead refugee in Evros" (Efimerida ton Syntakton, 4/3/2020) which mainly emphasize on the security of the people and not of the borders. Government-affiliated newspapers use headlines that refer only to "border security". Not a single article in "Kathimerini" and "Ta Nea" has a title that emphasizes the security of people, whether if they are Greek citizens, or refugees and immigrants. On the other hand, 7 of the 12 pro-oppositional newspaper headlines refer to "border security", while the remaining 5 emphasize the importance of human life and the need to protect trapped refugees and migrants.

Out of the 25 articles in total, 15 are identified to refer mainly to the interior of Greece and the political aspects generated by the crisis in Evros, while the remaining 10 mainly emphasize the problems caused by both Greece's relations with Turkey, as well as the relations of Greece and Turkey with the European Union. It is noteworthy that the humanitarian crisis comes second to politics and diplomacy. Refugees and migrants are presented as the cause of the problem or as the problem itself. The instrumentalization of refugees and migrants is clear. Diversity is presented here as a "problem" that must be solved, without any thought of even conditionally opening borders or sending humanitarian aid. The findings confirm the thematically broader

but relevant research of Zillmann, Knobloch and Yu, (2001: 306) which shows that it is common for the media to focus on presenting crises, negative news and problematic situations.

### **Analysis of the images on the front pages**

The next part of the research focuses on the application of the framing theory to the images presented in newspaper articles. The study of photographs can provide valuable material, according to their own socio-economic context (Becker, 1998: 89). The frameworks set from the beginning are four: 1) The presentation of the issue from a political point of view, 2) The presentation of the issue from a humanitarian point of view, 3) The representation of refugees as "people in need of help" which is part of the humanitarian frame and 4) The representation of refugees as a "threat" which is part of the political frame. The total number of photographs found in the articles under study is 19. The following are typical examples of photographs classified in the above contexts:

Out of the total of 19 photos, 16 seem to have a political connotation. The humanitarian issue in Evros is represented through the faces of politicians, creating a parallel universe of action, two different worlds, a chaotic gap between the reality that people experience at the border and the reality that politicians perceive in their local official meetings. This comes in line with what Poulakidakos (2018) is highlighted when he mentions that "Although a tragedy is taking place in the European land and sea borders, the politicians favor a managerial approach to the crisis, by supporting the division between refugees and immigrants and the subsequent conditional provision of either humanitarian aid or asylum, in terms of the people eligible for it". This is actually noticed in frontpages as Kathimerini (10/3/2020) and Ta Nea (10/3/2020) (Images 1-5).

It is of high importance that whether we refer to newspapers that support the Government or to those that do not support it, the choice of smiling politicians shifts the readers' attention from the refugee-immigrants. In this way, the choice of the isolated, secure political environment has the power to create illusions of total and universal security for Greece.



social relationship. However, on none of the front pages we studied did we find close-up photos of refugees and immigrants that could give another, more emotional meaning to diversity.



Image 6: Kathimerini, 8/3/2020 (source: [https://www.frontpages.gr/d/kathimerin8\\_3\\_20](https://www.frontpages.gr/d/kathimerin8_3_20))

In the third context, refugees are represented as "people in need of help". Out of the 19 total headlines, only 4 present the refugees with these characteristics. Newspapers mainly choose animation photos, avoiding showing the faces of refugees. This choice on the one hand can be considered to protect the personal data of the refugees, but on the other hand, it creates an emotional distance between the face of the photo and the reader, since the real face of a trapped refugee, especially a child or a woman, could highlight the humanitarian side of the issue and evoke emotional attachment, compassion and empathy for the people portrayed (Images 7 & 8). This could also be approached as a humanitarian subframe.



Image 7: Avgi, 6/3/2020 (source: [https://www.frontpages.gr/d/avgig6\\_3\\_20](https://www.frontpages.gr/d/avgig6_3_20))



Image 8: Avgi, 4/3/2020 (source: [https://www.frontpages.gr/d/avgig4\\_3\\_20](https://www.frontpages.gr/d/avgig4_3_20))

The last frame represents refugees as a "threat". There is an impressive media preference here, since out of a total of 19 newspaper photos, 15 present refugees as a threat. In these photos the refugees are mainly presented as masses of diverse people gathered one next to the other, often in large groups. In addition, photographs depicting refugees as a "threat", usually include borders or military installations. Of high interest is the front page of the newspaper

"Kathimerini" (29/2/2020) which emphasizes the red sign that reads "Turkey" in the Turkish language, thus showing the responsible one, but at the same time clarifying where the refugees and immigrants belong. The presence of soldiers in the same photos in which immigrants appear, intensifies the view that they are a "threat" to our country, with the, at the same time, reassuring view, that Greece "is not in danger".

The notion of a possible "invasion" reinforces the idea that refugees are a problem that needs to be removed from Greece (Images 9-15). This element is in line with the positions of Moschopoulou (2005: 183-184), who describes the threat felt by the citizens of the host country regarding the degradation of the cultural and educational level of their country, the falsification of national homogeneity, but also deprivation of jobs due to the integration of refugees into the workforce. As regards an aspect of the political frame/approach to the refugees the result of a "threatening" representation of refugees could lead to the development of a hostile attitude of the inhabitants of the host country towards the immigrants, since these can be considered responsible for a possible state of social decline or even a "threat" to national sovereignty and border integrity (Tsoukala, 2001: 80).



Image 9: Kathimerini, 29/2/2020  
(source: [https://www.frontpages.gr/d/kathimerini29\\_2\\_20](https://www.frontpages.gr/d/kathimerini29_2_20))



Image 10: Kathimerini, 3/3/2020  
(source: [https://www.frontpages.gr/d/kathimerini3\\_3\\_20](https://www.frontpages.gr/d/kathimerini3_3_20))



Image 11: Ta Nea, 3/3/2020  
(source: [https://www.frontpages.gr/d/tanea3\\_3\\_20](https://www.frontpages.gr/d/tanea3_3_20))



**Image 12:** Kathimerini, 5/3/2020 (source: [https://www.frontpages.gr/d/kathimerini5\\_3\\_20](https://www.frontpages.gr/d/kathimerini5_3_20))



**Image 13:** Ta Nea, 5/3/2020 (source: [https://www.frontpages.gr/d/tanea5\\_3\\_20](https://www.frontpages.gr/d/tanea5_3_20))



**Image 14:** Ta Nea, 6/3/2020 (source: [https://www.frontpages.gr/d/tanea6\\_3\\_20](https://www.frontpages.gr/d/tanea6_3_20))



**Image 15:** Efimerida ton Syntakton, 3/3/2020 (source: [https://www.frontpages.gr/d/efimeridatonsyntakton3\\_3\\_20](https://www.frontpages.gr/d/efimeridatonsyntakton3_3_20))

## Discussion

The present research partly confirms Hall's position (1981: 64, 87) that the media not only distort reality, but also define it, although in order to have absolute confirmation, additional audience research would be needed. Especially when the defined reality does not contradict an established social perception, the influence of the media can be maximized. As seen in the analysis of the content of the headlines but also of the images on the front pages of the Greek political newspapers, the media promote aspects and project trends that do not adhere to the principles of diversity.

According to the framework we have set in order to study more closely the published journalistic material, the refugees are mainly represented as a "threat", with a special emphasis

given mainly by the newspapers that support the Greek government. In addition, there are few cases in which refugees are portrayed as "people in need of help", and these are found exclusively in pro-opposition newspapers.

Another aspect we examined in this research relates to the reduction of the crisis in Evros to a major political problem, at a time when the humanitarian dimension has been largely sidelined by opposition newspapers, and to a greater extent by pro-government newspapers. The instrumentalization of the refugees is clear. In part, it conveys the message that diversity not only does not provide enrichment of the society, but on the contrary, it is responsible for the sufferings that will potentially come to the Greek society.

The answer to the original research question, that is, whether and to what extent a newspaper's political positions influence the way they portray refugees, is obvious. The political positions of the newspapers strongly influence the way they describe and present major issues of diversity such as the representation of refugees in crisis situations. The basic journalistic principles of reaching as much as possible independence and objectivity are sinking into the sea of property and political ideology, with the danger of destroying the freedom of the press, which is necessary for the smooth functioning of any society. Further comparative studies that will focus on how the Greek press covers issues of diversity, could be particularly useful in order to investigate the current state of journalistic political independence in Greece.

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## **Ideological Functions and Nationalism in the main news bulletins**

Vasilios Tzotzis\*

### **Abstract**

The paper attempts to investigate the role of mass media in shaping public perceptions of the Greek-Turkish conflict in the Aegean and the Southeastern Mediterranean. The purpose of the paper is to analyze the messages conveyed in the light of Ideology and Nationalism, to present the ideological functions of journalistic discourse, the presence of ethnocentric discourse as a coherent element and to highlight the relations between the above notions. The study derives its theoretical base from the literature referring to the approaches to Ideology and the theoretical Schools of Nationalism. The methodology utilizes Critical Discourse Analysis and Content Analysis (quantitative & qualitative). The research demonstrates the dense existence of ideological discourse, as well as the existence of ethnocentric discourse in the transmitted messages. Furthermore, it analyzes both qualitatively and quantitatively, the relations and sequences between the ideological functions and the theoretical approaches of the study of Nationalism. The paper suggests that there is a strong presence of ideological functions in the transmitted messages, a permanent presence of nationalist discourse, a discriminatory construction of national identity, but also a necessary decoding of ethnocentric rhetoric regarding social practice in the protest about peace.

**Keywords:** nationalism, media, Greek-Turkish relations, CDA, content analysis.

### **Introduction**

The Greco-Turkish relations as well as their projection by the media have been the subject of inquiry by many researchers throughout the years. The convey of facts, the building of the "national self" image and also of the "national other", the ideological prism of the distortion of reality, repeating dominant nationalist patterns, are only some of the aspects of journalistic "language" that are under investigation. The perpetual friction between the two countries which takes place within the international arena has been greatly affected by the latter. The international upsurge of the far right (Katsika, 2019) as a political choice for the reconstitution of capitalism within national borders, the historic reclassifications after the two circles of the decade long financial crisis of the Lehman Brothers and the Covid-19 pandemic (Friderike Marx & Gern Beder, 2020), as well as competition for the exploitation for submarine fossil fuels are new traits in the continuum of history. The tension between the two countries in conjunction with a one-sided manifestation of the matter by the media, reintroduce the narrative of a conflict, not seen for years (Mastrogeorgiou, 2007).

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The present paper researches the theoretical relation of Power, Ideology, Nationalism, so as to try analyze the message by the media, the reception and perception of said message by the viewer and the socially predefined basis of this course. The aim of this endeavor is to point out the ideological functions within the journalistic speech, the proof of the existence of the ethnocentric idiom and the relationship that exists between the above. The basic aim of this project is to distinguish between the facts and the dominant state ideology and furthermore to defend the concept of peace and friendship among peoples.

The subjects of this research are the contents of three news bulletins by two private television channels (STAR, OPEN) and of the state channel (ERT) on 7/10/2021 which was the day that the Greek parliament voted in favor of the military agreement between Greece and France. The above agreement was the main event of the day for the mainstream media with live broadcast, continuous reports, comments by numerous so-called experts on such matters and many other sensationalized instances. More than that there were a number of other issues that emerged concerning the international arena, alliances between countries, the plans for both the economy and the energy produced in the region and the military armament of the countries involved.

The applied mixed methodology (qualitative and quantitative) employs ideas from the content analysis and also from the analysis of critical speech. The content analysis was used for the formation of the categories (Yannas, 2015), per ideological function in the first assortment and per school of thought of nationalism for the second. The structuring of ideological classifications is based on the available literature on the functions of this ideology. On a second level the analysis of critical speech is used so as to analyze what has been said or silenced in the broadcast message in parallel with the wider sociopolitical front. The interpretive and the explanatory analysis (Stamou, 2014) are placed at the epicenter with the aim to understand the ideological and political functions of speech. The conclusions which were drawn were based on the processing of the quantitative data, on the application of the analysis of critical speech which was used for the current project, as well as on the functions of ideology and nationalistic speech.

### **Basic theoretical assertions for Political Power, Ideology and Nationalism**

The theoretical foundation of the notions of Power, Ideology and Nationalism, as with every cognitive perception, requires the understanding of their materialistic background, the historical emergence and finally the historic necessity which created them. Thus, the idea of Power, of the dominant Ideology and of Nationalism, as a driving force on the level of ideas in the age of modernity, can be found in the distribution of the surplus wealth on a basis which is "unequal but nevertheless legal" (Habermas, 1980:35). In the age of mass industrial production this collective cultural web of institutions, ideas, values, built on the economic way of production was named Superstructure (Marx, 2010:19).

The same conjecture concerns the matters of Power and Ideology, as more often than not the role of violence and dominance is hidden or obscured with a result to study solely the field of ideas. Power is foremost the monopoly of organized state violence of the dominant class upon its dominated classes. "The state is a distinctive force of oppression" (Lenin, 1976:80). In this socioeconomic margin we see the appearance of the dominant ideology, as the ideology of the dominant classes both the economic and political elites (through the state). "The ideas of the dominant class are the dominant ideas in every day and age. In other words, the class which dominates the material production of society is simultaneously the dominant ideological force" (Marx & Engels, 1999:94). The processing and the instillation of the dominant ideology occurs in the field of the movements of society and in the actions of the ideological mechanisms of the state according to the analysis by the West-European Marxism (Althusser, 1976).

Nationalism should be studied under the assumption of it being the encompassing ideology in the margins of modernity, a historic counterpart of religion in traditional societies. "The ideology of one being a political and constitutional entity has a dominant position in the dominant ideology of this way of production, usurping the religious ideology within the dominant ideology of the feudalistic way of production" (Poulantzas, 1975:177). In accordance with the former, Lekkas (2011:162) notices that: "... most forms of the nationalist ideology want to provide a new social binding connection so as to replace religious bonds with the elaboration of the notion of the idea of nation, which among others formed the traditional society". Religion continued to be used as an element of the individual ideology on a new basis, connected directly to politics, but this happened under the guidance of the new ideology of nationalism.

### **A positive definition of Power**

The definition of Power solely through the relation between state violence and dominance is not adequate, since it hides its emotional dimensions. Some aspects of political power can function as a bilateral entity together with science and administration, knowledge, the truth, rationalization, Discourse, legality, state suctioned stances and more.

Foucault (1987:21) defined power as something which is beyond prohibition and simplified control. "What makes power hold on tight, what makes it acceptable is that it does not weigh on us as a force that says 'no', but surpasses social dimensions, produces notions, brings pleasure, forms of knowledge, produces Discourse". Power is deeply rooted in the system of social relations and interactions. Discourse and its practices are connected with power in a complicated manner, they are connected with relationships characterized by dependence and submission, they restrict, they set the limits and modify the actions of people, defining their desires, their limits of freedom and pleasure. In parallel with the regime of truth, power is surrounded by a state of logic and knowledge. Knowledge and power have a symbiotic relationship. An alternative view as far as power is concerned points out its practices as it is

reflected on the practices of its subjects, its guiding role in their basic understanding (Lirigis, 1995).

Habermas (1980:10) notes that in the modern world the legality of the law stems from the system of social work, which transforms to productive work from a political one. The rationality of production and distribution as well as the ideology of equal exchange feed power with multiple meanings. The cognitive functions of power combine former techniques, which had previously been used by the Christian church (Doxiadis, 1988), with the ability to "customized" and to do the exact opposite rendering and individual being binatural as both one and part of a whole at the same time, and thus enforcing itself on the subjects. These thoughts seem valuable in the effort to understand the simultaneous entity of the liberal individualism of the citizen with the holistic entity of the nation. The analysis of this certain way of using power, the sophistication of the methods of power, the technologies of controlling the self, the methods and the degree of rationalization, next to the regime of violent enforcement paint the dialectic image of power in the modern era. Lukacs (2001:414) makes a simile in which he equalizes the effect that both the natural world and the rut of everyday life has on the ideas of the people with the awe that an astronomer feels upon gazing the sunrise, even though Copernicus has taught us otherwise. On the above premise, Lukacs relates to the necessity to describe in detail all the aspects of power: "in all actuality, although in certain occasions the enforcing roles of society are materialistic in a tough and animalistic way, every source of power of every society is basically spiritual and only knowledge can liberate us from it...".

### **Ideology through the perspective of Althusser**

According to Althusser (1976:73) "Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of a person with the real conditions of their being". During the course of his thought social practices in the fields of ideology will be added and mainly "Philosophy is, ultimately, the struggle of the classes within the theory" (Althusser, 1983:68). Althusser's relationship with ideology can be compared with that of Spinoza's relationship with God. Ideology is compared with the subconscious; it has always been within people during their historical existence. Ideology is conveyed within each person and the sum of these individual wills is its effect on earthly reality, its existence depends on individuals, while the subjects act through it. "Therefore, we are not relating to a traditional creationist God (...), who creates willingly a parallel world, but to an infinite creative force, which does not only exist in an immobile manner but in itself is an endless internal dynamic of self-replication that manifests wholly on its products, which are not its equals but an expression of said force" (Goudeli, 2015:9).

The basic function of ideology according to Althusser, is the "calling" of the individual and their transformation to a subject. The process of **recognition** and **submission** to the "Divine" place a central role (Althusser, 1976). In this specific relationship the possible element of misconception by the subject must also be taken into consideration, the process of agreement with the "Divine" as well as the need to compare it to an objective truth (Doxiades, 1988).

What is crucial is the fact that ideology remolds the individual's life experiences with the conditions of their existence. The way with which the person experiences and understands their life so that it is worth-living concerns ideology.

The above theorem does not only insert philosophical matters concerning the truth and the production of meaning, but it also encompasses the psychoanalytical defining tools of desire, imagination and of the insignificant Other. It must be understood that the world in which we live has already been defined, the ideology is a redefinition of reality, the rationalization of the social actions of the subjects in relation to their conditions of their life. The self-critic of modernity has derived from this basis (Demertzis & Lipowatz, 1998), of the deeper understanding of social reality, the reimagining of the same analytical tools for the understanding of the world.

Ideology must merge with repression, not in a relationship of a zero sum but in a dialectic one. In modern societies violence is not the basic means of achieving concession on the contrary the subjects internalize the social and behavioral norms, widening the field of the study of Ideologist. "The fear of the masses must be conceived in a dual form: subjective and objective. It is the fear that the masses feel, but it is also the fear that the masses convey to whomever is in a position of power or acts politically and thus the state itself" (Balibar, 2010:27-8).

### **Ideology and common sense**

The process of connection between the individual and the group also concerns the realm of ideas. On the political level the individual approaches the group through the paradigm of citizen/nation, in the field of ideology this route has more complicated lines.

The inevitable national identity for every person (Gelner, 1992) has an ideological counterpart. "Even if you don't realize it, you are so closely connected to your homeland that you can't be isolated or distance yourself from it without feeling the effects of your illusion" (Kedurie, 2017:40). Nationalism is interpreted by and interprets ideas, deeds and emotions. Those who define nationalism as an idea, study the reasons and the actions of nationalist intellectuals and activists. Those who perceive it as an emotion focus on the development of some type of code and a collective way of life as well as their effects on the political arena. However, those who view nationalism as a mass movement emphasize political activity and conflicts (Ozkirimli, 2013). The premise stands, nobody can escape the general force of ideology, they are defined by it and act through it.

Ideology does not only concern single individuals, but social constructs, which adopt it as part of their collective life. In a psychoanalytical approach of ideologies, the notion of perspective is used under the weight of ideological predefinition. "Therefore, the ideology of nationalism is the one that 'builds' the national 'sentiment' and the nation, which in turn, when created, sustains and remolds nationalism. In this case besides the imaginary the symbolic also

fundamentally takes part: the main notion 'Greece' creates the 'Greeks', who imagine that they 'always were' with their predefined fate" (Demertzis & Lipowatz, 1998:131).

With these thoughts we are driven to the hypothesis of the relation between the dominant ideology as a process which co-exists with the formation of common sense. "The dominant ideology is made up by all the members of society who perceive the dominant social relations as natural and indestructible, on the level of common sense. The dominant ideology to a degree which is expressed through the knowledge acquired by educational normality, consists a processed form of the misconceptions of the common sense" (Pavlidis, 2004:65). While Poulantzas (1975) also asserts that the revolutionary ideology, as antagonistic, must be formed as a perpetual critic against the impulsive ideology, the common sense through the Marxist science.

### **The functions of Ideology**

At this point the basic functions of Ideology will be listed in brief. There will be an attempt to categorize these functions as they are utilized in the quantitative/thematic analysis of the research material. It is interesting that the majority of the contentions understand ideology through the contrasting lenses of the relations of power, as a system of opinions, opposed to the social reality or the objective truth.

According to the paper by Demertzis – Lipowatz (1998), the definition given by Eagleton (2018) and the categorization by both Lekkas (2011) and Lukacs (2001), the basic and interconnected points of the ideological functions are:

- The justification – legalization of the relations of power.
- The unification of the subjects in a unilateral field, in a symbolic space, beyond any antithesis (class, race, religion etc).
- The division of various social groups, targeting those prone to anti-systemic action.
- Covering up reality from the subjects.
- The mobilization of the subjects based on ideological imperative.
- Solidification as a means of perceiving reality; with the attempt to present a "part" as a "whole".
- The generation of meaning and the use of ready tools of interpretation of reality.
- The naturalization of reality, presenting the historical routes as a static/final reality.
- The pseudo conscious as a result of alienation and fetishization of commerce.
- The construction of identity.

It is important to underline that the naming of each function is connected to the way the subjects interprets/internalizes every aspect giving defining space to the codification of the subject matter.

## Some assertions about Nationalism

According to Kedurie (2017) nationalism is an Ideology. This admission defines the initial approach. Nationalism has replaced religion in modernity as a unified consciousness. "Most forms of nationalistic ideology have the ambition to generate a new social glue replacing the religious ties with the process of the notion of nation, which, among others, constituted the traditional society" (Lekkas, 2011:162). Nationalism can be compared to the beginning of an a priori knowledge of space and time according to Kant's thought (Marcatos, 2010) if space is the external shape of structure, then time is the shape of the internal self-consciousness of the mind; nationalism is the basic source of generating meaning.

"The main classifications, as have been suggested by Antony Smith are divided into three categories (with several subcategories): Primitive nationalism, Modernity and national symbolism" (Ozkirimli, 2013:15). The initial question is whether nationalism is a social relation, a timeless unchangeable entity or if it can be defined by symbols and emotions. The deferent approaches can be combined constructively under the light of the total stand towards nationalism as an antagonistic, conflicting, class ideology of the bourgeoisie, a historic counterpart of Marxism and the working class (Miliotis, 1996).

The following can be considered as the basic conclusions on the study of nationalism:

- The pioneering stand of Anderson (2019) as far as the imaginary aspect of nations is concerned. The emancipation of thought from the "narrow"-objective criteria has given a massive boost to the introduction of more defining tools. The imaginary communities in conjunction with the philosophical category of Kastoriades (2010) about the imaginary and the "interchangeable meaning" and compass disciplines of the social science in the study of nationalism.
- The "invention" of tradition by Hobsbawm (1994).
- The high culture, teaching through education and the contribution of the industrial society by Gelner (1992).
- The observation that nationalism creates states, which in turn and in time shape the nation, utilizing nationalism as the formal ideology by the state.
- "The idea of the division of humanity into nations is carved in the consciousness of the people within capitalism" (Harman, 2018:109). This conscious reflection of historic/social production is de-ideologized, lifting the nation as a high political value.
- The observation of Smith that in the eastern nationalism the popular factor is the ultimate critic: " (...) a fact which renders the national realization as 'inter-class' and gives it a more 'populist' scent (...) thus, in the national perception of nation the movement of people place a major role – if not on an actual level, at least on an ethical and rhetorical one" (Smith, 2000:28). This approach gives emphasis to the movement of the people, it has a grassroots approach to the notion of nation, it beautifies the characteristics of the

lower classes since they are the keepers of the national culture in spite of their conditions of life.

- The pre-national group "ethnie", its vertical or lateral development, the creation of the cultural core for the shape of the nation. The treatment of ethnie also as imaginary (Karakasidou, 2000). Its treatment as a "Key ingredient for the cultural/pre-national core which will be the primordial atom of the nation which is under development" (Smith, 2000).
- The participation of the people as a mechanism of national renewal.
- The sophisticated observation by Hroch (1996) that the lack of political democracy and of a tradition in collective and individual freedoms in the Eastern empires brought the social demands on the level of pre-ethnic solidarity.
- Following suit, Smith maintains that in Eastern nationalism the position of the law is usurped by the popular culture and pre-ethnic ethics (Smith, 2000) while individual rights are substitute by unlawful relations (Michail, 2015).
- The thought that the various phases of nationalism are closely connected to their penetration in the subordinate classes and not just in circles of the intelligentsia.

### **The application of the analysis of the subject matter on the research material**

The following ideological classification categories are based on the research material and the bibliography and are thus: The calling / nation-state / unification / equalization / otherness / holistic / division / mobilization / legality / covering up / constructional identity / naturalization / pseudo consciousness. While utilizing the criteria for the definition of the nation: primitive nationalism / national symbolism / modernity.

The "theme" is the basic unit of the textual analysis, that is to say the minimum required to produce meaning. The analysis of the subject matter was done with "vertical" writing using Microsoft Excel, with each theme being placed in one "cell" of the software, with a parallel double categorization and comments. The writing of the central section is considered united, regardless of whether the speaker is a presenter, a journalist, a commentator, a reporter, or a politician.

### **Conclusions**

This paper has analyzed the research material according to the directions of quantitative and quality inquires. The categories of analysis derived from the bibliography as well as the definition of the terms Power, Ideology, Nationalism. The quantitative aspect has proven (after analysis) the omnipotent presence of ethnocentric speech in parallel with the intensive presence of the active ideology. The division of the subject matter in minimum speech periods, themes and the ability to categorize it collectively with both criteria was characteristic. In all of the above the eccentricities of the spoken language must also be taken under consideration. The

central idea as for the method was confirmed through the ability of ideological classification of the message.

The ideological functions were recorded axiomatically in their quality connection with the schools of studying nationalism. Their quantitative recording can only give us an idea of the usual speech practices, while under no circumstances should an ideological function be underestimated by its infrequent presence. The interconnection of ideological functions defines the escalation of the messages as the attempt to generalize would lead to insufficient assertions.

The analytical description of the functions of ideology reinstates reality, the image of "the national other" and of "the national self". The contribution of scientific research is required to shed light on the economic – energy – geopolitical scenarios which are woven in the Mediterranean basin in conjunction with social practices. The struggle for peace concerns both sides of the Aegean since everyday people have nothing to divide among themselves, on the contrary they have a whole world to gain.

Below an example of a three themed ideological categorization is included together with the textual analysis.

**Theme Mitsotakis:** Will you indicate it yes, or no? The Greek and the French people must know, the Turks must unfortunately also know who are clearly not happy with the signing of this agreement.

**Ideological categorization:** Indictment/ national symbolism

**Text analysis:** In the prime minister's speech there are also other ideological and political functions (identity, otherness, legality). However, the most decisive indictment is based on the sentiment of the "national other" who is believed to be unsatisfied with this agreement.

**Theme Gennimata:** Our yes, our responsible stance towards the agreement with France, is also connected with the demand for the government to take the necessary initiative so as to utilize the agreement halting Turkish aggression.

**Ideological categorization:** Indictment/ Modernism

**Text analysis:** Mrs Gennimata, basing her speech on her party's stance, calls on the government to take institutional initiatives, so as to achieve results against the "national other". Her speech being institutionally constructed and within the predetermined state and international procedures, Mrs. Gennimata "builds" the image of the social relationship which is categorized as modernism. The other ideological functions are (legality, mobility, otherness).

**Theme Tsipras:** And I ask you: God forbid, with how many body bugs bearing the Greek flag will the Greek forces and the Greek soldiers return from war zones.

**Ideological categorization:** Indictment/ Primitive nationalism

**Text analysis:** Mr Tsipra's indictment touches on the boundaries of populism. The picture that he paints is oblique to the hearer. While the flag is a symbol, the frequent use of the adjective Greek and the noun Greeks, intonates the notion of a "common essence" which runs through the above and categorizes it in Primitive nationalism. The other ideological function is mobility.

**Theme journalist:** Prime minister Mitsotakis explains what was mentioned yesterday on STAR Chanel, that the agreement covers Greece on land, sea and air. So, the defense support is activated.

**Ideological categorization:** State / national symbolism

**Text analysis:** The "nation-state" produces definitions and constitutes the experienced reality within the world of modernity. The existence of Nations-States doesn't only describe the function of the states or drawings on a map, but the unique connection of a cultural group with land, time and the nation's state. The above record falls into the category of national symbolism as Greece is defenseless, being in danger on land, sea and air. The way Greece as a nation is conveyed, anxiety is transformed to a feeling prevalent among the masses as far as the defense of the country is concerned. What is interesting is the fact that this mutual sentiment is shared by people who live far from places which are concerned with the FIR and the EEZ. Another ideological function is pseudo consciousness.

**Theme Koutsoumpas:** Being unable to prevent the offensive inclinations of the Turkish elite, in the past there is no reason to believe that both the French and American weapons can prevent such aggression in the present.

**Ideological categorization:** State / Primitive Nationalism

**Text analysis:** The category "Nation-State" seems to be a necessary prerequisite for its existence. Weapons, states and aggression all have the need of a national land. In his speech the Secretary general of the central committee of the Greek Communist Party maintains that the national "essence" seems to define the objects so the categorization is within primitive nationalism. Another ideological function is otherness.

**Theme journalist:** At this point it is necessary to state what the minister of defense Mr. Panagiotopoulos said today in the parliament regarding the French – Greek agreement.

**Ideological categorization:** Nation – State / Modernity

**Text analysis:** In other topics we will find e.g., "the Greek prime minister", changing the categorization. In this addition the nation is not defined by lineage or sentiment, but through the state relations within it, it has institutional representative functions, popular domination responsible work allocation and international relations within international law. The above is placed in modernism. Other ideological functions are unification and legalization.

**Theme Mitsotakis:** Your populist cries regarding the return of body bags wrapped with the Greek flag is the most awful think I have heard in this room.

**Ideological categorization:** Unifying / national symbolism

**Text analysis:** The unifying function appears in the creation of a unified common ground in the phrase "in this room". Parliament is not just a place of conversation; it is the space in which the will of the representatives of the nation unify. The argument is done in a structured way within the limit of the nation, without evolving in an all-out war since the nation has a past as well as a future to realize. Parliament is a place of unification and common existence. National symbolism is the category in which the above is placed since it has a sentimental value claiming that this is the place where we unify and thus there is no room for populism.

**Theme journalist:** The parliamentary conversation as for the validation of the defense agreement with France caused a head-to-head conflict.

**Ideological categorization:** Unifying / modernity

**Text analysis:** The unifying function is even more intense in this occasion. The head-to-head conflict occurs within the parliamentary limits and those of the parliamentary ideological unification. It cannot interfere with the place where the will of the nation is expressed, in any way the parliament is the political party of the upper class. The above is classified in modernity as the nation comes to existence in the modernity that the state shapes. There is also the notion of pseudo consciousness.

**Theme Mitsotakis:** These signatures will forever stay in the memory of all Greeks.

**Ideological categorization:** Unifying / Primitive nationalism

**Text analysis:** The unifying procedure is constructed in the common memory of the Greeks, the place of unification is the imaginary point of view of the common memory of the members of the nation, in the turbulent history of the nation as the Greeks conceive it. The unification is realized on a reminiscing level, while the national base of the unification is the timeless essence of what it means to be "Greek". The above is why this entry lies within primitive nationalism and not national symbolism.

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# **Alternative communication forms in raising public awareness: The interactive documentary**

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## **Abstract**

This research examined how digital media created the framework for the evolution of new communication and storytelling forms and their connection to public awareness. It attempts to shed light upon the genre of interactive documentary as a new hybrid genre of documentary that employs various multimedia tools that promote audience participation during the evolution of the narrative. The key issue that was addressed was whether this genre can promote public awareness and intention for behavioral change through its inherent potential for audience participation. The experimental part of the study included an audiovisual production of mini documentaries that incorporate different interactive elements, such as quizzes, images, hyperlinks, etc. Quantitative research was carried out to identify audience's perspectives on the genre of interactive documentary, as well as its impact on their awareness. The findings revealed a positive effect on public awareness, while the interactive features enhanced participants' engagement, memory, and active thinking.

**Keywords:** audiovisual production, digital storytelling, interactive documentary, public awareness.

## **Introduction**

The evolution of technology -among others- made new forms and practices of communicating show a rise. New media technologies have been established, including new forms of communication platforms, transforming the way we get informed and the ways we participate in our society, while digital media present major impacts on every aspect of our culture. As the technical resources progress, new audiovisual storytelling genres emerge providing appealing stories with incorporated control choices through which the audience becomes a participant, thus promoting engagement (Kalinov, 2017; Podara, Giomelakis, Nicolaou, Matsiola, & Kotsakis, 2021; Podara, Matsiola, Maniou, Kalliris, 2019a). Non-conventional storytelling techniques through a versatile arrangement of information with alternative navigation paths deliver new forms of video productions that combine multiple narrative and multimedia functions in a non-linear style (Matsiola, Dimoulas, Kalliris, & Veglis, 2015).

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The concept of Web 2.0 as a participation platform where users participate and connect to each other, satisfying these innate human characteristics has long and extensively been mentioned by scholars (Jenkins, 2016). Furthermore, it triggered a broader engagement, both in terms of different forms and of wider access globally, in social issues. Users became producers, as Web 2.0 encourages the creation and sharing of user-generated content (UGC), and a substantial shift in their participation in the media environment is witnessed (Bruns, 2013; Saridou, & Veglis, 2021). In the age of new media technology, people are increasingly producing, and sharing their stories digitally. User-generated content employing digital storytelling narratives receives high levels of attention on global social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube; thus, much greater visibility is achieved resulting in delivering bigger social consequences (Jenkins, 2016). Increased information exchange through online networks can build trusting relationships among participants reinforcing existing ties and creating new ones (Gil de Zúñiga, Jung & Valenzuela, 2012; Valenzuela, Halpern, Katz, & Miranda, 2019). Studies show that the new media play a positive role in the participation of citizens in social and political life. Results vary by study, but overall, they show a positive relationship between social media use and online participation (Boulianne, 2020).

In the following sections, the genre of the interactive documentary will be further deployed along with the environmental issues of fast fashion, zero waste, upcycling and recycling and their importance in sustainability. Subsequently, the production of the four interactive mini-documentaries and their evaluation via statistical terms will be presented and explained. Next, the authors' conclusions on the research are stated, and finally the limitations are referred, and additional studies are suggested.

## **The interactive documentary**

The field of filmmaking, and particularly the documentary, has been challenged and was reconstructed by the advent of the digital technologies. In this framework, a new genre, the interactive documentary was born applying to the characteristics of an online audience who is active making choices during the viewing process and finally receives personalized information (Podara, Matsiola, Maniou, Kalliris, 2019b). Innovative experiences are provided via the multidimensional approach of interactive documentary to new audiences who are able to interact in environments they favour, such as mobile devices (Vázquez-Herrero & López-García, 2019). It combines elements of traditional documentary (audio-visual production) and uses digital tools to document reality. Its innovation is that the audience is participating in the development of the story through interactive features. Paths are deployed in the web-customized narrative and the audience which is positioned within the production and related to it, is allowed to follow its own way while watching the documentary. As Perlmutter (2014) argues interactive documentary symbolizes the birth of an entirely new art form and Aston and Gaudenzi (2012) in their definition on the genre, identify the interactivity, which is a physical action, as part of the production process, besides its relationship with the platforms. Different

interactivity modes and levels vary depending on the technologies employed (i.e., hypertexts or immersive technologies), the medium that will facilitate the production, along with the range of experience and the interactivity capabilities provided to the user exist (Aston & Gaudenzi, 2012; Nash, 2014). The offered capabilities extend, but not limit, to commenting, filling in a quiz, moving to other websites, sharing content, playing, and more, however, the story is what determines the format (Vazquez-Herrero, 2021).

## **Sustainability**

The topics of the interactive documentaries involved in this study are focused on environmental issues, thus, the term sustainability and its significance will be shortly deployed. "Sustainability" refers to meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own, and its concept depends on three basic sectors, economy, environment, and society which are also known informally as profits, planet, and people (Mollenkamp, 2022). With the addition of the term "development", the concept of sustainability is transformed into sustainable development whose goal is the evolution of social progress and the quality-of-life enhancement around the world.

Worldwide, initiatives and interconnected alliances are increasingly created to face the environmental and social problems that many societies must tackle, and sustainability seems to be the key. The United Nation's 17 SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) which were agreed to be adopted by the UN members in 2015, constitute a good example (United Nations, 2022). Generally, sustainability promotes businesses' awareness to consider more factors than simply the immediate profit or loss. The last decade more and more companies have issued sustainability goals, such as commitment to zero-waste packaging by a certain year or by cutting emissions, lowering their energy usage, etc. (Mollenkamp, 2022).

However, change can also come from a personal level. Media hold a significant role in informing people and consequently raising public's awareness about social or environmental issues. Nowadays, participation in the public sphere through Internet and social media is powerful, and digital media can perform major influences as channels for social transformation promoting individual responsibility. The purpose of this study is to explore whether current media technologies and specifically the interactivity in digital storytelling narratives is related to audience's awareness. As digital storytelling liberates from the constraints of time and space and the emerging technologies which are embedded promote participation, online communities and digital cultures are created in the media. In this framework, the aim of the paper is to explore the interactive capabilities of audiovisual production and digital storytelling through the investigation of the dynamics of the interactive documentary. More specifically, the research examines whether interactivity enables audience's participation and whether it is related with higher or lower levels of engagement and consequently whether it influences audience's awareness and attitudes over social and environmental issues. The questions that this research seeks to answer are:

RQ1: Does a digital storytelling narrative / audiovisual production promote awareness and social change?

RQ2: Does interactivity promote a sense of participation, thus making the experience of the audience way more intriguing?

RQ3: Is interactivity in digital audiovisual stories correlated with higher levels of audience awareness?

To answer those questions, four (4) interactive mini documentaries on environmental issues were created. The selected topics were a) fast fashion, b) zero waste, c) upcycling and d) recycling. After completing their production, they were evaluated, at an initial stage, by viewers-users on their fulfillment of the aforementioned questions.

In the following subchapters, the terms of fast fashion, upcycling, zero waste and recycling are shortly presented.

## **Fast fashion**

During the last couple of decades, manufacturing and trading processes of clothing have drastically changed globalized economy. As world trade agreements opened fashion brands to offshore production, powerful brands started producing clothes in developing countries. Furthermore, technological innovations led to mass production, thus leading to manufacturing a new, low-cost fashion, that is based on styles presented at Fashion Week runway shows, described with the term "fast fashion". Fast fashion allows consumers to purchase a wide variety of trendy new garments at affordable prices which are mostly sold by multinational retailers (Hayes, 2021).

Nevertheless, fast fashion is considered one of the most resource-intensive industries in the world, both in terms of human and natural resources (Wicker, 2017). Also, it is associated with exploitative and abusive labor practices in factories of developing countries (Nguyen, 2020). Negative environmental impacts derive from fast fashion, too. It is estimated that it is responsible for 10% of humanity's carbon emissions, more than all international flights and maritime shipping combined (McFall-Johnsen, 2019). Furthermore, the garments' manufacturing requires a significant amount of energy and according to a 2015 report by European Clothing Action Plan, fast fashion is also the second largest water-consuming industry (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2019).

Efforts have been made to turn consumer behavior towards choosing more sustainably made clothes. Transnational organizations have addressed the environmental dimensions of fast fashion and its harm on people and the planet. New business models (such as clothing rental) are developed and garments that can be reused and recycled more easily (circular fashion) are designed. In addition, an effort is made to convince consumers to buy fewer clothes of better quality (slow fashion) (Štefko, & Steffek, 2018).

## Upcycling

Initially, products were designed to be maintained indefinitely, however lately a "throw away" culture has appeared which resulted to increased resource use with negative environmental consequences (Bridgens, Powell, Farmer, Walsh, Reed, Royapoor, Gosling, Hall & Heidrich, 2018, p.146). The term upcycling originated in the 1990s and it involves the creative reuse of recyclable or recycled materials, objects, or parts thereof. This process is recognised as an encouraging way to reduce material and energy use, and to provoke sustainable production and consumption (Sung, 2015). It represents a variety of processes by which "old" products are modified and given a second life as they are transformed into a "new" product. As Yi, Lee, Lee, & Kim (2019, p.74) state "upcycling generally refers to the conversion of waste materials to something useful or valuable and is a useful concept that can be applied not only to the waste design industry but also to waste recycling and resource circulation". Upcycling may be initiated either by the need to meet human needs, or as an art form (Bridgens, *et al.*, 2018).

## Zero waste

There are many examples illustrating people's tendency to consume carelessly and uncontrollably, and this mentality of an unaware throwaway culture characterizes many contemporary consumers. This tendency may involve everyday routines, such as easily discarding items of low value, (i.e., disposable plastic plates or cups) or even items of higher economic value, such as electronic devices although they may still work efficiently and probably have been used only for a small period. These attitudes reflect society's lack of eco-consciousness.

Each new device or item we buy easily throw away costs to natural resources and this cost will eventually affect the environment and eventually the lives of future generations. The zero-waste movement is trying to bridge the gap between overconsumption and eco-friendly attitude. The five principles that govern zero waste are defined as the 5 Rs of zero waste: Refuse, Reduce, Reuse/Repair, Rot and Recycle (Yazawa, 2021).

"Refuse" is the first step and is performed by refusing to purchase unnecessary materialistic items as accumulating overloads. The second step is "Reduce" which means that shopping should be executed with a purpose, focusing on necessary purchases as opposed to random splurges (Judd, 2017). "Reuse or Repair" is the third step and is considered the most creative one. Before deciding whether to discard an item and buy a new one, one can consider reusing or repairing it. Moreover, reusing refers to swapping disposable items with reusable alternatives, thus minimizing waste destined for landfills. The fourth stage of zero waste is "Rot", which refers to composting food waste which is an eco-friendly way to recycle organic waste. The last step, which should be considered as last resort, is "Recycle".

## **Recycling**

Recycling, although it is referred to as the last section of zero waste, it will be further developed since it is considered the most well-known sustainable action. It is the process of initially collecting and afterwards converting materials that would otherwise be discarded as garbage and turning them into new products. Among the benefits of recycling is the reduction of the waste amount that is sent to incinerators and the conservation of natural resources, such as timber. It is deemed necessary when the four previous steps in zero waste chain do not work, but unfortunately this process is not enough to confront the ecological crisis. Recycling encompasses a highly energy intensive manufacturing process, therefore presenting environmental impacts (Clark, 2019).

## **Research methodology**

Considering the research questions, a research design was elaborated with the main priority being the creation of the interactive mini documentaries which afterwards would be evaluated by the audience to explore interactivity's role in promoting awareness. The four episodes on environmental issues were produced after having performed research and conducted interviewees with experts, such as members in environmental groups and non-profit organizations, people working in university or ministry, a clothes' designer, an architect and interior space designer, a sustainable-friendly businesswoman who owns and manufactures reusable sanitary products and a social media administrator.

Furthermore, many linear and non-linear documentaries on environmental issues were watched to comprehend the directors' perspective. Our focus was made on providing alternatives to what the individual can do when confronting crucial world issues. Therefore, the interactive mini documentaries aimed at presenting simple steps that anyone could follow to make the shift to a more sustainable way of living.

Upon the completion of the linear video production, interactive elements were added in the platform of H5P. The interactive elements that were employed were of different kinds depending on the role they served. External links were used to serve two functions, one to lead the audience to further engage with a group in social media, and a second one to further look into a specific topic presented briefly by the interviewee. Additional images helped the audience to have a visual impression and quizzes were employed to stimulate the audience's curiosity. We thought that in that way the viewers would be incited to participate in a more interesting and entertaining way in the evolution of the narrative. This specific feature could engage the audience to a larger degree with the project experience. The vision behind this project was based on the two terms of interactivity which applies to its structure and sustainability which applies to its content. Prior to that, extensive research was performed on the digital authoring tools that could be used to create interactive documentaries evaluating their features (technical skills required such as coding, compatibility with other platforms, cost,

navigation, etc.). Keeping in mind our purpose and after having tested some of the offered solutions we concluded that H5P would be the appropriate platform to materialise our project.

Eventually the digital story was published online and by that it became accessible to the public. Therefore, the next step was the creation of an evaluation form and proceeding to a quantitative survey. The online questionnaire which was distributed through social media was selected as the instrument to succeed that. The links of the four interactive mini documentaries were attached to the questionnaire, enabling easy access and participation of the audience. It has to be mentioned that it involves initial trend control research exploring general perceptions in a limited audience that has to be further evaluated at larger scale after considering the answers provided by this analysis to reach safer conclusions regarding the attitudes of the audience towards interactivity, interactive documentary and public awareness.

The characteristics of the target audience were set as the research was planned. Since the issues developed in the interactive documentaries involved environmental matters, it was thought that anyone could participate, however familiarization with information technology could somehow prohibit the engagement of older people (60+). Nevertheless, none of the age groups were excluded, as some seniors do have digital literacy. Respecting the educational background, all educational levels were considered, as media literacy is not exclusively related to the level of studies.

The anonymous questionnaire was divided in two parts, one prior to watching the mini documentaries which consisted of nine (9) closed-ended questions referring mainly to general opinions and one after having watched the mini documentaries which was consisted of fourteen (14) closed-ended and two (2) open-ended questions referring to the specific productions and their impact. Generally, the second part tried to measure changes in audience's attitudes towards the issues depicted in the interactive mini documentaries. There were also four (4) questions on demographic data. In the first part, the participants were asked to provide their opinions either in a five-point Likert scale in terms of importance evaluation (1-not at all, 5-very much), or by simply replying in binary (1-no, 2-yes) questions. In the second part, they were again asked to state their perspective mainly in a five-point Likert scale, in two (2) multiple choice grid questions but they were also given the chance to elaborate further in the two open-ended questions on the reasons they estimate that some of the interactive elements were more useful and whether, after having watched these mini documentaries, they would change some of their habits and which would be those.

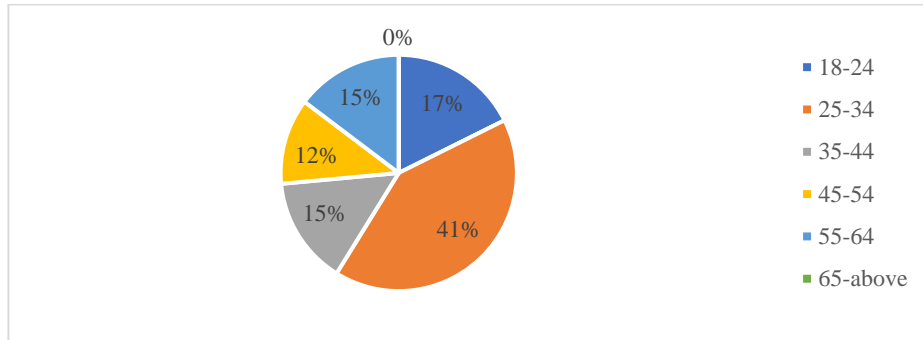
The distribution method of the questionnaire was through social media in the form of public posts in personal accounts and social media groups that the researcher followed, and it was open for replies for one month (June 2021).

The analysis of the data derived from the questionnaire was performed with SPSS version 25, using mainly descriptive statistics. In total 36 answers were collected in this preliminary

evaluation of the interactive mini documentaries in terms of raising audience awareness on environmental issues.

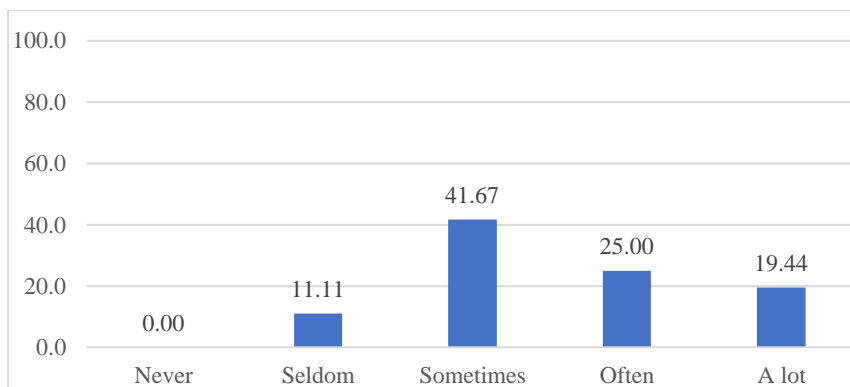
## Results

The male participants accumulated 58% while the female ones 42%. In Figure 1, the age distribution of the participants is presented.



**Figure 1:** Age distribution of the participants

The documentary watching attitudes were asked in the first part of the questionnaire and in Figure 2 their answers are shown with a bar chart. As is perceived "sometimes" was the most common answer.



**Figure 2:** Frequency of watching documentaries (percentages)

In Table 1 the responses to the three questions (using Likert scale from 1. not at all, to 5. very much) regarding the role of documentaries on raising awareness, influencing attitudes, and provoking social change are depicted in mean values. It can be assumed that the general perspective of the audience is that documentaries may have a positive impact on the aforementioned issues since all mean values are higher than 3. Even if the mean value in the last question is lower than those in the first two ones, again it is still over 3, meaning that the participants seem to agree that documentaries may provoke social change.

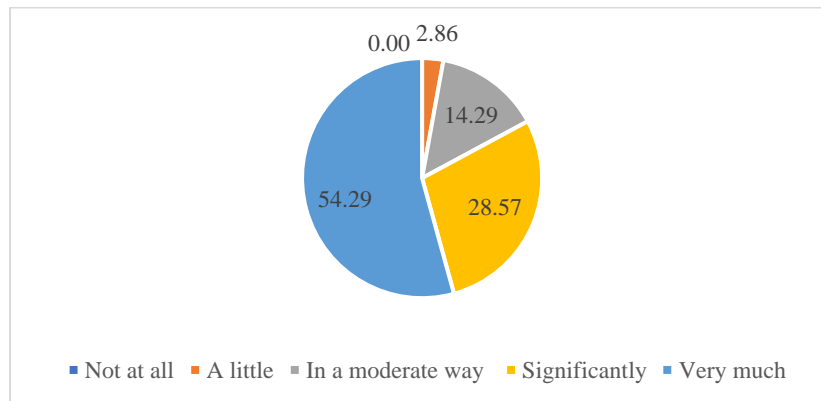
**Table 1:** The social impact of documentaries (mean and standard deviation values)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Do you think that documentaries can raise awareness on social, political or environmental issues?	36	3	5	4,14
Do you think that documentaries can influence the attitudes of the audience?	36	2	5	3,89
Do you think that documentaries as media are able to provoke social change?	36	1	5	3,42

On the question of whether they had seen a documentary that was memorable almost all participants gave an affirmative answer (33 people, 91,6%). On the consecutive question whether they have noticed a change in their attitudes after watching that documentary, out of the 33 positive answers, only 6 replied that they have not noticed a change.

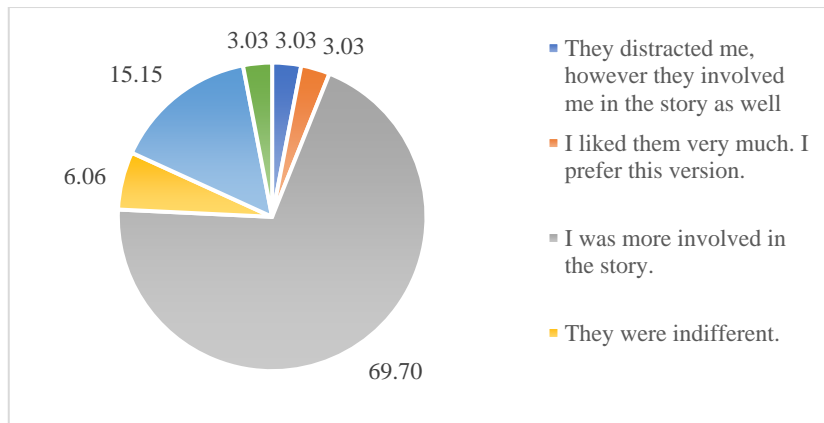
Regarding the Interactive Documentary genre, more than half of the participants (19 people, 52,77%), had never even heard of it, while only 10 respondents had actually watched an interactive documentary.

Next, the participants were asked to watch the four mini documentaries and continue the evaluation with the second part of the questionnaire. The first question that they were asked related to the degree of interest that interactive documentaries raised. As depicted in Figure 3, more than half of the respondents thought that they were very interesting and only about 2,86% thought that they were slightly interesting.



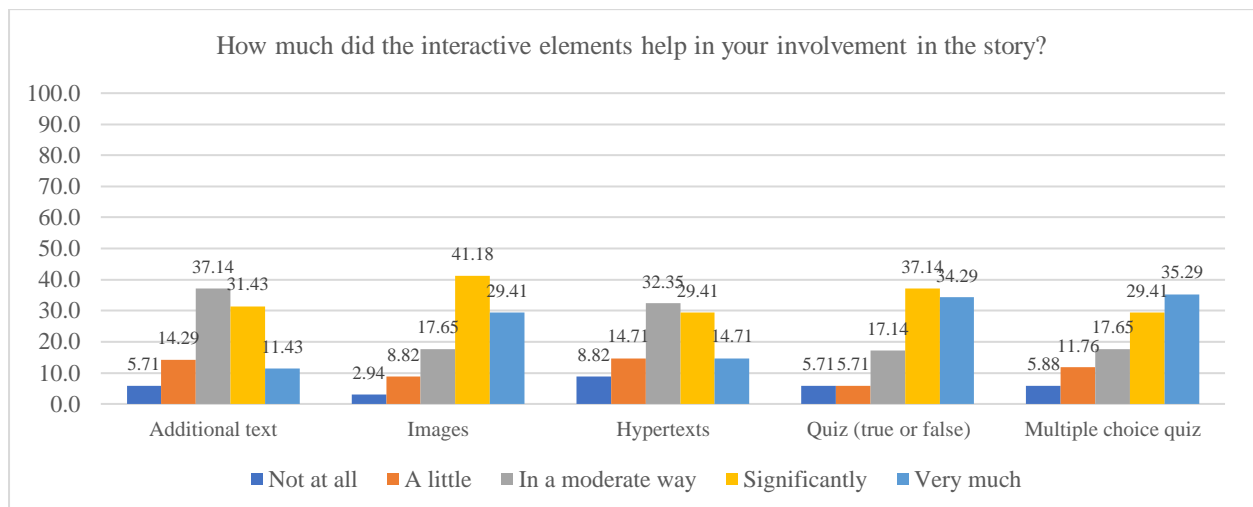
**Figure 3:** Degree of interest on the mini documentaries.

Next, the participants were asked a series of questions on the interactive elements, starting from whether they helped in the engagement with the story or were distractive. The great majority of the answers (70%) were "They kept me involved in the story". In Figure 4 the answers are presented, it has to be mentioned that the participants had the opportunity to add an answer of their own besides the ones set by the authors.



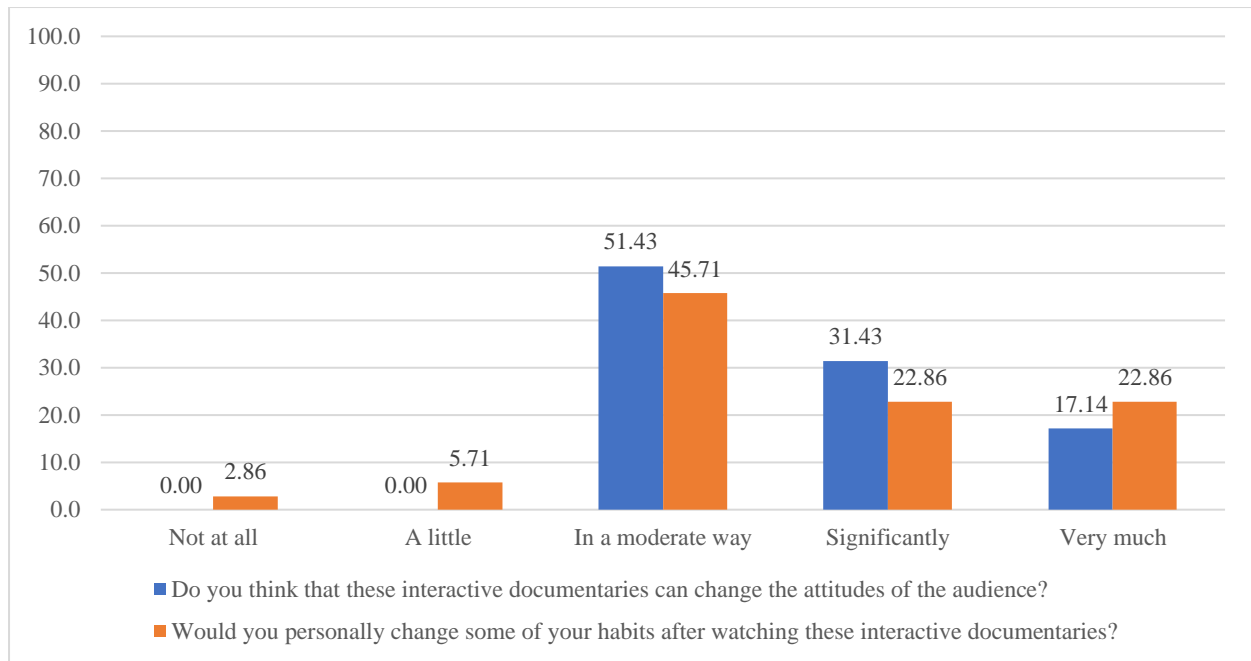
**Figure 4:** Aspects concerning the interactive elements.

The following question concerned the specific interactive features that were employed and whether they were helpful in the involvement in the story. As presented in Figure 5, the most helpful for the viewers appear to be the two kinds of quizzes.



**Figure 5:** Participants perceptions on interactive elements aid

On the question whether interactive documentaries could raise public awareness 37% of the participants replied, "very much" and another 37% of them replied "significantly", which is a finding that clearly shows a positive attitude on the genre and its capabilities to raise awareness. In the same framework, the participants were asked whether these productions could change the public's attitudes and their own attitudes after having watched them and the results are presented in Figure 6. As may be observed the general position taken is positive either as a personal point of view or as a global aspect.



**Figure 6:** The role of interactive documentaries in changing attitudes

Finally, there was an open-ended question regarding the attitudes that the respondents would change after having watched the series of the interactive mini documentaries. Most of them stated that they would stop buying clothes from multinational companies, go thrift shopping and start buying secondhand clothes. They also said that would try to reuse, recycle, compost and a very interesting answer was "I will start watching documentaries because until now I was bored or thinking it's a waste of time".

## Discussion

As Nash (2014) argues, the participatory culture of the Internet provides an appropriate environment for socially oriented documentary. Based on the findings of the conducted research, the incorporation of interactive features in the audiovisual production of mini documentaries seems to have a positive effect on the audience.

Drawn from the results, interactivity and awareness in digital stories are indeed connected. Audience's awareness was moderately enhanced by the interactive elements, conclusion which answers the first research question of the study (*Does a digital storytelling narrative / audiovisual production promote awareness and social change?*). This new genre as one of the forms of digital storytelling in the contemporary world can have an impact on civic engagement and social awareness, the same way traditional documentary has. As Nash & Corner (2016), argue strategic impact documentaries are used by groups to achieve political and social change outside the mainstream media practices.

Our participatory culture is transformed by technology and alternative digital media, such as the interactive documentary, may satisfy the innate human need to participate (Jenkins, 2016), especially if we consider that most of the participants stated that the interactive elements made

them feel like they participate. Respondents' feeling of getting involved in the story through the interactive elements also showed a tie between interactivity and intention to change attitudes. Even though for most of the participants this was their first encounter with the genre of interactive documentary, they evaluated positively their whole experience which is a proof of the quality and effectiveness of the project answering to the second RQ (*Does interactivity promote a sense of participation, thus making the experience of the audience way more intriguing?*). Podara et al. (2021) also recognize the significant role which digital technologies and the Internet play in engaging audiences via content dissemination. However, they mention that digital projects need a transmedia approach, employing both conventional and interactive promotional techniques to reach the public.

Regarding the third RQ (*Is interactivity in digital audiovisual stories correlated with higher levels of audience awareness?*), the findings revealed that the interactive elements sharpened the memory and initialized a process of active thinking, especially when trying to answer to the interactive quizzes. As a respondent mentioned, the fact that interactive quizzes make you doubt your knowledge is what makes you want to know the truth. Promotion of understanding and memorization is achieved via interactive videos which are considered as the ideal technology for that purpose (Birkett, 2016). The present project attempted to mirror the transformation from traditional forms to innovative, as well as the public's need of participation online.

Nowadays, digital stories in the form of brief online videos, either user-generated or professionally made, are flooding all social media platforms. Within this plethora of digital production, all creators are seeking to attract the audience's attention and as Seeper (2015) argues creators should be constantly looking for alternative ways for visual arts to achieve attention and engagement online. Considering the short attention span of younger ages, new media genres that allow them to stay connected and engaged as long as they wish and from which they may drop out at any time having though received basic information on the issued deployed, are designed to satisfy that need (Podara et al., 2021).

Like all research, this one too comes with limitations, the main one being the small number of the respondents and the restricted participation of certain age groups that prohibits the generalization of the findings. However, this was known from the beginning since this study was a preliminary one that could set the basis for larger scale research to be conducted in the future. As a next step, besides reaching a greater audience, different kinds of interactive productions (i.e., journalist reports) on social, environmental or other issues with different interactive features produced on different platforms could help in delivering safer conclusions. Future research could also involve a qualitative survey through interviews after some time has passed of watching an interactive documentary. In that way richer insights into the genre's potential of social change would aid in providing more information on how interactivity and its tools correlate with behavioral change.

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# **Public Support for European Disintegration: Cultural threat or Economic Hardship? The cases of Greece and Italy between 2012 and 2019**

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George N. Georgarakis†

## **Abstract**

Since the 2008 financial crisis and the subsequent immigration crisis, public opposition to European integration has increased in southern European countries. This disaffection against European integration has coincided with public support for far-right ideologies and parties in Greece and Italy, two southern countries that were hit hard by both crises. However, it is still unclear whether public attitudes toward European integration are driven by economic hardship or cultural concerns. To explore this question, we draw on data from the Eurobarometer between 2012 and 2019. This study aims to provide further evidence about the cultural and utilitarian foundations of the European public opinion.

**Keywords:** financial crisis, immigration crisis, Eurobarometer, public opinion, Italy, Greece.

## **Introduction**

Since the 2009 Eurozone crisis and the 2015 immigration crisis, public support for far-right ideologies and opposition to the EU have increased in Europe, and in particular in the Southern EU member states. The rise of nationalist-Eurosceptic ideologies has manifested itself into the increase of public support for EU disintegration (Schmitter & Lefkofridi, 2016). This dynamic was particularly salient in Greece and in Italy, two European countries, which were hit hard by both crises. In Greece, the eruption of the financial crisis had an impact on the rise of the far-right and anti-EU sentiments (Georgiadou, 2019; Halikiopoulou, 2020). Accordingly, in Italy the far-right is increasingly Eurosceptic (De Vries & Edwards, 2009) and in some cases even advocates for European disintegration (Mammone, 2015).

However, it is still unclear in the existing literature whether economic hardship or perceived cultural concerns are better predictors of public attitudes toward the EU. This article attempts to fill the gap in the literature by exploring the case of Greece and Italy between 2012 and 2019, during a period when both member states were struck considerably by the economic and the immigration crises. To investigate the correlates of public support for European (dis)integration we draw on cross-sectional and longitudinal data from the Eurobarometer. We find that economic evaluations trump opposition to immigration in predicting support for the

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EU, especially in the Greek case, but as the immigration crisis continues to develop, anti-immigrant sentiments correlate with negative opinions about the EU at higher levels.

## **Ideology and European Disintegration**

The ideological cleavage is traditionally considered to encompass and organize all major social divisions in Western European national politics (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967). More recently, Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks (2018) added a transnational dimension in this cleavage theory, which characterizes ideologies that are against external actors, who threaten the nation state, and against European integration in general. European disintegration is expressed by a traditional left-right cleavage, but also depends significantly on the status quo of the national welfare state (Brinegar & Jolly, 2005).

European Union's future can be put into question due to the rise of far-right ideologies and Eurosceptic parties (Lefkofridi & Schmitter, 2015; Schmitter, 2012). There are various nuances and degrees of Euroscepticism across the ideological spectrum. Indeed, some Eurosceptic parties reject the EU as a supranational entity altogether while others are advocating for its restructure (Schmitter & Lefkofridi, 2016). Nevertheless, the far-right seems to respond to both economic hardship and perceived cultural threat. Far-right supporters converge on claims of national sovereignty not only as cultural but also as an economic response against external threats (Mazzoleni & Ivaldi, 2020), and they diverge from radical left supporters on the cultural concerns of the European integration (Brack, 2020). Both the Eurozone and migrant crisis enhanced these centrifugal pressures (Fabbrini, 2016; Schimmelfennig, 2018) as the rise of far-right Euroscepticism was a consequence of the fear of cultural and economic losses (Bremer & Schulte-Cloos, 2019; Lefkofridi & Michel, 2017).

Relevant literature lacks a clear consensus on what specific elements compose the core of far-right ideologies (Golder, 2016). Yet, there are common ideological features of the far-right supporters. In Greece, the nativism, populism and authoritarianism of Golden Dawn manifested itself in its 'social activism' including distribution of food or organization of blood donations "only for Greeks" (Dinas et al., 2019). Similarly, populist claims and nationalist discourse are the main aspects of the political rhetoric of *Forza Nuova* (Caiani & Kröll, 2017), *Lega Nord* and *CasaPound* (Froio & Gattinara, 2015) in Italy, three main actors of the far right. Apart from populist anti-systemic elements, the far-right agenda in Italy combines ethno-cultural nationalism, nativism, and social conservatism (Loch & Norocel, 2015; Mudde, 2007; Rydgren, 2007).

## **Immigration and European Disintegration**

The bulk of the relevant literature shows that the far-right appeals to and politically expresses citizens' anti-immigration and cultural concerns (Brunner & Kuhn, 2018; Edo et al., 2019; Halla et al., 2017; Harmon, 2018; Lonsky, 2021). Indeed, as far as the question of national

identity is concerned, a new cultural cleavage which opposes “open” positions of integration to “closed” positions of demarcation has an important impact on identity politics in European countries (Kriesi et al., 2008; Loch & Norocel, 2015). As Loch and Norocel (2015) argue, this cleavage involves an internal (immigration) and an external (European integration) dimension. Perceived cultural threats have a major role in the articulation of national identities as they trigger the rejection of different cultures and the protection of national ideals (Loch & Norocel, 2015). Indeed, far-right supporters often relate migrants with crime and terrorism and support the drastic restriction of immigration to reinforce national security and social order (Eller, 2017; Loch & Norocel, 2015).

In Greece, LAOS (Popular Orthodox Rally) and Golden Dawn based their political programs and rallies on an anti-immigration and anti-EU agenda (Dennison & Geddes, 2019; Ellinas, 2013; Georgiadou, 2019; Vasilopoulou & Halikiopoulou, 2015). Most importantly, Golden Dawn advocated for an ethnic cleansing against outsiders, immigrants and external enemies who allegedly undermine the national interests of Greece (Vasilopoulou & Halikiopoulou, 2015). Similarly, anti-immigration discourses played a major role in the rise and strengthening of all Italian contemporary far-right parties (Davis & Deole, 2017) and shaped the electoral base of *Forza Nuova*, *Fiamma Tricolore* and *CasaPound* based on nativism and the rhetoric of protecting the national identity (Caiani & Kröll, 2017; Castelli Gattinara & Froio, 2016).

### **Economic Hardship and European Disintegration**

Public support for European integration also has a utilitarian explanation. The main argument of this approach is based on the benefits of liberalization of the EU trade and the interaction of EU citizens with higher levels of income and human capital, especially in terms of education and professional skills (Kriesi et al., 2012; Tucker et al., 2002). Indeed, high-skilled workers and entrepreneurs with capital are more supportive of European integration than blue-collar workers (Hobolt & de Vries, 2016). Since the Great Recession in 2008 and the Eurozone crisis one year later, economic insecurity clouded these benefits. The far-right saw an opportunity in this development and mobilized against globalization and the EU to blame them for the current economic insecurity (Lefkofridi & Michel, 2017).

The far-right represents a backlash against the globalization of the markets and seeks to extract political gains from the increasing divisions between the “winners” and “losers” of globalization (Norris & Inglehart, 2019; Rueda, 2005). Most importantly, the latter express their grievances related to low job opportunities, lower incomes, and economic insecurity (Kriesi et al., 2008). The approach of economic grievances is widely supported especially at the individual level (Golder, 2016). People who support far-right ideologies often belong to lower socioeconomic groups and feel underrepresented by mainstream parties that express the interests and preferences of people with higher income (Bovens & Wille, 2017; Brils et al., 2020; Kriesi et al., 2008).

In Greece, the economic crisis has undermined trust in the traditional political system and served as a springboard to the emergence of the far-right (Ellinas, 2013). Following the outbreak of the financial crisis, economic and political hardship weakened the traditional bipartisan Greek system and prompted the rise and consolidation of far-right ideologies (Georgiadou, 2019). Moreover, Kriesi and Pappas (2015) argue that the economic crisis was a crucial element in the identity-building process of current far-right supporters in Italy. For instance, *CasaPound* interpreted the economic crisis as “a direct output of liberal capitalism” (Froio & Gattinara, 2015) and defined it as an obvious enemy causing the increase of unemployment and austerity measures.

## Data and Methods

To test our argument, we turn to eleven representative surveys of the Greek and Italian population that cover the period between 2012 and 2019 (N = 22,322). All studies are part of the Eurobarometer (waves 77.3, 81.2, 83.3, 85.2, 86.2, 87.3, 88.3, 89.1, 90.3, 91.5 and 92.3)\* and correspond to the annual surveys of 2012 and 2014-2019.† Due to the unavailability of common measures across these waves, we had to omit the 2013 Eurobarometer surveys and analyze data from 2012 and 2014 separately.

This seven-year period was critical for the decrease of public support for the European Union. On the one hand, the effects of the economic crisis of 2008 were still strong on the population of the European periphery. In fact, for both Greece and Italy the worst fiscal years in terms of Gross Domestic Product prior to COVID-19 were 2013-2016.‡ On the other hand, this period captures the European migrant crisis and the years that immediately precede it. In the EU, the migrant crisis peaked in 2015 but the pressure from massive migration flows is still felt in both countries.

## Measuring anti-immigration sentiment and economic evaluations

Previous literature suggests that public support for the European Union hinges on identity-related factors as well as on utilitarian evaluations of the economy (for an overview, see Hobolt and de Vries, 2016). To gauge anti-immigration sentiments, we combine two items in an additive scale. The first question asks respondents whether they agree that immigrants contribute a lot to their country on a 4-point scale ranging from totally agree to totally disagree. The second item asks how respondents feel about immigration of people from outside the EU on a 5-point scale ranging from very positive to very negative.§

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\* Waves up to 88.3 were conducted by TNS ICAP, Athens, Greece and TNS Infratest, Milan, Italy. Beginning from wave 89.1 the surveys were carried out by Taylor Nelson Sofres Market Research, Athens, Greece and Kantar Italia, Milan, Italy.

† From 2016 to 2019 we draw on two waves per year.

‡ The World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD?locations=GR-IT>

§ This question is available only from 2015 onward. For this reason, we rely only on the first item in our analysis for 2012 and 2014.

Further, we measure socio-tropic and egocentric evaluations of the economy by constructing three additive scales. The first two scales tap into retrospective and prospective evaluations of the national and European economy by adding assessments of the current situation in national/European economy (measured on a 4-point scale) and relevant expectations for the next twelve months (measured on a 3-point scale). Accordingly, we gauge egocentric economic evaluations by adding two similar items that ask respondents about their assessment and expectations regarding their household finances.\*

In addition to these variables, we account for respondents' ideology (measured on a 10-point scale),<sup>†</sup> sex, age, education, occupation, and self-reported belonging to the working class, the middle class, or the upper class of society.

## **Measuring support for the EU**

The main dependent variable of interest is public support for the EU. In the Eurobarometer, the classic measure of public support for European integration is an item that asks respondents if their country's membership in the European Union is a "good thing," a "bad thing," or "neither good nor bad." However, this item is not available in any of the Eurobarometer waves we draw on. Moreover, the fact that this question is measured with a 3-point scale would make the regression analysis more complicated as the variable is neither continuous nor binary. To overcome these shortcomings, we create a 9-point scale that combines two items that arguably tap into the same construct. Indeed, the first item asks respondents to rate the image of the EU on a 5-point scale ranging from "very good" to "very bad" while the second question is a dummy that asks if respondents tend to trust or not to trust the EU.

## **Analytic Strategy**

To test our central argument, we run a series of linear regressions. Because the 2012 and 2014 Eurobarometer surveys do not include the same measures as subsequent waves, we analyze these two cross-sectional studies separately. The set of regressors consists of anti-immigration sentiment, evaluations of national and European economy, evaluations of the household finances, ideology (only in 2014), sex, age, education, occupation, self-reported class identity and country fixed effects (with Greece being the base category). In a similar manner, we pool observations from 2015 to 2019 and fit a series of linear models that include year fixed effects in addition to the above predictors. In all regressions, the dependent variable is public support for the EU. Prior to be entered in the models, all variables were normalized to range from 0 to 1, and therefore coefficients should be interpreted as percentage points. Although our analysis

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\* The measure of expectations about respondents' household finances is not available in the 2012 Eurobarometer survey and therefore we only take into account their assessment of their current situation.

<sup>†</sup> Ideology is not measured in the 2012 Eurobarometer survey.

has a descriptive value, an important caveat is that in absence of random assignment, we cannot make any causal claims.

## **Empirical Results**

Due to the fact that several questions have been excluded from the 2012-2019 Eurobarometer surveys, we organize the presentation of the empirical results in three sections. First, we show the results from the 2012 Eurobarometer survey separately for each country as well as by drawing on the pooled sample. Then, we proceed similarly for the 2014 survey. Finally, we offer the results corresponding to the 2015-2019 period.

### **Public support for the EU in Greece and Italy: 2012**

Table 1 presents the correlates of public support for the EU in Greece and Italy in 2012. Note that this model does not control for ideology because it is not measured in the survey. In Model 1, only the Greek sample is analyzed. Although anti-immigrant sentiments are not associated with public support for the EU, positive economic evaluations seem to predict higher support. More specifically, favorable assessments of the national and European economy are correlated with public support for the EU at  $b = 0.152$  ( $p < 0.05$ ) and  $b = 0.279$  ( $p < 0.001$ ), respectively. Further, Greek citizens' view of the EU is associated with egocentric evaluations about the finances of their household ( $b = 0.201$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and their identification with higher social class ( $b = 0.092$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

Turning to Italy, Model 2 suggests that the correlates of public support for the EU are somewhat different than those in the Greek case. Indeed, Italians' anti-immigrant sentiments undermine public approval of the EU in a substantive manner ( $b = -0.128$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Moreover, Italians base their views of the EU on positive assessments of the European economy ( $b = 0.439$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and their household finances ( $b = 0.213$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) rather than on assessments of the national economy or their identification with higher social class.

Model 3 that draws on the pooled sample of Greek and Italian citizens corroborates that in 2012, opinions about the economy and not immigration play the dominant role in predicting higher support for the EU. Although anti-immigration sentiments are associated with lower support for the EU across both countries on average ( $b = -0.080$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), assessments of the European economy ( $b = 0.341$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), pocketbook evaluations ( $b = 0.201$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and self-identification with higher class ( $b = 0.081$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) drive public opinion toward the EU.

Table 1. Anti-immigrant sentiment, Economic assessment, and Public Support for the EU in Greece and Italy (2012)

	Public Support for European Union (2012)		
	Model 1 (Greece)	Model 2 (Italy)	Model 3 (pooled)
Anti-immigrant sentiment	-0.028 (0.032)	-0.128*** (0.033)	-0.080*** (0.023)
Assessment of national economy	0.152* (0.064)	-0.024 (0.069)	0.079 (0.046)
Assessment of European economy	0.279*** (0.064)	0.439*** (0.068)	0.341*** (0.040)
Assessment of household finances	0.201*** (0.049)	0.213*** (0.043)	0.201*** (0.031)
Ideology	–	–	–
Ideology (sq)	–	–	–
Female	0.013 (0.020)	-0.015 (0.024)	-0.002 (0.015)
Age	0.028 (0.069)	0.011 (0.092)	0.039 (0.055)
Education	-0.287 (0.174)	0.199 (0.209)	-0.072 (0.133)
Social Class	0.092* (0.041)	0.080 (0.045)	0.081** (0.030)
Italy	–	–	-0.023 (0.016)
Constant	0.210*** (0.070)	0.179* (0.086)	0.206*** (0.054)
N	812	597	1,409
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.208	0.225	0.220
AIC	105.047	117.201	206.144
BIC	222.535	222.607	342.661

*Note:* Entries are OLS coefficients (and standard errors in parentheses). All models control for occupation. The *p*-values are based on a two-tailed test. All variables are rescaled to range from 0 to 1. \*  $p < 0.05$  \*\*  $p < 0.01$  \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

## Public support for the EU in Greece and Italy: 2014

The results in Table 2 suggest that in 2014 there has been a shift in how the Greek and Italian public opinion evaluates the EU. Economic factors are still key in understanding the foundations of public support for the EU, but the negative effect of anti-immigration sentiments has become stronger. In Italy, opposition to immigration is a stronger predictor of low approval ratings for the EU than in Greece ( $b = -0.230$ ,  $p < 0.001$  vs.  $b = -0.138$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) but the magnitude of this association is still relatively small in the pooled sample ( $b = -0.171$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

Contrary to Italians, Greek citizens who hold optimistic views about their national economy tend to express higher support for the EU ( $b = 0.165$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Although neither national public seems to take into account pocketbook evaluations, assessments of the European economy are still pivotal in whether Greeks and Italians put their confidence in the EU ( $b = 0.301$ ,  $p < 0.001$  and  $b = 0.424$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , respectively). In fact, assessments of the European economy are the most important correlate of public support for the EU in the pooled sample ( $b = 0.341$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) while self-identification with higher social class is a less powerful predictor ( $b = 0.081$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

In Greece, but not in Italy, the public is found to be divided across ideological lines on whether it supports the EU. Citizens who identify as right wing tend to be more in favor of the EU ( $b = 0.624$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) but the relationship is not necessarily linear. Instead, people that position themselves in the extreme left or extreme right are less likely to be favorable toward the EU ( $b = -0.414$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Similar but less pronounced divisions are found across demographic characteristics. Women are less supportive of the EU ( $b = -0.053$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) while older people are more supportive ( $b = 0.199$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). These differences across levels of ideology and demographics in Greece are strong enough to drive the magnitude of associations in the pooled sample as well.

Table 2. Anti-immigrant sentiment, Economic assessment, and Public Support for the EU in Greece and Italy (2014)

	Public Support for European Union (2014)		
	Model 1 (Greece)	Model 2 (Italy)	Model 3 (pooled)
Anti-immigrant sentiment	-0.138*** (0.036)	-0.230*** (0.050)	-0.171*** (0.028)
Assessment of national economy	0.165* (0.070)	-0.033 (0.087)	0.094 (0.053)
Assessment of European economy	0.301*** (0.051)	0.424*** (0.078)	0.341*** (0.042)
Assessment of household finances	0.054 (0.066)	0.088 (0.075)	0.073 (0.048)
Ideology	0.624*** (0.157)	0.060 (0.161)	0.329** (0.111)
Ideology (sq)	-0.414** (0.145)	0.006 (0.159)	-0.191 (0.105)
Female	-0.053* (0.023)	-0.015 (0.031)	-0.037* (0.018)
Age	0.199* (0.079)	0.036 (0.113)	0.157* (0.064)
Education	0.108 (0.181)	0.275 (0.225)	0.202 (0.140)
Social Class	0.042 (0.047)	0.044 (0.060)	0.043 (0.036)
Italy	–	–	0.065*** (0.018)
Constant	-0.079 (0.080)	0.189 (0.102)	0.002 (0.063)
N	593	352	945
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.274	0.279	0.272
AIC	55.763	52.091	97.730
BIC	178.549	156.409	238.415

*Note:* Entries are OLS coefficients (and standard errors in parentheses). All models control for occupation. The p-values are based on a two-tailed test. All variables are rescaled to range from 0 to 1. \*  $p < 0.05$  \*\*  $p < 0.01$  \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

## Public support for the EU in Greece and Italy: 2015-2019

The results from the last series of tests of our hypotheses are shown in Table 3. During the 2015-2019 period that covers the migration crisis, public support for the EU seems to depend almost equally on anti-immigrant attitudes and economic evaluations. Interestingly, Italians' opposition to immigration influences their opinions about the EU more so than that of Greeks ( $b = -0.325$ ,  $p < 0.001$  vs.  $b = -0.204$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). In the pooled sample, anti-immigration

sentiments are the second strongest factor that predicts the rate of public support for the EU ( $b = -0.251, p < 0.001$ ).

The results concerning economic evaluations follow a similar pattern as in previous years. In both countries, evaluations about the European economy and household finances are positively correlated with favorable opinions about the EU on average ( $b = 0.324, p < 0.001$  and  $b = 0.150, p < 0.001$ , respectively). Further, self-identification with higher social class correlates with higher support for the EU both in each country separately and in the pooled sample ( $b = 0.115, p < 0.001$ ). Greeks', but not Italians', rating of the EU also depends on their evaluations of their national economy ( $b = 0.187, p < 0.001$ ).

Finally, the Greek public is found once again to be polarized across the levels of ideology. Indeed, right wing citizens are more likely to express favorable views about the EU ( $b = 0.281, p < 0.001$ ) but those who place themselves in the extremes of the ideological spectrum are less supportive of the European project ( $b = -0.128, p < 0.01$ ). Accordingly, in Italy education seems to be a stronger predictor of pro-EU attitudes than ideology with more educated Italians being in favor of the EU ( $b = 0.124, p < 0.05$ ).

Table 3. Anti-immigrant sentiment, Economic assessment, and Public Support for the EU in Greece and Italy (2015-2019)

	Public Support for European Union (2015-2019)		
	Model 1 (Greece)	Model 2 (Italy)	Model 3 (pooled)
Anti-immigrant sentiment	-0.204*** (0.016)	-0.325*** (0.017)	-0.251*** (0.011)
Assessment of national economy	0.187*** (0.021)	-0.044 (0.022)	0.095*** (0.015)
Assessment of European economy	0.273*** (0.017)	0.401*** (0.023)	0.324*** (0.013)
Assessment of household finances	0.103*** (0.020)	0.197*** (0.023)	0.150*** (0.015)
Ideology	0.281*** (0.052)	0.008 (0.055)	0.126** (0.038)
Ideology (sq)	-0.128** (0.049)	-0.090 (0.053)	-0.087* (0.036)
Female	0.006 (0.007)	0.009 (0.008)	0.009 (0.005)
Age	0.011 (0.028)	-0.034 (0.034)	0.006 (0.022)
Education	0.046 (0.055)	0.124* (0.058)	0.078* (0.040)
Social Class	0.111*** (0.018)	0.135*** (0.023)	0.115*** (0.014)
Italy	–	–	0.023*** (0.006)
2016	-0.051*** (0.013)	-0.057*** (0.015)	-0.054*** (0.010)
2017	-0.020 (0.013)	-0.049** (0.016)	-0.033** (0.010)
2018	-0.011 (0.013)	-0.074*** (0.015)	-0.039*** (0.010)
2019	-0.010 (0.013)	-0.073*** (0.015)	-0.036*** (0.010)
Constant	0.165*** (0.031)	0.365*** (0.036)	0.235*** (0.023)
N	5,847	4,261	10,108
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.236	0.342	0.293
AIC	1476.056	906.2933	2609.537
BIC	1696.288	1116.083	2855.053

*Note:* Entries are OLS coefficients (and standard errors in parentheses). All models control for occupation. The p-values are based on a two-tailed test. All variables are rescaled to range from 0 to 1. \*  $p < 0.05$  \*\*  $p < 0.01$  \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

## Discussion

The economic depression and the subsequent immigration crisis have negatively affected public support for the European project. The challenges that European publics face, especially in the periphery, have reduced the reservoir of goodwill that legitimizes European institutions and initiatives for greater integration. In this article, we sought to understand whether public support for the EU is based on economic concerns or cultural fears. To explore this question, we focused on Greece and Italy and drew on data from the Eurobarometer that cover the period from 2012 to 2019.

The results of our study suggest that economic concerns are more important than anti-immigration sentiments in predicting support for European (dis)integration. However, we report important differences both across countries and across years. Contrary to Greece, in Italy opposition to immigration was negatively correlated with supporting the EU even before the outbreak of the immigration crisis. After the outbreak, anti-immigration sentiments have been steadily growing stronger in both countries, undermining favorable attitudes toward the EU.

Turning to economic concerns, we find that evaluations about the European economy and household finances are prevalent predictors of pro-EU attitudes in Greece and Italy. Nevertheless, only the Greek public takes into account the state of the national economy when assessing the EU integration. This hints that the intensity of the Greek economic crisis has severely eroded Greeks' confidence in the EU. Further, Greeks but not Italians are highly polarized on ideological grounds about whether to support the EU. Rightwing individuals are more likely to express pro-European opinions, but the relationship is not monotonic. Instead, people that adhere to extreme ideologies, either right or left, are more critical toward the EU.

An important contribution of this article is that it highlights the divergent and convergent points between the Greek and Italian public. First, the anti-immigrant sentiment in Italy seems to be steadily increasing over the years between 2012 and 2019. In contrast, in Greece such tendencies appear after 2014 and most importantly after the outbreak of 2015. Second, the Greek public tends to place greater importance on the state of national economy regarding its (dis)affection of the EU. In Italy, national economic performance does not seem to be a criterion that predicts the evaluation of the EU. Third, support for the EU is strongly polarized on ideological grounds in Greece but not in Italy.

A caveat is that our findings can inform our understanding of public attitudes toward the EU prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since both countries took a heavy toll in terms of human and economic loss during the pandemic, future research should expand our analysis to investigate the roll of health concerns in shaping public support for the EU.

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## **Readings and discourses of a crisis: Reports and comments on Efood’s labor issue**

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### **Abstract**

The current research aims to describe the dominant ideas that emerged alongside Efood’s labor issue. The food delivery company attempted to achieve a new labor agreement with its employees, but the project fell down as the platform’s users objected to the company’s practices and they massively started to unregister. Our research’s objective is twofold. First, to analyze and categorize Greek news sites reports according to the readings they suggest. Second, to analyze and categorize the Facebook users’ comments in the pages of the same news sites. The research scrutinizes discourses of journalists and citizens in order to enlighten the ideologies hidden behind their positions. The main research question is what ideas can be found in each discourse and how they are intertwined with the labor nature of the issue. The reports under analysis come from four different news sites and their Facebook pages.

**Keywords:** labor rights, neoliberalism, ideology, discourse.

### **Introduction**

The current paper presents a case study on a labor crisis focused on readings and discourses regarding a labor issue. The Efood online delivery platform, a popular application for delivering food products at home, attempted to change the employment status of its employees without their consent and the issue came to the spotlight of the media agenda.

The research aims to complete multiple tasks. First, to highlight an urgent issue which occupied the Greek public opinion under the lens of ideology. Second, to analyze different media reports on the issue, and the corresponding journalistic views on it, since the media tend to offer specific readings which vary according to their approach to reality (Pleios, 2021). Finally, our paper investigates individuals’ opinions on the issue expressed through Facebook comments, posted on the news sites’ Facebook pages.

The topic emerged on the 17th of September 2021. However, it didn’t emerge out of the blue. Two days earlier, the delivery platform Efood had attempted to downgrade 115 delivery workers from their standard employee status to freelancers. It had suddenly informed them via email that the company was going to keep under its roof only those employees who would accept the offer written in the email. This is a decision aligned with the neoliberal set of policies, commonly known as Washington consensus policies (Di Muzio, 2018). Despite this

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being common practice, there are plenty of questions arising due to the morality of enterprise culture (Wilson, 2018) and the consequent violation of labor rights (Blanton & Peksen, 2016).

The main scope of this paper is to analyze how the media reported the issue and how the citizens responded to it. Therefore, it is organized around the concept of the different schemes of the interpretation of the media content proposed by Stuart Hall (1980, 2019<sup>a</sup>, 2019<sup>b</sup>). The case study concludes that the news' sites were in favor of the workers' rights more or less. Nevertheless, this support differs between the various media we conducted research on. Each news report included different sources, arguments and meanings, while the posted comments emphasized different aspects of the story. In addition, as it was expected (Kadushin, 2012; Sianis, 2020; Pleios 2021), some comments chose to represent more polarized attitudes by contributing to justify the company's strategy.

## **The case**

Efood is a delivery service platform in Greece. It offers an application and a site where a wide selection of fast-food brands, restaurants and supermarkets and their products are hosted for sale. It is a company that dominates its market section and this dominance became even more obvious during the lockdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Konti (2021), a journalist working for the newspaper Kathimerini in Greece, the company's business turnover for 2020 increased by 50%, while its net profit increased by more than 25% compared to the previous year, surpassing the total amount of 20 million euros.

Despite its rapid economic enlargement, the company attempted to reduce its labour costs. In autumn 2021, the company's staff consisted of more than 4000 employees, while the platform provided services to 15000 stores in 90 different Greek cities (Lampiris, 2021). However, being a delivery worker is a very difficult, if not a dangerous job. Although platforms such as Efood are enlarged and play an increasingly important role in consumers' daily life at an almost global scale (Aloisi, 2018; Lin et al., 2020), commercial intermediaries tend to act upon an unregulated framework that doesn't protect workers' rights. For example, Figueroa et al (2021) claim that in NYC, app-based couriers have been working as independent contractors who lack the protections and rights a common employee enjoys. This condition became even more prevalent during the pandemic. In Greece, in early October 2020, food delivery workers called a strike asking for corporate motorcycles, a collective bargaining agreement and individual protection equipment among others (Tziantzi, 2020). These demands show that their working conditions needed to be improved.

Regarding our case study, no less than 115 Efood delivery workers suddenly received an email which informed them that their employee status was going to be demoted (from employees to freelancers). In case anyone refused this deal, the company would not renew her/his contract. The email in question included also a reference to a "batch", according to which the company assesses the efficiency of its employees. The email is as follows (translated from Greek):

«Dear Rider, in the context of increasing the productivity of the fleet and the wider strategy of the company, we would like to suggest you to participate in the freelancing cooperation scheme. We want to continue our cooperation, but based on the above and your batch (which is formed by various parameters), we estimate that it would be better to continue working as a freelancer.

You will have the flexibility to choose your working hours and increase your earnings.

Otherwise, we would like to inform you that there is no possibility of renewing the existing contract.

Please inform us immediately via ticket for the acceptance of the above, in order to inform you about the next steps».

A wave of reactions was caused due to the company's policy. Thousands of the platform's users deleted their accounts, while a negative trend against Efood was shaped in the social media. After these reactions, Efood officially responded by denying the accusations of blackmailing and sought to control the damage by claiming that the mail was poorly written and did not reflect the company's culture and respect for labor rights.

### **Freelancing: A neoliberal practice**

The practice of demoting an employee to free-lancing status should not be treated as an isolated incident (Ahsan, 2020; Figueroa et al., 2021). It is clearly part of a broader approach to working relations, which seeks to increase the employees' productivity through hard competitiveness (Papatheodorou, 2015).

Competitiveness can take various forms. It characterizes the neoliberalization of economy as a process (Peck, Brenner & Theodore, 2018). This has been implemented in Greece in an intense way since the signing of the First MoU in 2010 (Tastsoglou, 2022), while the dominance of neoliberalism marks a number of similar practices aiming to dissolve the welfare state. Employers and companies move away from their traditional commitments to workers, which were established during the era of Keynesianism (Heywood, 2013; Schram, 2018).

A core value of neoliberalism is competitiveness (Hayek, 1988; Tastsoglou, 2022). Usually, under the conditions of globalized capitalism, competitiveness is manifested through competition which produces stagnation or reduction in wages in order to increase profits (Harvey, 2005; Bauman, 2011; Crouch, 2011).

The reduction of the welfare state and the costs it entails for employers is mainly achieved through deregulation of the labor market. Deregulations comprise the privileged regulatory regime applied by a neoliberal way of governance (Lipietz, 1987; Harvey, 2005; Crouch, 2011). They seek to relieve employers from expenditures such as insurance coverage, compliance with schedules, compliance with licenses, compliance with working conditions, as well as from other practices which aimed to allow state interventions (Brown, 2019). In this way, given the ever-increasing unemployment, workers are enjoying reduced benefits in favor of competitiveness.

To this extent, the neoliberal ideology has succeeded in facilitating a top-down class struggle (Kotz, 2002; Brown, 2019; Tastsoglou, 2022), where the capital is constantly making labor to accept less and less advantageous agreements and contracts. Workers are essentially being blackmailed to let go of their rights in order not to lose their jobs, as the demand for labor is very high due to unemployment. The “industrial reserve army”, as Engels (1845/2009) called it, also contributes ideologically to this blackmailing process by acting as a vehicle for even greater neoliberalization of modern societies. Regarding the food distribution sector, there is a general institutional deficit. Stakeholders and workers are eager to see the outcome of the regulatory bills expected to be applied at a European level (Raschke, 2020). In any case, the lack of institutional framework is already causing problems for employees, while companies seize the opportunity to maximize their profits.

A key factor in the exercise of biopolitics in the era of neoliberalism is the enterprise culture (Doxiadis, 2015; Wilson, 2018). This is a theorem based on each individual thinking of her/himself as an entrepreneur and perceiving his/her workforce as his/her personal business. In this context, the individual has to become more and more competitive in order to improve the status of her/his “enterprise”. The two most appropriate ways to do this are self-improvement, due to which even education is treated as an investment, and the commitment to economic efficiency, i.e., not to do something if it does not result in profit. In both cases the profit constitutes the most basic value of personal business. But what happens when the individual-enterprise works for another business?

In this case the individual-enterprise should compete its colleagues, even if they work for the same employer. This process has two consequences as well. First, the productivity of the individual goes up not in order to make the most, but to achieve the most profits for the employer. Second, competition between co-workers is growing, resulting an alienation between employees. When everyone looks at the interests of their own “business”, they are isolated from their colleagues, therefore the employees cannot form a common bloc to claim their rights (Fuchs & Sandoval, 2014). This is in line with the general tendency of neoliberalism to attack trade unions (Hayek, 1960).

The individual-enterprise, therefore, is persistently trying to improve her/himself and become more productive, but without any extra earnings (Marttila, 2018; Tastsoglou, 2022). (S)he produces more, but this happens in a compulsory context (Bruff, 2014), where (s)he produces more so as not to lose her/his job, since there are, first, other individuals-enterprises under the same employer, and second, hundreds of thousands of unemployed people willing to participate in this productivity crescendo. As a result, just as a company constantly strives to offer the best possible product at the lowest possible cost to the customer, so does the individual-enterprise. But, in this case the customer is the employer. However, the latter is not a customer. The employer is the one who enjoys the profit. As a result, wages remain low despite the steady increase in employee productivity.

This enterprise culture is the central concept in the case of Efood employees. The company attempts to achieve a reduction in labor costs based on the productivity of workers, but without losing their workforce. Thus, the employees who were evaluated as more efficient in their work, continue to work under the same regime/terms. The less productive- according to the company- workers are forced to accept another contract, worse than the previous one, which makes them self-employed, although they remain under the same employer. In essence, it is a purely ideological practice: it is neoliberalism, the dominant ideology of the 21st century.

## **Method, tools, and research questions**

This presentation concerns a case study. Despite the fact that case study comprises also a teaching strategy (Kokkos, 2017), it has to do with a more general approach to educational research, either as a strategy or as a method (Cousins, 2005). In this research, case study is implemented as a method under the scope of contributing to a better apprehension of Efood's practice coverage. It is an *intrinsic case study* (Cousins, 2005), which attempts to go deep in a case that problematized- strongly but temporarily- the Greek public opinion. Thus, the research method implemented is critical discourse analysis, which focuses on the “language at use in the world” (Gee, 2011) approaching it as a communicational form through which power relations are being reproduced.

The research aim is twofold. First, it attempts to analyze journalistic reports on the issue. Second, to present the Facebook users' discourse as it was expressed in the form of comments. In order to satisfy these two different research objectives, we investigate a range of questions set by CDA (Gee, 2011), which are used here as analytical tools and are divided into two groups. The first one concerns tools applicable to news reports, while the other one includes discourse analysis tools.

The tools come from various disciplines of social science, including communication theory, agenda-setting, ideology, discourse analysis and cultural studies. Regarding the news reports analysis, the research utilizes five tools: framing twice, aspects of power relations, a list of objects and dictated practices. The Facebook comments are investigated through the schemes of media content interpretation, quantitative frequencies regarding the users' position towards the company, discursive elements that indicate a specific ideology, a bipolar scheme with neoliberalism and solidarity in its poles and dictated actions, a discourse analysis' tool which is the only one recruited for both objectives.

### *Framing I (news reports)*

Framing regards the dominant aspect of an issue that the journalist chose to focus on. Frames are used to organize meaningful schemes (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989) which direct the reader towards a specific aspect of an issue. There are plenty of typologies over frames (Iyengar, 1996; Kendall, 2011; Chatzikonstantinou, 2020). In this research we use the frames proposed by

Semetko & Valkenburg (2000). These frames are attribution of responsibility, conflict, economic consequences, morality and human interest.

*Framing II (news reports)*

Framing II refers to which aspects of the issue are highlighted by the journalists. In this case, the investigation of framing follows a more open approach by noting down the main organizing ideas of each report (Weaver, 2007), as they are presented by the authors.

*Aspects of power relations (news reports)*

Laclau & Mouffe (1985) considered power relations as a constitutive element of a discourse. Discourses tend to describe power relations by placing things, concepts and ideas in an evaluative order. They suggest a typology of power relations which includes relations of subordination, relations of oppression and relations of domination. Subordination means that the subject expresses a discourse where the subordination seems rational and it is not contested. Oppression describes relations where the subordinated subject attempts to compete with people or/and institutions to which is subordinated. Finally, domination is present in a discourse when the relations of subordination are thought of as arbitrary, oppressive and unacceptable.

*A list of objects (news reports)*

According to Gee (2011), any attempt to analyze a text should contain an enlisting of the subjects/objects/topics to which the text refers. This choice means that other objects have been dismissed, while it expresses a kind of preference at the same time. Doxiadis (2011) also places objects at the heart of apprehending a discourse by specifying them as one of the four main axes of how to do a discourse analysis.

*Dictated practices (news reports and Facebook comments)*

Dictated practices comprise a discourse analysis tool taken from the same toolkit as the list of objects. Gee, (2011) calls it the “doing and not just saying” tool, because he believes that a discourse always includes some social practices dictated by the text. Each speaking subject tends to urge others to perform some practices which the analyst has to bring to the surface.

*Schemes of media content interpretation (Facebook comments)*

According to Stuart Hall (1980), each message can be decoded in three ways: dominant, negotiating and oppositional reading. In the first one, the reader adopts the position of the writer by decoding the message in accordance with the latter. Negotiated readings means that the reader only partially agrees with the writer. In the last occasion, the reader is opposed to the meanings offered by the writer.

*Position towards the company (Facebook comments)*

This tool was made ad hoc in order to present the users’ attitudes towards the company. This variable has three values: positive, negotiated and negative. It is something similar to the previously explained tool, but, in this case, users’ attitudes are at stake in general. While the

reading type is used to investigate the users' attitude towards the news report, their position concerns if they accept the company's policy or not.

*Elements of ideology (Facebook comments)*

This tool is implemented in order to detect specific words or practices that are central in an ideology. It is an ongoing deductive process which aims to collect the most significant quantitatively ideological elements in users' discourse. These elements consist of principles, symbols and practices that tend to a specific political ideology. In this case, the focal ideology is neoliberalism.

*Neoliberalism vs solidarity (Facebook comments)*

As the theoretical framework showed, freelancing falls into a wider range of neoliberal practices. Neoliberalism is an ideology which tends to underestimate growing inequalities (Wilson, 2018; Brown, 2019). As a result, solidarity, an attempt to reduce inequalities, lies at the opposite pole. In this case, users' comments are categorized into the two poles.

The method's implementation is based on two main research questions. These are the following ones:

RQ1: What is the dominant representation of reality in each journalistic text?

RQ2: How do Facebook users "decode" the news items concerning the Efood issue?

To answer RQ1 the research aims to explore the news sites' reports on the issue. Four news sites were chosen. Protothema.gr and Capital.gr are two news sites with conservative ideology. Efsyn.gr and Rosa.gr are the other two chosen sites, which represent a more leftist approach in politics. Protothema.gr and Efsyn.gr are the websites of two newspapers (*Proto Thema* and *Efimerida ton Syntakton*), while Capital.gr and Rosa.gr are digital news sites. From each news site we analyzed the first report referring to the case. The four reports were published the same day (17th of September 2021). To answer our first research question, we examined five discursive aspects: framing I, framing II, aspects of power relations, a list of objects and dictated practices.

To answer RQ2 the comments on the Facebook pages of the four news sites were scrutinized. For the needs of this research 149 comments were collected. These comments were posted under the reports that were analyzed for the first RQ. 73 of them regarded the conservative news sites (21 from Protothema.gr, 52 from Capital.gr) and 76 the leftist news sites (24 from Efsyn.gr, 52 from Rosa.gr). The analytical tools applied in order to answer the second RQ were: dictated practices, reading types, position towards the company, elements of ideology and neoliberalism vs. solidarity dipole.

## Results

*RQ1: What is the dominant representation of reality in each journalistic text?*

Regarding the news report of Protothema.gr (<https://www.protothema.gr/economy/article/1162034/efood-allazei-to-ergasiako-kathestos-ton-dianomeon-adidraseis-sta-social-media/>), the title (“Efood: Changes the working status of delivery workers -Reactions to social media”) shows a supporting mood for the workers. However, it degrades the reactions to the virtual public sphere. The report frames the issue as a conflict, as a matter of a battle between capital and labour. It also dedicates its first lines to social media reactions which reflect a negative position towards the company (“Chaos on social media from Efood's decision”). The report expresses a sense of competitiveness by describing relations of oppression (“efood tried to escape from the stricter contract framework of wage labour”). The report also includes some additional evidence (such as social media interactions, relations of production, the e-mail, GSEE- the Greek confederation of workers). Therefore, a dilemma emerges as a dictated action, while each subject has to choose a side: competitiveness vs. poor working conditions. We think that the dominant reading reflects on the conflict between ownership and labour, but under the scope of competitiveness.

The news report of Capital.gr (<https://www.capital.gr/epixeiriseis/3582368/i-efood-allazei-tis-ergasiakes-sxeseis-ti-apanta-i-etaireia>) was titled “Efood changes working relationships - What the company answers”. As far as it concerns framing I, economic consequences come first, but this is a common trend in this site (a matter of ideology). However, the framing II analysis highlighted the danger of unemployment for Efood’s workers, even if the title emphasizes on the company’s response. Capital.gr, though follows a more neoliberal rationale compared to Protothema.gr and despite its economic focus, describes relations of domination (“Its intentions, to change its model, had already become clear since last July”), relations that are not accepted by the workers (“The Union of Catering, Hotel Tourism and Related Professions Employees of the Prefecture of Attica will hold a meeting”), something that was also found by the framing II tool. The referred objects included the e-mail, Efood’s policies, “gig workers”, Efood’s response, but there was no reference to social media reactions. By the way, the news report requests for regulation at a European level. So, its primary stance suggests a “stand-by” approach on the issue.

The leftist sites of our research presented the clash between ownership and labour as a product of blackmail. Efsyn.gr ([https://www.efsyn.gr/oikonomia/elliniki-oikonomia/310715\\_kataggelies-ergazomenon-stin-e-food-gine-free-lancer-i-efyges](https://www.efsyn.gr/oikonomia/elliniki-oikonomia/310715_kataggelies-ergazomenon-stin-e-food-gine-free-lancer-i-efyges)) published an article under the title “Complaints of Efood employees: Take freelancing or leave it”. The newspaper’s article combined two frames in its presentation. The human-interest frame on the one hand and the economic consequence frame on the other. Hence, the report attempted to highlight the consequences of this neoliberal practice (“it exempts the company from insurance fees”). The company’s mail was reproduced in the first lines and then the report

focused on delivery union reactions. Framing II also shows us a willingness to underline relations of domination (“‘partners’ by force”), focusing on a trade union alert. Efsyn attempts to correlate the Efood problem with governmental policies by hosting the opinions of opposition parties. The dominant reading suggests the conception of this practice as a blackmailing process.

Regarding the news report of Rosa.gr (<https://www.rosa.gr/koinonia/dianomeis-e-food-katangelloun-apeiles-apolisis-se-osous-arnithoun-na-einai-aftoapaxoloumenoi/>), its title is “Efood delivery workers: They report dismissal threats to those who refuse to be self-employed”. The leftist site reacts to the company’s policy almost in the same rationale with Efsyn, except for the aspect of politicization that was excluded from the Rosa.gr news report. Nonetheless, the report framed the issue as a conflict, and underlined the clash between the two sides. According to framing II, the news site interpreted Efood’s policy even in the first lines after presenting the e-mail (“the company saves the costs of insurance fee by declaring them as self-employed”). The representation of this clash was also obvious both in the list of objects and the practices dictated by the author. The list contained the e-mail, a critique to the practice of freelancing and reactions from delivery unions. It had no references to the government. The report also declared a trade union alert as a suggested action including a union’s poster. Similar to the case of Efsyn.gr, the report described relations of domination which contribute to representing the company’s policy as blackmail.

*RQ2: How do Facebook users "decode" the news items concerning the Efood issue?*

The comments on Facebook were less critical towards the company under the posts of the conservative sites, especially in Protothema.gr page. However, the users tended to express solidarity towards the workers. Their main scheme of interpretation had to do with negotiating the report’s offered dominant approach. Ten out of 21 comments expressed a negative attitude towards the company (“stay away from them”, “Bye-bye Efood”), six others attempted to offer a negotiated scheme (“Does anyone expect ideal working conditions in platforms?”) and five expressed a more condescending apprehension (“Facebook animals”, “it’s only 115 individuals”). The negative comments invoked surplus value and free market justice (expressed through deleting the application), while the positive ones presented either a sense of pragmatism or a sense of anti-communism. On the one hand, five of the analyzed comments focused on the company’s attempt to extract more surplus value and four of them were found to believe in a free market justice by dictating people to delete the Efood application. On the other hand, two comments represented a neoliberal pragmatism and two anti-communist beliefs. The majority of the comments expressed solidarity with workers (14 comments), and five appear to be mostly neoliberal. Regarding the dictated practices, three of them were more common. Six comments suggested not to react, four to delete the application, and three of them to blame the government.

Facebook users who commented on capital.gr page, expressed themselves in a negative way against Efood (“too good to be true”, “it wants to drain the employees”), despite the site’s

conservative ideology. The total of comments in the same site revealed a more polarized situation, as eleven comments were found positive towards the company, while the majority of them preferred a negotiated (nine comments) or a negative attitude (thirty-two comments) towards Efood. The ideological parameters detected in the comments were similar to the comments in Protothema.gr Facebook page. On the one hand, the users focused on surplus value in nine comments (“more expenses for the employees”, “we support the stores, not intermediaries”) and on free-market justice rationale conceptualized on the base of deleting the app (“delete”, “deleting the application loading”) was found in six cases. On the other hand, anti-communism was expressed in four comments, while competitiveness and individualism (two basic principles of neoliberalism) were found in two comments. As a result, 35 comments expressed solidarity and 13 favored neoliberal ideals. The significant difference in comparison with the Protothema.gr page is that the majority of the comments (18 out of 52) promoted deleting the app as a solution. Apart from regulation (eight asked for regulation, while two other asked for deregulation), other dictated practices were no reaction (in seven comments), critique to the government (in four comments) and a suggestion for customers to turn back to the shops (in two comments).

In the left sites’ pages, the users were more negatively disposed toward the company. The majority of the users expressed solidarity towards the workers (“no employee shall be dismissed”. “boycott”). As a result, the users tended to adopt the dominant reading (which includes an even more explicit conceptualization of Efood’s policy as a threat or a blackmail), accompanied by an expression of critique to the government. The left sites also presented a tendency to strongly support the movement for deleting the app. The users’ position against Efood was negative in twenty-one comments (out of twenty-four) on the Efsyn.gr page and in forty comments (out of fifty-two) in Rosa.gr page. However, in Rosa’s page there were also eleven comments that seem to adopt a more negotiated position towards the company (“there are also workers who side with their employer”). Regarding the ideological parameters found in the comments, in the case of Efsyn.gr, six of them focused on surplus value (“development everywhere... at the expense of everyone”) and other three on the aspect of free-market justice (“we the consumers made you king, we will overthrow you”). In the other left page, Rosa.gr, 13 comments highlighted the extracted surplus value (“they drink the employees’ blood”) and four of them the free-market justice under the same notion (“uninstall now”, “boycott”). However, in Rosa.gr competitiveness was supported in three comments and individualism in two. 22 comments out of twenty-four were in favor of solidarity in the case of Efsyn.gr, while forty-six out of fifty-two expressed the same attitude in Rosa.gr. Nevertheless, in the latter page, only two included a neoliberal sign. Deleting the app was the most common dictated practice in the comments. Thirteen out of twenty-four Efsyn.gr comments supported the cancelling of the Efood movement, while thirty out of fifty-four were found to do the same in Rosa.gr Facebook page. Furthermore, the second most common dictated action was to negatively react towards the government with six related comments in each page.

## Conclusions

The principal remark regarding the research is the fact that neoliberal policies such as the Efood's practice discussed here are not legitimized by the public opinion to be implemented. This was confirmed both in the cases of news' reports and Facebook comments.

Concerning the first RQ, *what is the dominant representation of reality in each journalistic text*, the two right sites presented the issue more moderately. In contrast, the two left sites preferred to support the employees explicitly. Nevertheless, three out of four sites presented relations of domination, except for Protothema.gr. This tendency revealed a generalized negativity towards policies like this. The framing I tool did not offer remarkable results. The conflict frame proved to be the dominant one, while Capital.gr and Efsyn.gr framed the issue by underlining economic consequences. Another important finding showed that all the reports referred to relations of production, something that was proven through examining the list of objects and framing II. Furthermore, the left sites signaled a danger by suggesting a trade union alert. On the other hand, Capital.gr suggested that one should wait and see how the case would develop, while Protothema.gr focused on competitiveness. These findings impel that there was a consent in favor of workers in the four reports, despite the different ideologies they represent.

Concerning the second RQ about *Facebook users' "decoding" of the Efood issue*, the site's position expressed through the report was found to have an effect on the user's statements. The right sites hosted more alternative or positive against Efood arguments in comparison to the left ones. Although they were not the dominant ones, they represented more than a fifth of the total comments (16 out of 73), while in 76 comments taken from the leftist pages only two of them adopted a positive attitude towards the company. In any case, solidarity was by far the dominant value in all four cases, but in different proportions. Most of the comments reacted in a negative way to the excess profit that Efood tried to make and this means that they criticize exploitation. Deleting the app was by far the most often dictated action, with the exception of Protothema.gr Facebook page. However, the right sites hosted more "don't react" opinions, while the comments in the leftist media Facebook pages tended to criticize the government.

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## **Defining TV watching experience: Psycho-social factors and screen culture of Generation Z**

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### **Abstract**

Nowadays, the concept of "watching TV" means different things to different age groups. Even though it has barely changed in the first 50 years of the medium's history, the way we watch TV is under discussion. Changes in viewing practices derive from technological convergence but also from a set of parameters, that include industrial changes, socio-economic factors, lifestyle, culture & ethics of each generation. This research uses qualitative tools to investigate which are the viewing habits of young viewers (RQ1), which are the differences in the way they consume TV content compared to their parents (RQ2) and how psycho-social factors influence their perceptions of television viewing (RQ3). According to the findings, coexistence with new media and social media offers new psychological and emotional experiences to people of Generation Z (born after 1996). However, several traditional features of the television experience have not changed and seem to be a comparative advantage of traditional television over platforms.

**Keywords:** Generation Z, TV watching, screen culture, psycho-social factors.

### **Introduction**

Television is currently undergoing a dynamic process of evolution, which began when audiovisual content became available over the Internet and the medium began to converge with the semantic web. The traditional screen is no longer the focus of the television experience. The audio-visual content is spread across various screens and becomes the product of an interactive, mobile experience, without geographical and time limitations. Content proliferates, highlighting the need for personalization and recommendation systems. Furthermore, the viewer has gained an ever-increasing control over the content (Podara et al., 2021). Evolution is about an interdependent system of audience and media. Young viewers are no longer the mass audience that traditional media was designed for. On the other hand, new media do not offer the conventional viewing experience: they offer new possibilities that shape new practices (Podara et al., 2020).

Based on a generational perspective and audience evolution theories, the present article aims to facilitate a better understanding of the screen culture of young media users (Podara, 2019b, 2019c), who are early adopters and heavy consumers of audiovisual content in the television

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streaming age. The adoption of innovation emerges as a structural element of TV's evolution. Studying the media usage of members of Generation Z (GenZers) as early adopters is a starting point for exploring and evaluating the transformation of viewing habits. It is part of an ongoing research that systematically explores the behavior of GenZers in Greece from a TV studies perspective, not only on traditional television but also on four other screens.

## **Media use of Generation Z**

The way we watched TV may have changed little in the first 50 years of the medium's history, but the changes are now so drastic that "watching TV" means different things to different age groups, especially to those born after 1996 (generation Z), the first generation who has never known a world without internet (Tapscott, 1998, Prensky, 2001, Twenge, 2017, Seemiller & Grace, 2018). Many talk about a revolution, others about the end of television as we knew it, while the general feeling prevails that younger generations have abandoned television.

It is not only the biological age but also the social parameters of each age group that influence media usage (Strauss & Howe, 1991; Reeves & Oh, 2008; Carrè, 2013). A generation can be defined as a group of people of similar age who share historical experiences over the same time period (Mannheim, 1928). Mannheim (1928) who was one of the first to talk about generations explains the "phenomenon of first contact" according to which the first contact someone has with a medium is the one that determines all his later experiences. Members of Generation Z (Twenge, 2017), i.e., people born after 1996, have not experienced a world without the internet and this characteristic differentiates them from all previous generations (Reeves, 2008). Their "first contact" with traditional television came at a time when television content was gradually being integrated into the internet and the small screen was not the only option available at home. Those born after 1996 do not remember the transition from the analog to the digital world. They are early adopters of streaming television and avid viewers of audiovisual content (Podara et al., 2020, 2021).

For Generation Z (Gen Z) streaming is not a new way of watching television but rather a new generation's concept of what television viewing is (Tremor Video & Hulu, 2017). Socialization through the Internet is for them an extension of their daily social life - the choice of platforms defines their identity. They are emotionally connected to the Internet, developing dependencies on their mobile and other screens. The main communicational code is visual. They prefer social media mainly based on images or video (Instagram, Tik Tok, etc.). In the streaming age where audiences exert increasing control over the parameters of their viewing, streaming technology, given the capabilities of recommendation systems, should address the concerns of program selection and attention (Tefertiller & Sheehan, 2019; Podara et al., 2019c, 2021). Gen Z has a particularly high requirement for filtering relevant content to alleviate information overload (Benselin & Ragsdell, 2016).

Greek Gen Zers had mainly access to three screens. Smartphones scores as the most popular device. They show a preference for Netflix and streaming platforms for entertainment programs, and the traditional TV screen for news/documentaries and reality shows (Podara et al., 2020).

## **Emotional Effect of Media Use in Gen Z**

Previous research in the field of Psychology shows that increased usage of social media influence the way Gen Z feels, reacts, and behave. Firstly, it has been observed that their emotional contagion, which is the tendency to mimic another and to converge emotionally without awareness is something that Gen Z appears to be high in when they communicate via video communication (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1993; Kramer, Guillory, & Hancock, 2014). This is related to the fact that Generation Z appears to create emotional connections since they arouse strong feels and a bond between people. Indeed, 73% of Gen Z students reported seeing themselves as compassionate and 80% saw themselves as being thoughtful and mainly concerned about the issues facing other people (Seemiller & Grace, 2018).

Since video chat is so accessible to Gen Z, people receive a connection mimicking the face-to-face interaction causing them to feel other's emotions. Moreover, virtual empathy has been correlated positively with live face-to-face empathy and people can show empathetic responses to others online (Carrier et al., 2015). Therefore, this means that advanced technology allows to increase empathy, the ability to understand another's feelings (Carré et al., 2013), especially for Generation Z. The emotional impact of technology and social media usage lead to shape their personality and identity. The possibility of uploading a content of interest offers them the freedom to express their views with other people. Finally, their character is also, influenced by their socialisation with users that have similar perspectives and interests. The online interaction allows them to create new friendships or keep communication with family members.

However, another study examined the relationship between cognitive empathy and cyberbullying for Generation Z (Ang & Goh, 2010). The study reported that lower levels of empathy led to promote actions of cyberbullying, especially in the male population. Another negative effect of technology in Generation Z is that they can trigger negative emotions such as anxiety, strangeness, and panic when absent from one's device or experience feelings of being afraid due to not knowing what everyone else is doing (Seemiller & Grace, 2018). One can even engage in irrational behaviour when feelings this strong connection to their phone, such as having the urge to text and at the same time, drive which can be dangerous to physical health. This can cause an internet addiction, promote harassment, cyberbullying, and surveillance with result to negatively impact their mental health and appear psychoneurotic effects such as aggressive behavior.

## Research Methodology

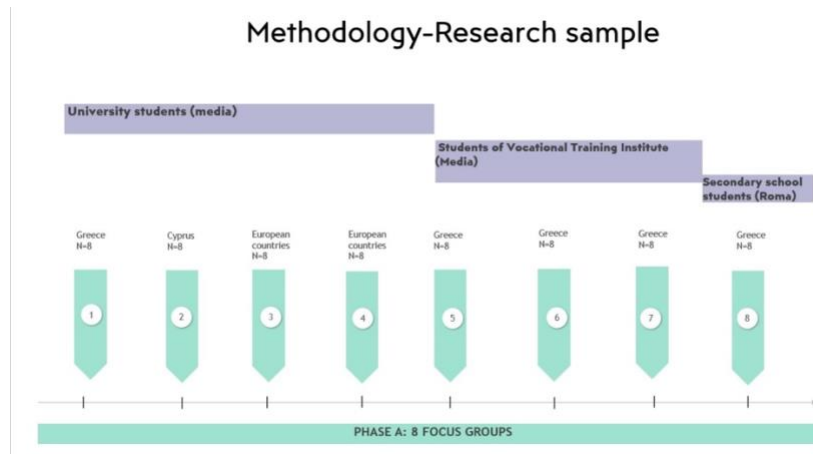
The aim of the research is to explore the evolving viewing practices of the young audience through the findings of multi-level research regarding Generation Z's media usage. Qualitative tools were used to investigate which are the viewing habits of young TV viewers (R.Q.1), which are the differences in the way they watch television content in relation to their parents (R.Q.2) and how psychosocial factors affect their perceptions of television (R.Q.3).

Eight focus groups were conducted to members of Generation Z exploring different socio-demographical criteria [television culture, country, educational level, digital literacy level]. The qualitative approach had been chosen to understand not only what people watch but also why they watch it. This qualitative research was conducted among 18–25-year-old person from 2018 to 2020, being the first phase of an ongoing study that continues with quantitative research.

The first focus group included students from the Journalism and Media Department of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH). The second focus group was held in Cyprus, to students of the Journalism Dept. of the School of Arts, Communication and Cultural Studies at Frederick University. Learners in the field of media were chosen because, according to the literature are more likely to have a high level of digital literacy and be early adopters of innovation, two factors that have an impact on their own audio-visual viewing behavior (Jenkins 2009; Dhoest & Simons 2016, Nicolaou et al., 2020; Podara, 2020). Media users who have high level of digital literacy are using digital media easier and they can assess when to use them depending on the circumstances (Matsiola et al., 2019).

The same framework of questions was used in both focus groups to investigate whether people from different countries, with different television cultures, have developed the same viewing habits. The results showed striking similarities in the viewing habits of Greeks and Cypriots, so the decision was made to expand the research outside of these two countries. Therefore, two English-speaking focus groups were designed aimed at students from various European countries studying at the universities of Greece and Cyprus (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki & Frederick University). The goal was to investigate whether place of origin is a demographic variable that influences viewing habits. It turned out that viewing habits do not differ by country of origin, so we continued by choosing to examine another criterion, namely the different educational level.

Three more focus groups were then designed, to check if the educational level differentiates the viewing habits. The sample of the research is young people aged 18-25, who were studying in Public Vocational Education Institutes (DIEK) in Central Macedonia.



**Figure 2:** Methodology Research Sample

As seen in the picture in the first seven focus groups, the participants were people trained at Journalism and Audiovisual technology since according to the literature review, young people studying in the field of media more easily adopt new technological innovations and have a high level of digital literacy (Nicolaou et al. 2020; Podara, 2020).

For the latter group, deviant sampling was used (Patton, 2002); a case of an audience was selected that was special and did not constitute a wider norm. It consisted of 18-25-year-olds who belonged to a vulnerable Roma social group and had not completed Primary High School or were working young adults who had dropped out of school. This group was designed to investigate whether the lower level of education and correspondingly the lack of digital literacy affects viewing habits, at the time when television is converging with the internet.

## Results

According to the results of the study, Generation Z members are avid users of audiovisual content. Generation Z watches less TV content than any other generation up to now, but at the same time, they consume much more content online than any previous generation. They are online more than twelve hours a day, stating that they are not online only when they are sleeping or have some other occupation (work, school). They watch audio-visual content online for about three hours a day. While on traditional television they spend less than an hour a day. A preference for YouTube was expressed unanimously by participants from seven focus groups. For members of Generation Z, this platform is not only a source of entertainment but also a source of information and education. The statement of a vocational school education student that "I have learned more from YouTube than from school" embodies their perception.

The factors that make them prefer watching audiovisual content online are ease of use and functionality. In the new TV era where the supply of audiovisual content exponentially exceeds the demand, participants are used to determining the time and duration of viewing themselves and therefore avoid the traditional TV experience that has various delays (e.g., commercial break). Another finding of the survey is that most of the young participants have three screens

at their disposal (mobile phone, laptop, traditional TV), while many use up to five screens (mobile phone, laptop, desktop computer, tablet, traditional TV). As emerged from the theoretical overview, today's young people, from their childhood, perceive all five screens as part of the household equipment of the family. Unlike their parents who were called upon at some stage in their lives to make a conscious decision to buy and learn to operate a personal computer, tablet, smartphone, etc.

### **Generation Z's relationship with traditional TV & the differences in how they watch TV content compared to their parents.**

One of the demands of this research was to investigate what is the relationship of generation Z with traditional television and whether there is a “generation gap” between the traditional television’s viewing patterns of generation Z and previous generations.

It seems that Gen Z hasn't completely abandoned traditional TV viewing, although it's not their first choice. The lack of focused viewing is identified as the most interesting difference between Gen Z viewers and their parents. The participants stated that their parents watch TV passively, to pass their time, to relax, not caring what they are watching, “just to listen to something while they are doing work”. The gratification they get from this way of viewing is one of the main reasons they entertain themselves by passively watching TV, since it is a familiar medium that comforts and relieves them (Ellis, 2021). Young audiences are not used to watching randomly whatever comes across a television program stream, so they find it extremely difficult to watch something they are not interested in.

It also emerged from the analysis of the results that Generation Z is turning to traditional TV for the gratification of group viewing and is doing so mainly because it perceives watching the traditional small screen as a family activity. Greeks and Cypriots are big fans of traditional television as most South European countries (Podara & Kalliris, 2022). In Greece, there is a TV paradox: although there is a high level of distrust to the traditional television, TV is the medium that Greeks love to hate (Podara & Matsiola, 2022). In a survey carried out in 15 EU countries between 2008 and 2015 (Eurostat, 2018), Greeks were by far the top screen lovers in Europe.

Also, members of Generation Z turn to it only when they need to watch the programs that everyone is watching, seeking to have a common context of discussion with their friends and participate in the conversation that is happening on social networks. That is the reason why the programs that they say they prefer on the small screen are usually the “media events”, for example a Eurovision, the Olympic games etc. They also watch popular series and reality shows.

From all the surveys a clear preference was observed to the use of mobile devices/ screens. Unlike their parents, TV for Gen Z is not a medium that they watch when they get home. It's

something that follows them everywhere: on the bus, at work, at the beach, at class. Everyone now carries their own personal television in their pocket.

The majority stated that they watch series online usually alone. They are alone but they don't feel lonely. They continue to discuss TV content and comment on it collectively with others, only now their communities have moved online.

Our research revealed that binge watching is a regular viewing habit for Generation Z as well. This practice of watching multiple episodes of a series in quick succession, was introduced seven years ago by the Netflix platform and very soon established among the general public. The analysis shows a preference of Gen Z for streaming TV content, where the viewer-user does not have to take any action to move from one episode to another.

### **Socio-economic variables affecting Gen Z viewing habits.**

From the sequence of qualitative research carried out, it appeared that the viewing habits of generation Z do not show differences depending on social or demographic criteria.

Nielsen audience surveys examining traditional television viewing in Greece show that educational level plays an important role in viewing habits as adults with a low educational level watch traditional television almost 1.5 hours a day more than those with a medium educational level (Nielsen, 2019). As far as generation Z is concerned, this criterion did not appear to play a role in shaping viewing habits or in differentiating the time spent watching TV content.

From the data obtained in the qualitative analysis, no significant difference in viewing habits related to the country of origin of the viewers was revealed. The internet tends to create a global audience for viewing audiovisual content, where geographical boundaries converge. The evolution of new media technology has created a borderless viewing culture. The above raises a wider academic debate about the internationalization of young audiences and the global spread of television products.

As it emerged from the focus group on young Roma, members of a vulnerable social group, indeed the lower level of education led to a lack of digital literacy. This didn't resonate with internet access but with problems related to the adequate use of digital technology. Despite this, no differentiation was observed in terms of viewing habits in relation to their parents.

Finally, there are some psychological variables that could affect their viewing habits. The way they perceive socialization and communication as well as personal values and emotions are possible factors that could trigger their increased relationship with advanced technology. The choice of interacting with others with similar interests as well as of creating friendships, enhancing their existing bonds (e.g., with family) and feeling attached with this way could be some reasons they prefer social media usage. Technology offers an easier way to share opinions

as well as communicate through live chat and video cameras which makes them more comfortable to express their feelings.

## **Conclusions – Discussion**

The answer to the question "what is television" will continue to be a matter of debate as long as the medium is at the crossroads. The possibilities, but also the limitations brought by the convergence with the internet, are changing television, without it being yet clear what the outcome will be. Traditional television is trying to redefine its place in the television landscape.

In conclusion, based on the literature review and corresponding findings, the gratifications of streaming TV were the focused, uninterrupted viewing, and the personalized, individual viewing while the gratification of watching traditional TV was mainly group viewing. It was shown that Generation Z is watching more content than ever before, but it's also more demanding than any other generation. TV for Generation Z is a mobile device, providing a mobile viewing experience without geographical and time limitations. This complies with industry surveys about Gen Z that show they are 'mobility centrics', prioritising the usage of mobile small screens for television viewing (Ericsson Consumer Lab, 2017; Tremor Video & Hulu, 2017). Coexistence with new technology and social media offers new psychological and emotional experiences to people of Generation Z because it strengthens family and friendship ties and develops socialization skills. Young viewers of Generation Z favor individual watching, perceiving audiovisual content as an individual experience.

They are alone but not lonely; through viewing they have the feeling of belonging to a global fandom. Also, a tendency to passive viewing was found since they prefer watching audiovisual content in rapid succession (binge watching). Undoubtedly, this can have detrimental effects on physical health such as it can lead to suffering from eating disorders, mental health problems, addictions etc. Moreover, they tend to perceive traditional TV viewing both as a family activity and to join the group. This means that they embrace a sense of belonging and attachment while watching TV.

Another important element of social media usage is that algorithms significantly influence their viewing options. This can result in consuming information with the same content, which can satisfy their preferred needs but also, over-use a social media platform.

Furthermore, it is note-worthy to mention that as technological structures continue to evolve, several traditional features of the television experience have not changed and seem to be a comparative advantage of traditional television over other new platforms. These are three: the preference for live, collective viewing, the preference for non-interactive content and the preference for flow-based viewing.

Until now, these findings do not support the idea that "young people do not watch (traditional) television". Nevertheless, it is awaited with great interest what will happen with the next generation of audience, i.e., the children of the Millennials, who are growing up in homes

without a traditional television set, as viewing every screen is a choice as well as a habit. Traditional TV is not dying; therefore, further research needs to redefine who and why it produces audiovisual content.

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## **Media in Turkey during the period of the Justice and Development Party's (AKP) takeover of power**

Nikolaos Liazos\*

### **Abstract**

Media ownership in Turkey is concentrated in the hands of a few large private groups, which are often part of heterogeneous conglomerates controlled by businessmen. In addition, companies use their influence to support the financial interests of their owners, by also seeking friendly relations with the authorities, which limits any free opinions. The media have also a strong influence on public opinion in Turkey. This research aims to highlight the radical transformation of the Turkish media from 2002, after the Justice and Development Party AKP, led by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, took over the power, to the present day. This kind of transformation on media has been aligned with the transformation of the Turkish society as well over the last 20 years. The Turkey's media has undergone a radical transformation since 2002 and this media transformation is reflected in ownership and control relations, as well as in the ideological approaches to media broadcasting. This research addresses the subject of this transformation, considering the social cohesion. It also examines the relations between power and the media from 2002 until today, which is analyzed in the context of the historical approach. The current paper focuses at the beginning on the change in the structure of media ownership and control during the period of the Justice and Development Party, based on the party's hegemonic strategies. Moreover, this paper explores how this change is reflected in the reporting news and aims to illustrate this change, by setting the media as a starting point. Finally, this study discusses how the change in the ownership and control structure of the media is also reflected in the sphere of ideology.

**Keywords:** Media freedom, policy, government, press freedom, Turkey.

### **Introduction**

The media in Turkey have been operating for many years under the control of the government and the manipulative relationships, created by the owners of the media owners with the government. Although it is well known that the media have never operated under the free and competitive market's conditions, the concentration of power in the hands of a single party or even a single leader in recent years has increased the pressure on the press more than ever. Moreover, the situation in the economic sector makes more effective the tools that the government will use against the owners of the media, while owners who support the government are rewarded with public tenders. On the contrary, the owners who oppose to the government are punished with taxes. The defamation cases that brought against journalists by the President and members of the government, have made a record level during the recent

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years, by giving the impression that they are intended to intimidate the very weak, in financial terms, opposition press. It seems that under these conditions, the profession of journalism has been influenced so much by this situation, that it stands powerless in front of the government, while at the same way, the owners of the media cannot operate with solidarity with each other, because of the political polarization (Sözeri, 2015:11).

In the current research, we study the role of the media in shaping and transforming the current reality of Turkey. Additionally, several changes have been observed in the capital structure of the media during the period of his rule AKP as government, which started in 2002. Our paper aims also to highlight the takeover of the media by the regime of Erdogan's Justice and Development Party. Erdogan's media policies implemented by the AKP since it took office in 2002, have been shaped according to the relationship it has established with the media owners, and this relationship has undergone a constant change and transformation in the course of its governance. In addition to other political, economic and cultural reasons, the transformation in the media is one of the one of the main pillars of the AKP's hegemony. The main role in maintaining this regime is played by the major media organisations, which are rewarded when they act in accordance with the government but are subject to heavy sanctions when they act in the opposite direction. In the media system established by the AKP, disseminating all kinds of opinions and news carried to the masses was under strict control. Thus, AKP has managed to maintain the support of the voters in every election it has participated in for 18 years (Ayдын, 2015: 24).

### **Restructuring of the media in 2002-2007**

During the severe financial crisis that erupted in February 2001, one fifth of the media outlets in the media sector of the Central Bank's foreign exchange reserves evaporated and the Turkish lira depreciated by 50 percent. In the following period, more than 20 banks failed, 1 million people lost their jobs, and dozens of businesses closed (Yeşil, 2016:73).

The AKP emerged from this disaster and left its mark on Turkish politics. The people in the 2002 elections put the blame for the crisis on the politicians and in the elections, it wiped out the existing parties. Thus, the AKP received 34.3 percent of the vote, by gaining a comfortable power with 363 deputies in the parliament of 550 seats. To overcome the crisis that began in the 1990s, the AKP government undertook comprehensive economic and political economic reforms. At the same time, the neoliberal economic program implemented by the AKP, the government-maintained contact with the International Monetary Fund and the process of the democratization of the country has been accelerated and be in line with the goal of EU membership. While the AKP attaches importance to social consensus in this period, high rates of growth are being achieved and the start of the accession process is underway. Consequently, the negotiations with the EU are empowering the public support for the government. The main points about the ownership structure in the media during this period of consensus were the restructuring of the industry through Savings Deposit Insurance Fund (TMSF) and the launch

of the foreign capital into media investments in Turkey. Noteworthy is also the government's agreement with fund owners that will help control media (Çam & Yüksel, 2015).

### **The role of the TMSF in the media**

When the AKP came to power in 2002, it initially had the support of the media. This positive atmosphere began to deteriorate after the second election victory in 2004, and the government's opposition to the Doğan Group increased, which was the country's largest media group. The AKP's response to this challenge was by pursuing a dual strategy. On the one hand, it forced the Group Doğan to shrink by imposing heavy tax sanctions and, on the other hand, it began to shape the mainstream media (Kurban & Sözeri, 2012: 54).

Before the AKP came to power in 2002, the largest media in the country, represented the mainstream and they were belonged to the Doğan, Çukurova, Uzan groups, Bilgin, İhlas and Doğuş. However, the crisis of 2021 had a serious impact on these powerful means. Thus, this situation paved the way for the disappearance of the Uzan and Bilgin groups (Adaklı, 2010a:561; Yılmaz, 2016:150). With the collapse of the economy, media groups faced significant decline in advertising share, which is their main income. The size of the national advertising market decreased from about 1 billion dollars to \$500 million and the banks, which were the source of 80 percent of the advertising revenue, were collapsing. In addition, 10 of the 25 failed banks are also media owners (Akser & Baybars-Hawks, 2012:306).

Meanwhile, the Savings Bank Deposit Insurance Fund (TMSF), which seized its assets for the debts of failed banks, became suddenly one of the largest media conglomerates by taking control of three major newspapers, three national TV stations and a number of radio stations in the country. With the tenders conducted by the Deposit Insurance Fund Savings Bank Fund (TMSF) for the sale of these media, foreign funds began to enter the Turkish market, new local players started to enter the media, and some of the existing local players started significantly to increase their shares (Adaklı, 2010b:77; Yesil, 2016:83).

The Doğuş Group is also evolving, benefiting from the sales of the Fund Savings Bank Deposit Insurance Fund (TMSF). banking and automotive sectors, the Doğuş Group in 1999 acquired NTV, one of the country's old and respected news channels. Later, it bought Kanal E and the popular music channel Kral TV, which was owned by the Uzans, through its Savings Bank Deposit Insurance Fund (TMSF) (Adaklı, 2010a, 564; Yesil, 2016, σ. 89). Doğuş Group bought also Kanal E, partnering with CNBC from U.S.A., and it changed its name to CNBC-E, which later transformed it to a financial channel. Doğuş Group increased more its market share when it acquired Star TV from the Doğan Group in the second term of AKP (Aydın, 2014:133, Yesil, 2016:89).

Group is also emerging as a new player in the Turkish media sector through the Savings Bank Deposit Insurance Fund (TMSF). Operating in the energy and transport sectors, the group in 2005 first acquired the Sabah newspaper and ATV channel, the second largest media group in

the world, from the Insurance Fund Savings Bank Deposit Insurance Fund (TMSF). The Sabah newspaper and the ATV channel, which both provide national coverage, form the basic backbone of this structure, which was formerly held by the Bilgin Group under the leadership of Dinç Bilgin. However, when in 2007 the sale was cancelled by the Deposit Insurance Fund Savings Bank Fund (TMSF), Turgay Ciner, the head of the Ciner Group, immediately bought television, website and radio HaberTürk, founded by Ufuk Güldemir, the prominent journalist of the 1990s. The HaberTürk newspaper joined the media group before the 2009 elections (Adaklı, 2010b:77).

Targeting the Doğan Group, the government passed the law, which came into force in 2011, regarding the media companies' market shares, which must be limited to 30%. The Group Doğan Group in 2005, which bought Star TV from TMSF, was sold to the Doğu. Subsequently, the Doğan Group was forced to sell Milliyet and Vatan to DK Gazetecilik ve Yayıncılık, a joint venture of the Demirören and Karacan. In February 2012 this company was taken over by control of the Demirören Group.

Another important point is that the liquidation of the Uzan Group by the Fund Savings Bank Deposit Insurance Fund (TMSF) was linked to the success of the of Cem Uzan's Youth Party in the 2002 elections. Similarly, the AKP, which noticed Cem Uzan getting 7 percent of the vote, and the media media as a threat and took action. More than 200 companies of the Uzan Group, which had significant investments in banking, media, energy and football, were seized by mid-2003 (Aydın, 2014:134).

### **Government's desire to control the media in 2007-2013**

The AKP's second term, which began in 2007, is very different from the first. The defensive position that was set by the government during this period for the social consensus has now been put aside. The AKP and its Islamist allies, especially Gulen, attacked the media. They tried to shape the military, the judiciary and the academic world, according to their own ideals and ideology (Aydın 2014:135).

From this period onwards, the AKP tries its best to secure its connection with pro-government media alongside the existing mainstream media, to exploit better the resources of the state. The AKP started gradually to control power in all social sectors, and that became the reason for the new media organizations to become the new mainstream sources of information (Aydın, 2014:134). The powerful media organizations of the 1990s were now in a deadlock between colluding with the AKP or being under the risk of punishment, which were threatening even their existence. Consequently, the harsh punishment of the Group Doğan by the AKP during this period, because it took part against the government, forced the other media owners to begin obeying to this new order (Sözeri 2015:12).

Two important events regarding the media of this era were the creation of the AKP's media, and the change of attitude from other media, in favour of AKP. Another important event was the overall reorganization of the ownership of the media with the new law passed in 2011.

The year 2007 was an important turning point in the AKP's approach to the media, while the government adopted an increasingly repressive stance towards the media (Akser & Baybars-Hawks, 2012:308). Thus, the year 2007 can be acknowledged as important for three reasons a) the General Staff published on the internet on 27 April 2007, an electronic memo against the AKP's efforts to elect the Abdullah Gul as president, because he was an Islamist; b) a lawsuit was filed on the AKP shutdown, and c) news that an army group was making plans for a coup in 2003-2004 was published in *Nokta* magazine (Aydın 2014:137).

When the presidential election turned into a crisis, the AKP decided to hold early elections and it significantly increased its votes, during the elections of the 22nd of July 2007, by electing 341 deputies, with a 46.7% share. The AKP's electoral victory provided an important advantage over its rivals. The legitimacy and strength of the government became undoubtably clear, and everyone should take that into account, also including the moguls of the media. With the conclusions that were drawn from these events, the AKP attempted on the one hand to reshape the state and social life, and on the other, it monitorised the arrest of several dissidents from the field of the army, the academia, and the political spectrum. A notable example of all these were the “Ergenekon and Balyoz” cases, that had left their mark during this period. Along the way, criticisms, lawsuits, and investigations began to target people who had nothing to do with the coups neither with nor opponents of the AKP. However, the response of the government and the media to these criticisms, by accusing these people of supporters of the coup. Into the framework of this settlement and restructuring of the Turkish society, it has been observed that changes in the ownership structure of the media (Alan, 2015).

### **The 2013-2016 period and the media crisis**

The year 2013 was a turning point as the AKP government has gone through two serious crises. Initially, the resistance that launched by a group of activists against the construction of shopping malls in Istanbul's Gezi Park in Istanbul Square Taksim Square in early June turned into mass street protests, where millions of people across the country protested the oppressive policies of the AKP. The AKP government, which claimed that these manifestations were led by foreign forces, were pursuing the overthrowing of the government. Thus, the government found solution, on increasing the police force, which led to further police violence and the suppression of these manifestations after a while.

The second major crisis was the corruption's investigation that had erupted in the last days of the year in December. As part of the investigation, the sons of three AKP ministers were arrested along with some other officials. After a while, shocking details of the raids appear have been published by the press. The distribution of the recordings of some interceptions

related to the corruption scandal from anonymous accounts on the internet, had further increased the pressure on the AKP. Some of these records were confirming the allegations of corruption (Yesil, 2016:111).

The AKP government accused members of the Gülen Movement, which had infiltrated into the forces of the judiciary and the police. It claimed that the recordings were fake, and this investigation was an attempted coup to discredit and overthrow the government. This crisis shook the hegemony of the AKP. The AKP's response was to intensify the pressure on the ideas and news circulating in the society, to further manipulate the media and to eliminate the media Gülen's media, which it accuses of corruption. The government shall establish a tight control over mass communications, accelerates its efforts to strictly regulate this sector as dissidents turn to the internet.

After the release of these scandals, Gulen's media began to blame the government. On the other hand, the AKP government accused Gülen, whose organization that had developed a media empire, has started to disintegrate with various interventions. In early 2014, 93 percent of sanctions imposed by the Broadcasting Council, were referred to the Gulen's media. After the failed coup attempt of the 15th of July 2016, all Gulen's media outlets were closed down by legislative decrees that were issued under a state of emergency. Famous journalists working there such as Nazlı Ilıcak, Ali Bulaç, Şahin Alpay were arrested (Sözeri, 2015:17).

## **Journalism and press freedom in Turkey**

Journalists in Turkey are fighting both against the media owners and against the government, which had increased its repression through legal regulations and lawsuits. In 2014, 18 criminal prosecutions against 20 journalists and 2 cartoonists were held, with the accusation of insulting the former Prime Minister and now President Erdogan. In addition, in 2014, the government and the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan played an important role in the dismissal or coercion of 339 journalists, writers and media workers to resign. In 2013, 106 journalists, writers and media workers were fired and 37 were forced to resign.

The police raided the house of journalist Sedef Kabaş because of a tweet that was published in the last month of 2014. Kabaş was taken into custody and lawsuit was filed against her for "revealing the identity of the officers who involved in the fight against terrorism and targeting people in this way". Kabaş was also being prosecuted for making the police wait at the door during the arrest (Önderoğlu, 2015).

In this context, the roughly 18-year period of AKP's rule, it can be divided into three specific periods in which, AKP presented differences on media policy. In the first period, between 2002-2007, the government pursued social reconciliation, followed by the second period between 2007-2013, when the AKP attempted to restructure the media as well as the social order, and finally in the period 2013-2020, the AKP government faced different crises, that were also reflected in the media. For example, the AKP, during its first period of government, was quite

weak against the existing status quo in Turkey, and it pursued softer policies regarding the media, compared to the second and third period. However, over the time, the government policies for the media stated to change, as the government was strengthening gradually its status, by taking advantage of opportunities that provided by their political power, while at the same time, it became took a hard towards the opposition media. The government's relations with the media were constantly proceeding with the constant interaction with other social institutions such as politics, economy, education, and health.

The transformation of governance that has taken place in the key structures of the basic structures of the state under the AKP government, have been also shown to the political and non-governmental organizations and institutions, where there were significant developments in favour of the AKP. At the same time, the AKP changed its basic strategies of pressure that it implemented and exerted more than during its first period. The strategy followed by the AKP shifted over time from hegemony to almost totalitarian domination (Arslan, 2014:154).

The AKP's period, covering the years 2002-2020, includes efforts on the part of the government to change positions and maneuver the basic structure of the state, politics, society and non-governmental organisations, and institutions. From 2008, the political transformation that the government wants to impose throughout the structure of the state, with the power granted to it by both the state and the political scene, was also manifested in the media. During this period, the AKP's policies on media have been designed with strategies that followed throughout the course of its governance. In the strategies of conquering the media, the creation of business groups played a leading role affiliated with the government. The Savings Bank Deposit Insurance Fund (TMSF) was operated as a kind of reconstruction fund, the so-called media pool, which financed the purchase of media by entrepreneurs, the absorption of larger media with the entry of pro-government journalists, by making them into the mainstream media pro-AKP affiliates in this way (Alan, 2015b).

### **The media are being crushed under political and economic pressure**

During this period, several examples of strategies, that followed by the AKP governments, can be given. The strategies that followed were operating as a whole and they were also interacting with each other. Media organisations that belonged to the Doğan Group were added to the Demirören Group, and the Doğuş and Ciner Groups have been transformed based on the media's policy change that was taken over by the government between 2002 and 2020. A notable example could be the change in Hürriyet, Milliyet and Habertürk as a demonstration of this strategy. With all these changes into the field of journalists and media managements, it is difficult to find any news against AKP. This outcome became more obvious, especially after 2015, in the major media, which gradually forced to be silenced towards the government. This situation shows that the government was able to control, silence or make pro-government all the media that would stand against it, without changing the institutional structure of the media. The capture of the media has allowed the government to save money in terms of economy and

gain time in the process of controlling the media. The fact that television and newspapers consist of journalists and administrators affiliated to AKP, has resulted in the expansion of censorship in the media. The takeover of the major Turkish media by government not only saved the AKP from financial costs, but also ensured censorship practices in news production (Boratav, 2015:126).

The examples of selling of the media to parties affiliated to the groups and businessmen (such as ATV-Sabah to the Çalık Group, the seizure of Show TV, SKY Türk and Akşam, owned by the Çukurova Group), from the TMSF reconstruction fund and the transfer of Akşam and SKY 360 to the businessman Ethem Sanjak, who was close to the government, can be recognised as the takeover of these companies by the government. It should be noted that the silent coalition period of AKP with Gulen's organization was part of this strategic conquest of the media. Another example is the sale of Kanaltürk TV, which was one of the most important representatives of the opposition in the media sector until 2008, to the Koza Group, which was affiliated with the Gulen's organization. In this process, AKP conquered the media sector conquered, by utilizing different groups within the Islamic bourgeoisie. The entry of the capital and the Gulen organization, with the capitalists' groups pro-AKP represented by the Independent League Industrialists and Businessmen (MÜSIAD) facilitated the penetration of AKP into the media environment, which was mainly intensified between 2002 and 2013. After the 2013, and in parallel with the crises into the AKP coalition with Gulen's organization, AKP began this time to take over the media organizations, that were belonging to the Gulen's organization. After the failed coup in July 2016 and the declaration of a state of emergency, many media outlets of the Gulen's organization were closed down by legislative decrees and the assets from their technical equipment to the capital were transferred to pro-AKP organizations through the Insurance Fund. Thus, the process of conquering the media that began in 2002 continued with the use of Gulen's organization capital until the end of this political cooperation of the AKP-Gulen coalition. This crisis became deeper involving the media of the organization of the former government partner's organization which were closed. The possibilities that revealed by the state of emergency after the failed coup of 15 July 2016 to the government were not only used to conquer only the media's organization, but also during this period, the media of different sections of society were shut down one by one, and their assets were transferred to those who were affiliated with the government (Bora, 2017:509).

The formation strategy was mainly based on the bourgeoisie affiliated to the AKP, which was seen as one of the AKP's media policies. It is observed that many of the pro-government media organizations emerged between 2002 and 2020, with initiatives of groups represented by the Independent Association of Industrialists and Businessmen (MUSIAD) who were closed to the Islamist businessmen, by increasing their capital accumulation during the AKP period. These groups, which are reported to have increased their capital within the framework of clientelist economic relations, they have established with the authorities and at the same time have integrated into the media environment by receiving incentives from power. It is remarkable and

it can easily show the effect of the strategic formation of public opinion in the media. Between 2013 and 2020, the government faced several political crises, mainly in the sector of society. The fact that these crises almost toppled the government, could be identified in the Gezi Park events, during the Operation Corruption of 17 December 2013 and the failed attempt of the military coup on 15 July 2016, brought about the change of AKP strategies. In this process, the main strategy of the AKP was power shifted from hegemony to domination. The state of emergency that was declared after the 15th July of 2016, the country was transformed into a non-democratic state, by the government for its opponents. The crises, which arose from different centres during different times, made the government to suppress political opponents, non-governmental organizations and fundamental structures. The media is one of the sectors that have been affected the most by this period. The AKP applied the same policy of repression also to all the social political structures in the media sector, and it added two new strategies, which we explained above. These strategies of the government have become the main tool of domination in the media environment.

## **Conclusions**

The distinctive feature of this period in terms of the media into the Turkish society (especially in the period after the declaration of the state of emergency) is that the journalists were threatened, attacked, fired, arrested, and sentenced just for doing their job. In this period, many media outlets were closed down and their properties confiscated by the state. The state of emergency declared in July 2016, shows that it is not surprising that the media was one of the most important tools for the AKP's war against society organizations civil society organizations. In this period, where intimidation and suppression strategies implemented along with other strategies, the structure of the ownership and control of the Turkish media has completely changed. This change in the structure of ownership and control also shows how the conquest strategies, intimidation and suppression are related to each other.

It is important to note that the ideological practices of the media, which gradually transformed since the AKP came to power in 2002, adapted to the new reality. During its 18-year rule, the AKP changed/transformed the entire institutional and democratic experience of Turkey. This is also reflected in the professional principles of journalism. Journalists are employed not only for their professional profile in their domain of journalism, but also for their proximity with the government. Thus, the Turkish media became more monophonic in 2018 than it has ever been in the history of Turkey.

Behind this outcome, it is the Islamic bourgeoisie, which is the base of the AKP, as well as a part of the Western world bourgeoisie that took part in the government. Therefore, the main reason for the transformation of the media should be sought in the long-term change of the basic structure. The fundamental change in politics brought the AKP to power, which gained and secured the transformation of the media in its favour. The monophonic media, on the other hand, played an important role in overcoming all the crises the AKP faced. This dialectic

relationship between capital-politics and the media, which feed off each other, should not be seen as an independent element from the power that has completely transformed the Turkish society - the Islamic bourgeoisie. This relationship that the Turkish media have created with the capital and the politics, also shows how much weak and inadequate is the understanding that prevails in the prevailing communication studies for the comprehension of today's media.

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## **Greek political leaders on Instagram: Pre-electoral and non-pre-electoral “visual flows”**

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### **Abstract**

Through social media communities, politicians communicate professional, personal or even private information and try to “connect” with influential figures or ordinary people. More specifically, the use of Instagram by politicians can be approached as a way of producing “visual flows” of professional, personal and private moments. The present research is a comparative study of the ways in which the leaders of the three largest - based on their electoral percentage - political parties in Greece (New Democracy, SY.RIZ.A., KIN.AL.) shape their "image" through their posts on Instagram during the "multiple" pre-electoral period of 2019 (European elections, Local Regional elections, Parliamentary elections) and a non-pre- electoral period (first half of 2018), in order to identify similarities and differences in the communication strategies of the aforementioned political figures per period.

**Keywords:** political leaders, Instagram, personalization, elections, communication strategy.

### **The personalization of politics and Instagram**

Political communication evolves based on the changes that take place in the communication field. Just as television created new forms of televised political communication, so have social media created the conditions for the emergence of new forms of political communication (Karadimitriou & Veneti, 2016: 336). Studies focusing on Facebook and Twitter have shown that they are the platforms through which politicians project the “best possible aspects of their personalities” to the electorate (Jung et al., 2017:2195; Avedissian, 2016) by applying primarily text-based communication strategies (Poulakidakos & Veneti, 2016; Ekman & Widholm, 2017:16). Social media focus the public attention on the personal aspects of the politician and reinforce the personalization and privatization of her/his communication features. Therefore, the communication practices of politicians in the social media must be approached in the light of the articulation of their communication strategy under the popular culture of a celebrity (Ekman & Widholm, 2017: 18).

Political personalization describes a process in which "individual political figures have become more important than political parties and any other political collectives" (Karvonen, 2010: 4).

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As a result, candidates try to promote a self-image that meets the voters' expectations. Even political parties "strategically" choose to promote their political program through candidates who are popular figures among their constituencies (McAllister, 2007: 580).

According to Rahat and Sheaffer's (2007) typology, we can distinguish between three general types (or areas) of political personalization -institutional, media and behavioral- even though Adam and Maier (2010: 231) conclude that there is only one area of politics with plenty of evidence for the personalization thesis, media coverage.

Van Aelst et al. (2011: 206) suggest that personalization in the media landscape comprises two dimensions: "individualization", a term that describes a process where "individual politicians have become more central in media coverage, while parties and government institutions have become less relevant", and "privatization", which implies "a shift in media focus from the politician as occupier of a public role to the politician as a private individual, as a person distinct from their public role" (2011: 214).

Privatization can be further analyzed to two distinct sub-dimensions based on whether the media focus is on the "personal characteristics" or the "personal life" of the politician (Van Aelst et al., 2011: 207). According to Jebril, Albaek and de Vreese (2013: 107), privatization denotes a "shift in journalism towards covering the private rather than the public side of politicians" and can be associated to strategic game coverage in the news, in the sense that media focus on the personal traits of the political candidates rather than the party's political platform. In the same vein, Langer speaks of the "politicization of private persona" referring to an increased importance "not just of leaders or of their leadership qualities, but of leaders as persons, as "human beings" (2010: 61).

From the above overview it should have become apparent that most researchers identify two quite distinct aspects of personalization; on the one hand, the "hard side" of personalization, which refers to a stronger focus on politicians at the expense of parties, and on the other hand, there is a "soft side" of personalization, which goes beyond the visibility of the individual and stresses on the increased importance of personal traits and qualities that become more relevant and salient to the voters' evaluations of politicians' performance (Adam & Maier, 2010: 216; Bjerling, 2012: 45; Holtz-Bacha et al., 2014: 156).

In the new media environment, personalization of politics has found a new fruitful space to grow further since social media "are designed to facilitate a direct link between sender (politician) and receiver (citizen) and vice versa" (van Santen & van Zoonen, 2010: 65), by bypassing the journalists' intervention (Olsson, 2017: 100). More specifically, politicians' Instagram use can be understood as a way of producing visual flows of professional, personal and private practices in which the authenticity of everyday political life takes center stage (Ekman & Widholm, 2017: 29).

Instagram posts might include different types of performances and practices related to the private moments with friends and family (Jung et al., 2017: 2197), personal, semi-professional

and professional aspects of political life, like everyday professional footage (e.g., imagery of day-to-day duties/tasks), political performances (superseding the everyday duties of politicians), media appearances, attendance at celebrity events and public demonstrations (Ekman & Widholm, 2017: 21). In that way, politicians are able to construct strategically self-managed galleries, in which work practices and glimpses of their private life become visible (Karadimitriou & Veneti, 2016, p. 321). This is a typical feature of celebrity culture, where actors “must constantly shift between performing their stage persona, concealing or revealing personal information, and creating intimacy and authentic self-presentation” with their followers (Ekman & Widholm, 2017: 29).

As far as Greece is concerned, previous research (Poulakidakos & Giannouli, 2019) has shown that politicians use Instagram as a strategic communication tool (especially during the years 2017 and 2018). This first study on the use of Instagram by Greek politicians revealed both similarities and differences in the ways of its use (Poulakidakos & Giannouli, 2019: 202)\*.

## **Main Research Questions and Hypotheses**

Based on our theoretical background, as well as previous findings on the use of Instagram by Greek politicians (Poulakidakos & Giannouli, 2019), the main research question of the current research is about the similarities and/or differences that can be traced in the “image” of the leaders of the three major political parties<sup>†</sup> (Kyriakos Mitsotakis of New Democracy, Alexis Tsipras of SY.RIZ.A/Coalition of Radical Left, and Fofi Gennimata of KIN.AL./Movement for Change), formed through their Instagram posts to their personal accounts, during a non-electoral period (2018) and a pre-electoral period (2019).

Our coding unit is the Instagram post, hence the picture (or video) along with its caption (if it exists). More specifically, we examine the posts of the aforementioned politicians during the year 2018 (from the beginning of the year until the end of June), and during the consecutive pre-electoral periods of 2019 (from April 28 to July 6), accumulating 388 posts (122 for Fofi Gennimata, 130 for Kyriakos Mitsotakis and 136 for Alexis Tsipras), that were published during the first half of 2018 (220 posts) and during the pre-electoral periods of 2019 (168 posts). Each post is coded according to the variables outlined in the following research hypotheses and research questions, which stem from our theoretical background.

Since personalization is a fundamental feature of Instagram (Jung et al., 2017), (1) we expect frequent presentations of the politicians' personal and/or private lives (e.g., family moments,

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\* The politicians monitored for the scopes of this research are Kyriakos Mitsotakis, Alexis Tsipras and Fofi Gennimata.

† According to their parliamentary strength after the last parliamentary elections in July 2019. For a detailed presentation of the results see the relevant website of the Ministry of the Interior (Hellenic Ministry of the Interior, 2019).

person-centered everyday moments -political and non-political) in both campaign and non-campaign posts.

(2) We expect that during the pre- electoral period, politicians will “attack” their opponents more often compared to non- electoral periods, due to the intensity of political discourse and the polarization of public political discourse (Poulakidakos & Veneti, 2016).

(3) We expect that in both periods the majority of the posts will include a depiction of the politician her/himself (Van Aelst et al. 2011: 206).

In addition, we will seek to answer the additional research questions:

(1) Are there any differences in the proportion of the depiction of different personal performances during the two distinguished periods of study? For example, everyday professional footage (e.g., imagery of meetings and other day-to-day duties/tasks), political performances (superseding the everyday duties of politicians), media appearances and attendances at celebrity events and public demonstrations?

(2) Does the demonstrated “connectedness” of politicians – the strategy that creates symbolic links between politicians and different “spheres” of society (Ekman and Widholm, 2017) – differ significantly in the two periods of our research?

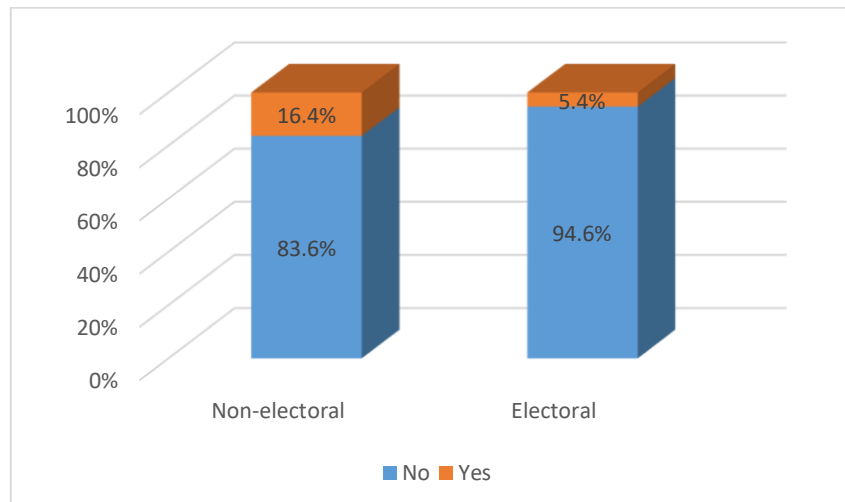
## **Methodology**

The method used for the current research is quantitative content analysis, which can be briefly defined as the systematic, based on scientific criteria, analysis of the characteristics of various messages (Kyriazi, 2001; Neuendorf, 2002). It constitutes a systematic, reproducible technique for transforming the content of various forms of messages (text, still and moving image, sound, etc.) into fewer categories of meaning, based on specific codification rules (Stemler, 2001; Miller & Brewer, 2003), allowing the researchers to examine large amounts of data through a systematic methodology. The ability to implement content analysis to a variety of “texts” makes it useful as a research method. The primary target of content analysis is the systematic research of the content of the unit of analysis (text, image, news item, advertisement, etc.) (Berelson, 1971). In our case, the unit of analysis is the Instagram post, including both the image (either still or video) and its caption. The quantitative analysis of the posts was conducted with SPSS 25. The statistical test implemented to assess the similarities and differences in the Instagram communication strategy of the politicians under research is the chi-square and Fisher’s exact test (Field, 2017).

## **Results**

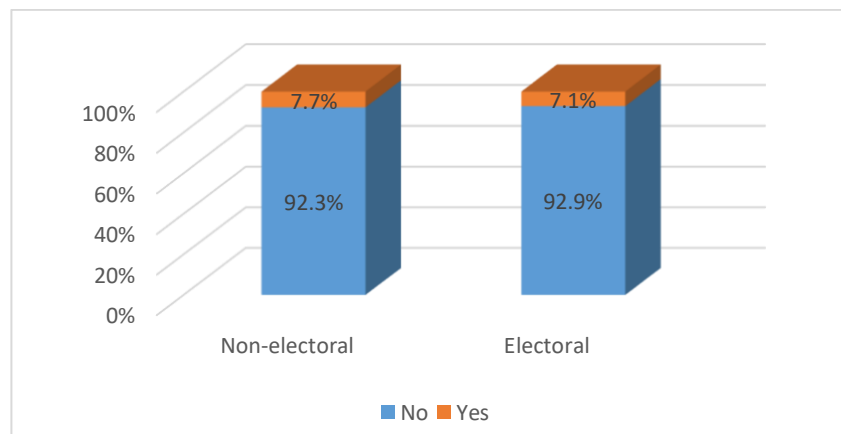
Our first hypothesis focuses on the personal/private aspects of the politicians’ posts since we expect a rather frequent presentation of the personal and/or private life (van Aelst et al., 2011). On the one hand, as Figure 1 shows, posts with personal aspects of politicians decrease

significantly during the pre- electoral period (from a percentage of 16.4% during the non- electoral period of our survey, they decrease to 5.4% during the pre- electoral period).



**Figure 1:** Posts with personal aspects of politics (by period) (fisher's exact p value= .001).

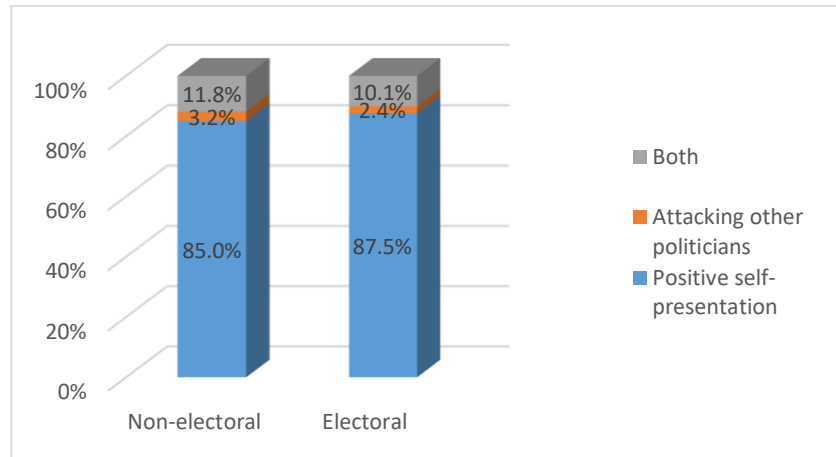
On the other hand, the private moments of politicians appear to have a constant presence in both periods of our research. According to Figure 2, the viewing rates of private moments on Instagram are almost identical for both non- electoral and electoral periods (7.7% and 7.1% respectively). This fact probably indicates the application of a certain communication strategy based on content that accords to the promotion of the private moments of politicians, who consistently choose to show instances from their private lives, since this reinforces the "quasi-social" "face to face" relationship with their followers (Avedissian, 2016: 6). According to these results, we partially accept our first working hypothesis about the constant existence of personal and private posts by politicians in both pre- electoral and non- electoral periods.



**Figure 2:** Posts with private aspects of politics (per period) (fisher's exact p value= 1,000).

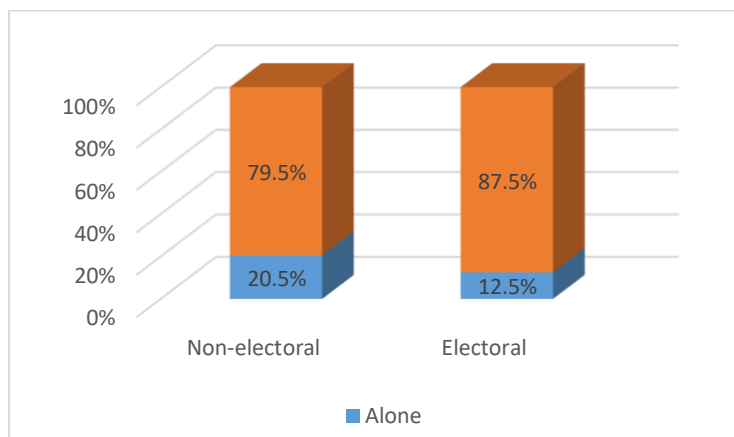
In addition, we expect that politicians through their posts will primarily attempt to build their own profile, rather than to attack their political opponents. According to Figure 3 politicians use Instagram almost exclusively as a means of "positive" self-promotion during both periods of our survey (85% during the non- electoral period and 87.5% during the consecutive electoral

periods of 2019). This is an interesting finding, especially in the polarized political sphere of Greece, in which the rationale of cross-blaming is a widespread practice, especially during the “crisis” (Poulakidakos & Veneti, 2016). Based on this finding we reject our second working hypothesis.



**Figure 3:** Positive self-presentation or “attack” on political opponents by period (chi-square p value= .766).

In a similar vein to the focus on the positive self-promotion, the portrayal of politicians itself can be spotted in most of the posts. As Figure 4 shows, the already high rate of depiction of politicians in the non- electoral period of our survey (79.5%) increases even more during the electoral period (88.1%), which reveals the strongly individual-centric rationale of the politicians’ communication strategy through Instagram, especially during the pre- electoral period.



**Figure 4:** Depiction of politicians in their posts by period (fisher's exact p value= .028).

In addition to publishing personal and private moments, the politicians' posts on Instagram also include professional aspects of their lives. Primarily, politicians displayed their participation in political events such as speeches and visits-tours in various places, either in Greece or abroad. These visits-tours show a clear upward trend during the pre- electoral period of our survey (Table 1).

**Table 1:** Distribution of professional content of posts (per period).

	Non-electoral period (2018)		Pre-electoral period (2018)		Fisher's exact p value
	No	Yes	No	Yes	
Everyday professional routine	198 (90%)	22 (10%)	166 (98,8%)	2 (1,2%)	<b>0.000</b>
Political events	100 (45,5%)	120 (54,5%)	52 (31%)	116 (69%)	<b>0.005</b>
Political Party Material	189 (85,9%)	31 (14,1%)	152 (90,5%)	16 (9,5%)	0.209
Media exposure	208 (94,5%)	12 (5,5%)	158 (94%)	10 (6%)	0.829

An additional element that strengthens the creation of a positive profile, is the highlighting of the “connection” - through meetings, discussions, collaborations - with important political actors/bodies (politicians, citizens, celebrities, media professionals, NGO representatives and entrepreneurs). According to Table 2, politicians primarily focus on connecting with citizens, non-political actors, and politicians (especially during the pre- electoral period), while they do not highlight their contacts with media professionals and celebrities.

**Table 2:** Depicted "connectedness" of politicians, per period.

	Non-electoral period (2018)		Pre-electoral period (2018)		Fisher's exact p value
	No	Yes	No	Yes	
Connection with:	No	Yes	No	Yes	
Politicians	156 (70,9%)	64 (29,1%)	133 (79,2%)	35 (20,8%)	0.078
Media professionals	210 (95,5%)	10 (4,5%)	155 (92,3%)	13 (7,7%)	0.200
Celebrities	220 (100%)	0 (0%)	166 (98,8%)	2 (1,2%)	0.18
Non-political actors	200 (90,9%)	20 (9,1%)	134 (79,8%)	34 (20,2%)	<b>0.002</b>
Citizens	164 (74,5%)	56 (25,5%)	79 (47%)	89 (53%)	<b>0.000</b>

## Discussion

In this research, we compared the visual communication strategies of three Greek politicians on Instagram during two different periods, a non- electoral period and a pre- electoral period, in order to identify similarities and differences between these two periods.

As far as similarities are concerned, they can be traced to the consistent depiction of politicians' private lives, which highlights the links between political communication and celebrity culture in social media (Ekman and Widholm, 2017: 18). Moreover, according to Langer's approach (2010: 61), this projection of the private sphere remains at the core of “politics”, as the aspects of politicians' private lives are used in order to craft their leadership profile.

The similarities between the two periods include the politicians' effort to project a positive image of themselves, rather than attacking political opponents. Although previous research has highlighted the polarization of public political discourse, especially within "crisis"

(Poulakidakos & Veneti, 2016), image-centric posts on Instagram seem to be predominantly aimed at creating a positive image of the respective politician.

As for the differences between the two periods, they can be traced to the increased depiction of politicians during the pre- electoral period, which highlights the person-centered communication strategy followed on Instagram. At the same time, this increased visibility of politicians during the pre- electoral period takes a more exact political dimension, as personal moments (van Aelst, Sheafer, & Stanyer, 2011) are reduced, possibly in favor of posts that promoting political events and “connect” with citizens and non-political actors (e.g., members of pressure groups).

It should be taken into account, that the research of a dynamically growing social network, such as Instagram, requires constant renewal of empirical data. A future extension of the present research is to examine comparatively the ways in which different social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) are involved in the process of political communication, and in particular if they convey the same message, or they act in complementary ways (Lalancette and Raynauld, 2017: 31).

The present research could also be extended to the analysis of structural features of Instagram posts (Ekman & Widholm, 2017) or focus on the ways in which users interact with the political messages disseminated through this platform. In any case, the development of Instagram as a social networking site and its subsequent political use, indicate that it constitutes an extremely conducive research field for political communication.

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## **Viral marketing. A case study from LinkedIn**

Chrysopigi Vardikou

Agisilaos Konidaris\*

### **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to explore the path of a social media campaign that became viral and to shed light on the reasons why this content drove thousands of shares and comments amidst an extensive online dialogue about Facebook's change of logo. We explored the time course of post reactions and new followers and analyzed the post comments with a text analysis software (LIWC) to identify the emotions generated among users.

**Keywords:** Social media, crisis management, viral content, crisis communication, crisis emotion, Passion behavior.

### **Introduction**

On October 28th, Facebook launched a rebranding and released the logo of its new company, called "meta". It adopted its -now famous- infinity loop symbol. Instantly, there was a flood of conversations on social media about the change, triggering a rise of user-generated content elaborated around two pillars. First, the new logo received heavy criticism because it was perceived as unimaginative and banal. Many users teased Facebook about the new logo by comparing it to a German pretzel, a Pringle chip, IBM's design thinking loop, Microsoft Visual Studio's old avatar and the list is never-ending. That resulted in many companies from all over the world getting into the discussion and publishing posts with a new logo very similar to the Meta logo. Second, exactly because this infinity symbol was not innovative, there were a few companies who were threatened by the new logo, as they had a great degree of similarity. In this landscape, a German app called M-sense Migräne by Newsenselab, developed to treat migraine, stood out, and got viral growth. In this paper, we aim to understand the reasons why this piece of content emerged by reviewing the theories behind shareable content and with a glance on the emotions this post elicited.

So far, while the virality of online content is a popular topic and well researched, the virality of LinkedIn content is under-researched. The authors have found no academic papers about this relationship. This gap is important because there may be different patterns of sharing in each social media platform (Heimbach, Schiller, Strufe, & Hinz, 2015).

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Second, emotions are well known to drive virality, but again there is little research studying emotions in the context of LinkedIn posts. One study (Tellis, MacInnis, Tirunillai & Zhang, 2019) has concluded that emotional content is not shared in LinkedIn as much as in other social media, because the platform is business-oriented, and the content shared there is more informational. However, these researchers had focused their study on the sharing activity of YouTube video ads across social media networks. Last, the time course of viral content has seldom been researched. The reason behind this is obvious, since researchers gather this type of data retrospectively, only after the campaign has already gone viral. While this methodology permits us to gather big amounts of data, it often loses temporal data, of interactions as they evolve day by day.

As an initial step towards addressing these gaps, we were searching for company/brand LinkedIn posts that were going viral. As a starting point, we observed the activity of a single piece of viral content as its redistribution was happening. We then analyzed its performance, the effect on the brand in terms of LinkedIn page followers and branded searches in Google. Afterwards, in our exploration of the drivers of success, we described the emotions conveyed by the post and then analyzed the thousand users' comments, to understand if emotions triggered by the post are in line with the emotions transmitted. While the post had a positive tone in the text, the underlying irony, and the conflict framing (“they go low, we go high”) resulted in a mix of positive and negative comments. It is noteworthy that most negative comments were not addressing the negative emotion to the brand which published the post. On the contrary, the brand seems to have gained positive visibility and virality as well as media coverage.

## **Literature Review**

We use the term “Virality” to indicate the high probability of redistribution of content. It is characterized by a distinct form of information sharing, the speed at which the information spreads, and the reach of the content (Nahon & Hemsley, 2013).

Content is the most important factor driving engagement and diffusion in social media. The question of what types of content drive virality has been regularly researched during the past decade. It appears that content with emotional impact is more shareable and has higher viral potential (Borges-Tiago, Tiago & Cosme, 2018; Berger & Milkman, 2010) and the reasoning lies in that people who feel something unique want other people to feel it too. According to Phelps et al. (2004) emotion “enhances information processing and increases memorability” which in turn stimulates sharing. When looking for virality factors, we can also take the valence of the emotional content into consideration. Positive content seems to trigger social shares more frequently (Berger and Milkman, 2010; Wu, Tan, Kleinberg, Macy 2011) as it “reflects positively on the sender and it is also likely to make recipients feel good” (Schreiner, Fischer, Riedl, 2021). On the other hand, some researchers have found the negatively valenced content to be shared more (Zillmann, Chen, Knobloch, & Callison, 2004).

Apart from the emotional valence, the dimension of arousal also affects viral results, in that content that triggers arousal emotions (versus relaxation) is more shareable (Borges-Tiago, Tiago, Cosme, 2018). The mechanism with which emotion influences engagement is that advertisements that contain emotional content transfer emotional stimuli to the audience and ignite similar emotions in the users, thus implying a direct transferability, according to Pieters, & de Klerk-Warmerdam (1996) whose results were also supported by Li, Chong, and Ch'ng (2015). A conflict framing of the message also plays an important role, because they bring an emotional tone which is often negative.

Apart from emotion, there are other factors influencing the decision of whether the user will share the content or not. Wu et al (2011) have concluded that content of high complexity has cognitive demands and therefore will not be easily shared. In line with this view, Botha & Reyneke (2013) have found that simple, general content tends to become viral more easily and that marketers who aim for virality should create content that will allow more consumers to feel an emotional connection to it, instead of creating specific content, on the grounds that people have a stronger emotional reaction to content with which they are familiar. Borges-Tiago, Tiago and Cosme (2016) analyzed the dimensions of content that drive virality and found that there are four key characteristics: storytelling, amusement, triggers, and reaction. They concluded that storytelling is the most effective for creating engagement.

The speed at which content is distributed is another measure of virality. Wu et al (2011) measured the temporal patterns of information diffusion and they have stated that content with a lifetime of more than twenty-four hours is “more likely to receive consistent waves of attention”.

Kaplan and Heinlein (2011) described the basic conditions of virality, and they noticed that one of them is “to be in the right place at the right time”. The other two conditions are to create memorable and interesting content and to select the right messengers at the early stages. According to Kaplan and Heinlein, the result of whether a piece of content will be viral is a product of two dimensions: the initiator of the content (company or users) and the outcome (positive or negative).

Outcome	Positive	<b>Strokes of luck</b> (e.g., the Diet Coke & Mentos Experiment)	<b>Triumphs</b> (e.g., Burger King's Whopper Sacrifice campaign)
	Negative	<b>Nightmares</b> (e.g., the case of JetBlue)	<b>Homemade issues</b> (e.g., Charlie's and Jeremy's Sony PSP blog)
		Customers	Company
		Initiator of viral marketing campaign	

**Image 1:** The four groups of social media viral marketing campaigns by Kaplan and Heinlein, 2011.

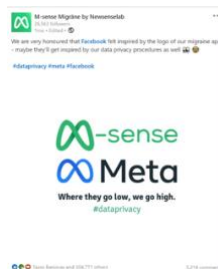
“Triumphs” are viral campaigns initiated by the company and with a positive outcome, while “strokes of luck” are viral campaigns initiated by the customers and with a positive outcome. When the company starts the campaign but with a negative outcome, it becomes a “homemade issue” and when users start a viral campaign with a negative outcome, it is called a “Nightmare”. In the following case study of M-sense, we posit that the campaign was a triumph, because of the positive results for the brand (in terms of shares, comments as well as the branded searches that were typed in Google) and due to the fact that the content was created by the company.

### **Method: The case of M-sense Migräne by Newsenselab**

We used observational data collection to gather available data about a single LinkedIn company page. The specific company page was selected because of the viral potential of the post, and only after it had gathered hundreds of comments and shares. Because LinkedIn does not provide historical data on the performance of a page and post, unless we are administrators of the page, we observed the performance of the post (likes, comments, shares) and the page (followers) every 24 hours and in some cases in between. However, this means that we do not have data on the very first hours that it went viral. From the historical performance of the page, we found the starting point of the follower base. After we gathered all data, we calculated new page followers and we downloaded all comments written on the post, to further analyze them with the software Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC).

### **Results of the viral post**

M-sense is a digital migraine treatment program delivered in a mobile app (M-Sense, 2022). On October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2021, soon after the rebranding of Facebook, M-sense published a post on its social media platforms LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter. Up to that point, the app was only in the German language as its audience consisted of mainly German citizens. In addition, its social media presence was also in German, apart from some scientific articles in English. Their LinkedIn page, which is our case study, had 919 followers before the content went viral. The company published the post on its other social media pages, and it received a great degree of attention on both Twitter and Facebook. The reason we put emphasis on LinkedIn is that it is not researched extensively, and it is seldom mentioned as a channel that drives virality.



**Image 2:** The first published post of M-sense on LinkedIn on 29<sup>th</sup> October 2021 (source: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/newsenselab-gmbh/posts/?feedView=images>).

The results of this content were the following: First, the single post on LinkedIn received 300.000 reactions and generated 6.117 comments. Consistent with Wu et al. (2011) findings, the major volume of engagement happened in the first 24 hours. (Figures 1 & 2). The post was published on 6pm local time (GMT+2) which is not the ideal time to post on LinkedIn, given that the audience of the page was mainly from Germany. However, it was 12pm EDT time, that was indeed in the optimal time range for LinkedIn, according to social media platform Sprout Social (2022). Therefore, it was in line with the “ideal” times to post on LinkedIn. We don’t know whether this happened on purpose, to adapt the timing to the time zone of the US audience according to the best practice, or it was spontaneous. Detailed data hour by hour tracking, instead of day by day, would shed light on the exact path of shares and would inform us if the first shares were made from the audience of the page and then the post went contagious or if the first shares came from the global audience, because it was a trending topic.

There was a spike of all engagement metrics on day two and it kept bringing high levels of engagement up to day 8. It’s worth mentioning that in the meantime, the company has posted one more time, and that post went well, but it was not viral. So, a small part of these engagement actions is owed to that second post. The increase in engagement increased page followers (Figure 3 - Daily stats of new followers). We notice that there is a pretty small increase during the first 6 hours when the page received only one hundred twenty new followers, during the first day they received three thousand followers and during the first five days in total they received 25766 followers (28X follower growth), which is the 96% of their current follower base.

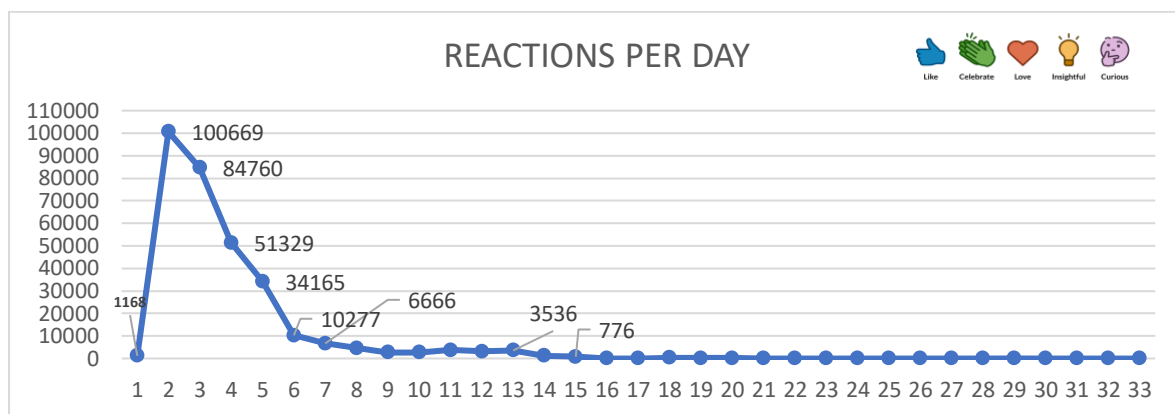


Figure 1: Post Reactions per day, starting 29th October.

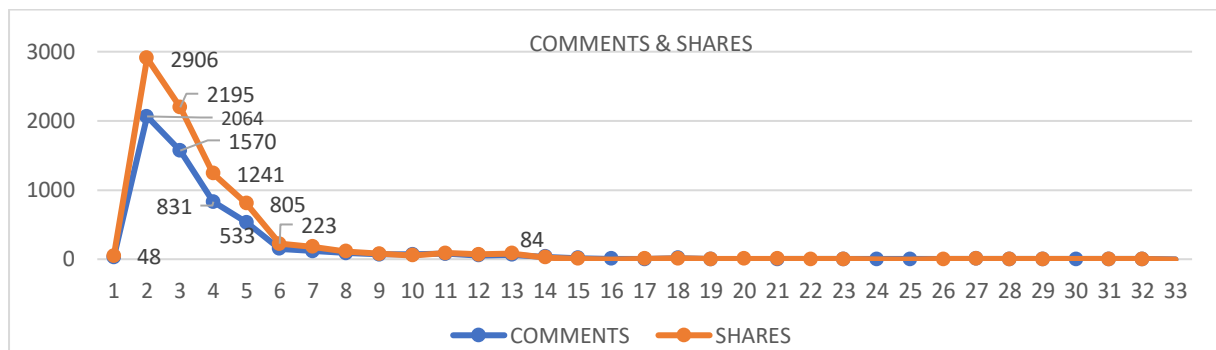
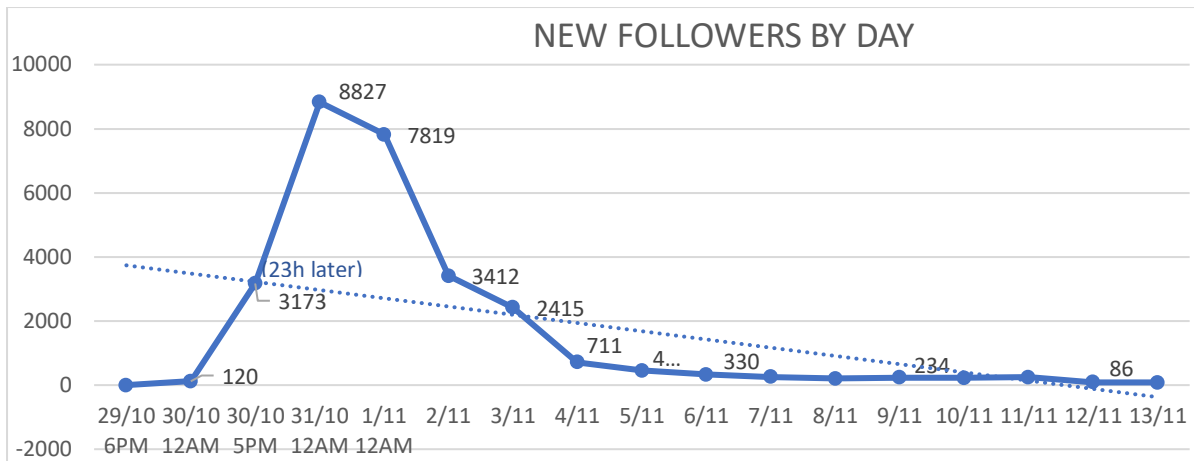
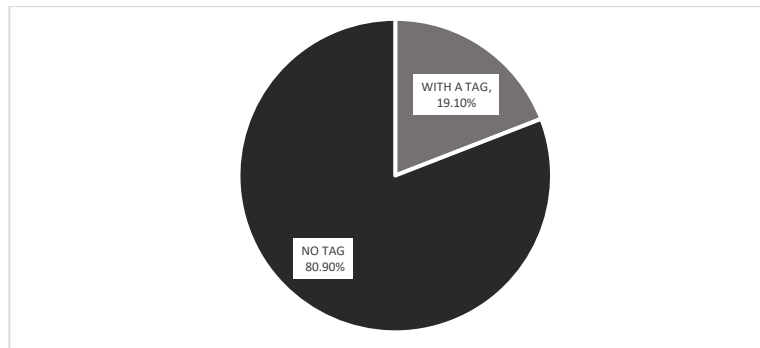


Figure 2: Page Comments & Shares per day, starting 29th October.



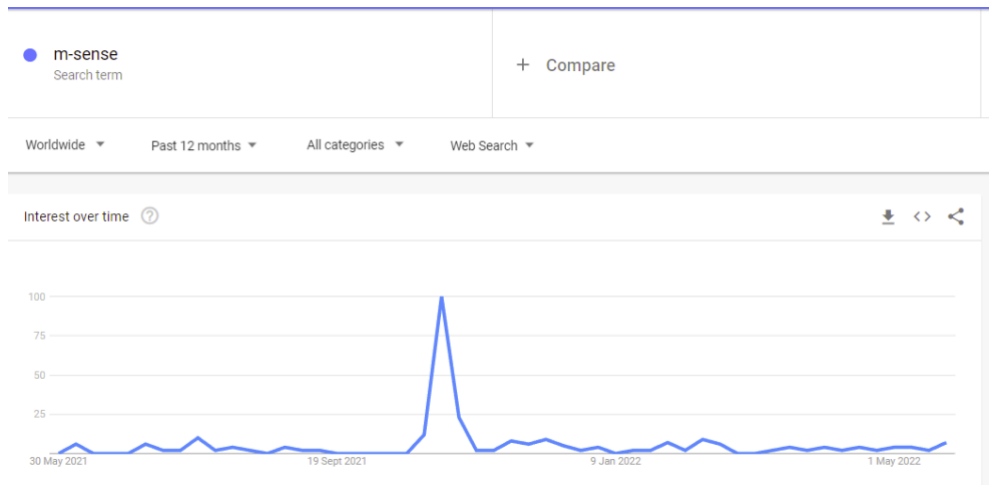
**Figure 3:** LinkedIn page new followers per day. Distorted view to depict the first hours.

In total, the page received 313.024 reactions, 6.117 comments and 8.144 shares. Approximately 19.1% of the comments contained a tag to a friend (Figure 4), which is an indication of the intention to share with friends.



**Figure 4:** Percentage of comments containing tags to friends

Another interesting fact is that not only did they have 28 times follower growth in LinkedIn, but this virality originated branded searches in Google. More specifically, there were 41.900 Google searches, of which 14.800 (35%) happened during the first two days after the post and the rest 27.100 (65%) happened in the next month. If we wanted to calculate the estimated value of these searches, we could check how much it would cost at that time to reach 41.900 people searching for migraine apps with Google search ads, and this would be approximately 193.000€. However, as we notice in Google Trends (Figure 5), a tool that measures the search trends, this effect was not maintained in the next months. A spillover effect can also be observed, with an increase in searches for the general term “migraine app”, which climbed from 600 searches per month to 1900 searches per month. The effect on online PR is notable, with over 1450 articles written for the case of m-sense and more than 8.400 search results containing the name “m-sense”.



**Figure 5:** Worldwide interest about the brand of m-sense as it was depicted in Google Trends for the branded term “m-sense”. In line with the theory about how to classify a piece of content as viral, the post of m-sense ticks all the boxes to be considered viral.

Welker (2002) proposed that viral efforts be measured in terms of velocity (the rate at which it spreads), persistence (how long it lasts), and transmission ease (simplicity in regard to mental barriers, costs and handling). M-sense’s post spread very fast (in the first 24 hours), lasted approximately 14 days (the last day of multiple shares) and it was easy and free to consume and to share across all platforms, with a simple design and text with low cognitive load.

## Deconstructing the viral content

The goal of this work is to answer why this particular post stood out and generated thousands of comments and reactions. The explanations could lie in timing, time of publishing, graphics and copy. Looking back into the theoretical background to understand the reasons of this post’s success and grounding our analysis on the work of Reichstein & Bruschi (2019) who made a review of all factors of virality, we noticed that the factor of content is the main driver of success, as the credibility of the source, the communication channel and the value do not differentiate much from the other pages that engaged in the conversation about Meta’s new logo. Also, some of the factors reported in that work are irrelevant or not used in this case.

In terms of content, it also satisfies most of the factors found to evoke shareability. For example, the headline is simple, precise, striking and expressive to attract attention as mentioned in Nwala & Umukoro (2017), uses short words and emotions (Kuiken et al, 2017) and it may have also aroused curiosity in line with Kouroggi et al (2015), with 41 comments explicitly containing the word “curious”.

In terms of emotional valence, the post is very carefully written to be entertaining despite dealing with a potentially serious issue, as the company would be damaged by meta’s logo choice, and this is in line with the findings of Chen & Berger (2013) who claimed that excessively controversial content would result in people hesitating to share it. The chosen words and emojis mostly transmit positive emotions (“honoured” “inspired” and a use of a

smiley, smart emoji) such as humor, and increase the intention to share (Hsieh et al, 2012) as well as improve the attitude for the brand (Eckler & Bolls, 2011) which explains the increase of followers and branded searches.

At the same time the post might have ironic and sarcastic connotations (the use of “inspired” instead of “copied” or “stole” in the phrase “Facebook felt inspired by the logo of our migraine app”). However, irony and sarcasm are perceived as less negative when they are used instead of literal criticism (Pickering, Thompson, Filik, 2018; Filik et al, 2016), although not all researchers agree with this view. For example, Colston et al (1997) found that a sarcastic message has an enhanced negative effect, because there is a contrast between what actually happened and the positive way the sender presents it. Pickering et al (2018) state that sarcasm & irony may also be perceived as humorous exactly because of this disparity and together with the “surprise of hearing a comment that is the opposite to what is expected”. Last, it also makes an ironic reference to the data privacy issue (“maybe they’ll get inspired by our data privacy procedures”) and it reminds the audience of the pre-existing conversation about the data privacy policies of facebook.

Our view is that this last phrase made all the difference since the majority of posts during those days were humorous and ironic. However, the post of m-sense differentiated because it seemed to have been published not only to get into the social media conversation but to inform the audience about a real threat to their business. By getting also into the data privacy conversation and the possibility of losing revenues and brand value due to facebook’s logo, they had positioned themselves as the moral “David” in the David versus Goliath battle, which could result in sympathy towards their brand and negative emotions about facebook’s moral standards. Brady, Crockett, Van Bavel (2020) have researched the role of moralization in the diffusion of content, and they found that moral content is easily shared because people have a tendency to share moral and emotional content, and because the social media platforms make it easy to spread such issues.

In total, the post of m-sense had a combination of positive and negative emotions which has been shown to drive virality (Brown et al. 2010). To understand whether the transmitted emotions were indeed felt by the audience, we scraped and analyzed the posts comments with the scientific research tool Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC). LIWC is a meaning extraction tool. With the use of dictionaries (e.g., cognitive words, emotional words dictionary, anger words dictionary etc.), it “accesses each text in your dataset and compares the language within each text against the LIWC-22 dictionary” (Boyd et al, 2022). After deleting comments containing no words, comments with tags only and comments in other languages, texts were submitted to LIWC and the output file was analyzed with excel & SPSS. We analyzed 4518 comments to understand if the audience used words about sentiment and emotions and which emotions specifically. The LIWC tool was recently updated to include separate calculations for tone and emotions. The “tone” dictionary includes a broader list of words about emotions and the emotions themselves (e.g., happy, joy, sad, angry, birthday, beautiful, kill etc). The

“emotion” dictionary includes a list of words that describe emotion per se. Unfortunately, this tool cannot assess irony and sarcasm, which would be one of our target emotions, so we could only observe these emotions empirically.

When we tested for a positive tone ( $\alpha = .61$ ), we found that 38% (1726 comments) had a positive tone, and testing for a negative tone ( $\alpha = .62$ ), 27,4% (1238 comments) had a negative tone. Looking only at these percentages of positive versus negative comments, would result in doubts about whether this viral post was indeed favorable for the company that published it. However, taking a closer look at the nature of negative comments, we would see that the biggest part of the negative comments was related to Facebook-Meta practices and not the German app (e.g., “A pathetic attempt to pull people’s attention the other way!”). This is of crucial importance, because it turned out that this comparison with Meta’s practices drove sympathy among users to a German health app they would not know otherwise (e.g., “This might be one headache you can’t get rid of”). Some users suggested in their comments that the company should sue Facebook (“Infinity? Is at a real loss...The lawsuit will be infinite!”). There were even comments with negative tone that in fact were written as a compliment (e.g., “This is brutal but nicely done”).

Testing for the presence of pure emotional words ( $\alpha = .61$ ), we found that 41,2% of the comments included an emotional word, and 19,54% included texts with positive emotions ( $\alpha = .52$ ), while 22,27% included negative emotions ( $\alpha = .52$ ). Analyzing further for the presence of anger, it was present in 1.39% of the comments. However, the internal consistency of this scale is very low (anger’s  $\alpha = .31$ ). We also noticed that there was a 4,58% of comments containing moralization words (wrong, honor, judge, etc) and 2,57% containing conflict words. Content about moralization is known to drive diffusion of content in social media, although it is researched mainly on political and social content (Brady, Wills, Jost, Tucker, Van Bavel, 2017). The overall idea is presented in table 1 below. Given the low Cronbach  $\alpha$  indices, results should be studied with caution. Although the LIWC is updated, it does not cover all words and metaphors, and it does not test all emotions. In our case it would be very helpful to test for irony, sarcasm, justice but they were not provided in this tool. In fact, our own secondary analysis showed that many comments were not categorized at all. (e.g., the comments “sue them!”, “Are your products used by 3.6 billion users too?”, “lol”, “Big Oof moment”, “be surprised”, could not be classified in any category.

**Table 1:** Analysis of emotion and tone for comments containing only English text.

<b>LIWC TEST</b>	<b>Number of comments</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
POSITIVE TONE	1726	38,20%
NEGATIVE TONE	1238	27%
EMOTION WORDS	1782	41,20%
POSITIVE EMOTIONS	883	19,54%
NEGATIVE EMOTIONS	1006	22,27%
ANXIETY	48	1,06%
ANGER	63	1,39%
SADNESS	50	1,11%
MORALIZATION	207	4,58%
CONFLICT	116	2,57%

### **The secret sauce of success**

We believe the recipe of this post's success is based on 4 pillars. First, m-sense got into the debate of whether this logo is an imitation of their logo or not. There were already comments emphasizing on how meta used a very generic logo, as if they took it from a stock photo website, so this part was easy and they did not initiate the discussion, they became a part of it. Second, they used humor. We know from other studies that content that evokes emotion has higher viral potential than content that does not. What they did was to use humor and irony without using aggressive language or negative words. They use the words "felt inspired", not "copied", with a subtle irony and in line with other studies which show that positive content has been found to hold higher viral potential than negative content. This was depicted in the users' comments which contained positive and negative sentiments at the same time, as well as judgments on whether this was indeed a conflict or not. Third, they made this post personal. They did not just randomly create a post about logo similarities to get in the conversation, but they highlighted potential risks for their business. Fourth, they also got into the long-standing online conversation about how Facebook treats data to create more hype and they made several posts later, trying to show that the data privacy concerns about meta would damage their own reputation as a health app with lots of personal, sensitive data. We understand that they got into both conversations at the same time, both the new logo debate and the data privacy issues. This created a moral tone of the post. Instead of creating another humorous post about the "stolen" or unimaginative logo of Meta, they created a "Good versus bad data protection practices" post which put the post in a moral discussion with a conflict framing. All of these together resulted in a simple, short, and sweet story of how a small company from Germany is threatened by the giant company Facebook. In turn this story of David VS Goliath, made the audience relate to the company and generated hundreds of comments from users with concerns about data privacy and kept the conversation rolling.

## Conclusions & Discussion

Producing positive viral content for a business can be a stroke of luck or a triumph. In the case of m-sense app, it was a triumph as the content produced accounts for most of the success. Despite having published the post at a time that is not the optimal for social media and having an initial following base of only 919 people, it managed to generate thousands of shares and comments by sticking to the rules of viral content. First, the company got into a conversation about a trending topic (Facebook's logo change) and leveraged the preexisting data privacy concerns of the audience to its advantage. Second, the content itself was short, simple and with low cognitive demands. Further, it used humor and irony and managed to elicit positive and negative emotions to the audience, as the comment analysis showed.

We previously mentioned that observing other similar posts that were published simultaneously on the occasion of Meta's logo release made us realize that the main reason that could have possibly driven virality lies within the informational part of this post. Since most of the posts those days were humorous and ironic, this post made a difference because it informed its audience about a possible threat to their business. If this is true, it would probably add to the findings of Tellis et al. (2019), that in LinkedIn content is mostly informational and business-oriented and this makes it difficult to have viral effects of emotional content. It would also be linked to the work of Lee, Ma & Goh (2011) who concluded that in terms of human motivation, information seeking is what drives virality the most. We do not know if this is true though as we would need to run the same campaign without the informational part and monitor the results.

On the other hand, our own analysis of the comments shows a substantial number of emotional comments shared. Our view is that it is expected to have emotional content published in LinkedIn, because after all, its business audience is in fact humans logging in the platform with different needs (finding a job, building their brand, get information, etc). To put it with Hermida's words (2014; p.1) "People are not hooked on YouTube, Twitter or Facebook but on each other. Tools and services come and go; what is constant is our human urge to share."

By looking at the situation before this post went viral, we may also exclude some reasons that are believed to contribute to virality and validate other research findings. Watts and Dodds (2007) and Zhang, Zhao, Xu (2016) explored whether diffusion of content is created by influencers/opinion leaders or by the mass, and they concluded that it is the mass that makes content viral. Older research (Bobkowski, 2015) had found that opinion leaders drive increasing distribution. In our case, the German health app had only nine hundred followers before this post went viral, and it had been publishing only business content and most of the times in German. Given the small number of followers and the nature of the business, we may assume they did not have any celebrity or famous endorser that drove the very first moments of virality. It must have been the "simple" users.

The content itself was of big importance to the overall success. Indeed, looking back at the literature, the text comprised of short and sentimental words, both characteristics that drive effectiveness according to Kuiken et al (2017) who studied headlines of newspaper articles in a digital environment.

A topic of great importance would be the next steps of the company. How did it handle all this sudden fame? Did it capitalize on this viral post? Did they change their content strategy to address the needs of the new follower base? Although we do not have inside data to evaluate the performance in terms of growth and revenues, looking at the company's next steps on how they capitalized on the virality, and how they handled all this sudden increase of media coverage and followers, we notice some obvious changes in their social media strategy. First, they are now more extroverted, and they publish interesting and funny content as well as scientific news. Before the viral post, they were only posting about medical conferences, as if their LinkedIn audience mainly consisted of doctors. It is noteworthy saying that after the buzz, they created another social media campaign asking users to post about ideas on their new logo, and then re-shared the ideas in their social media accounts. The second obvious change is that they started posting in English. Before the buzz, they were posting only in German, with only a post per year in English. Now, half of their posts are in English. What's more, they translated their website, that used to be in German only, creating monetization opportunities in the global audience. Third, they increased their posting frequency shortly after the buzz, with a post every two days, but then they reduced the frequency to one post per month.

To sum it all up, while the viral success of the post can be considered a “triumph”, most of it is owed to the content itself. Using all the attention gained in a smart way, keeping the momentum to drive interest and attention several weeks after the buzz, and making strategic moves to monetize from this viral content is what drives now m-sense's social media growth.

From a theoretical point of view, this case study could add to the question whether it is positive or negative emotional content that drives virality. Previous research did not agree with the findings. This post is a good example, first, that the same piece of content may comprise of positive and negative emotional words, and second, that users' reactions may be positively or negatively valenced for the same piece of content. Therefore, maybe the whole idea of dichotomy is not right when we try to understand the reasons of virality. In addition, this post also adds up to the idea that users seem to react and share more when the content is framed as a conflict.

Regarding the managerial implications of this study, first, it shows that marketers could include LinkedIn in their digital marketing channels when they want to amplify their message, if it resonates with their audience. The assumption that LinkedIn is a business network with pure informational content is not the whole truth. Furthermore, to increase the probability of the content being shared in LinkedIn, content has to be short in length, comprised of short words and include mostly positive emotions but not exclusively. Irony and conflict could also enhance

the message and make it easily shareable. At the same time, because of the nature of the network, marketers should also add value to the conversation or provide information, instead of simply producing emotional content for the sake of distribution. In informational content, setting a conflict frame also helps the redistribution, even if it is negatively valenced.

## **Limitations and future research**

This study only deals with a specific case study; therefore any results cannot be generalized. In this context, we observed and analyzed emotions in text comments to understand whether the post transmitted the hypothesized emotions. The analysis was made only for comments containing English words, so all other languages that were present disqualified. Comments consisting only of emojis were excluded too. However, an additional analysis of these options would give a clearer idea of emotions.

The presented company m-sense created this post across many social media platforms. Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn were used, and the post became viral in all of them, with more than 11.100 shares in twitter and 2.900 shares in Facebook. Additionally, there was great media coverage. For the purpose of this paper, we analyzed only the viral post in LinkedIn. Analyzing the same post across social media platforms, and the use of emotions and sentiments and if they differentiate at all, would be of great interest.

Last, it would be very interesting to analyze the comments in a different way, searching for the existence of both positive and negative emotions in the same comments. The co-existence of both types of emotions would add to the idea of mixed feelings in the emotional “nature” of content.

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# **EaSI: A prototype system based on unusual ways of interaction for identifying and providing audio information for points of interest**

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## **Abstract**

Seeking information for points of interest (POIs) yet relies on systems that use location services and traditional techniques of interaction. These ways of communication, based on optical interfaces, necessitate cognitive demand and attachment to mobile phone screen, as a result degrade user experience. We developed a system, named EaSI that consists of an android application, the DA14583 IoT Sensor adapted to user glasses and a pair of headphones. It uses novel ways of interaction such as head gestures and relies on auditory feedback in order, to reduce user's time and effort, to identify POIs and obtain information about them. System evaluation showed that our prototype significantly reduced user's time and actions in identifying points of interest compared to a conventional application that uses visual interface. Attractiveness and realistic and hedonistic quality were rated with an average score of more than 2, with excellent 3.

**Keywords:** Location based services, POI discovery, Gestural interaction, Head sensors, Auditory feedback.

## **Introduction**

The widespread dissemination and use of mobile phones contribute to develop a plurality of applications and services. Many of them use user's location (Location Based Services - LBS) to provide services, such as discovering of Point of Interest - POIs, navigating in a selected geographic point and providing information about historical monuments, tourist routes and means of transportation.

One case of Location Based Services is the quest of information for a nearby point that draw user attention. In this situation, to obtain the desired information, a series of actions is necessary. For example, the user has to unlock and open the mobile phone, open the LBS application, locate on the digital map what is the icon that corresponds to the point of interest, select it and read the desired information.

This process by its nature is time consuming and can become even more complex and demanding in several cases, such as when the user needs to pan, zoom and center the map several times so that is capable of matching POI digital representation up with the desired real point. Given the non-knowledge of the region, the cognitive effort of digital map correlation

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with the physical world increases depending on the number of neighboring points of interest. Furthermore, it should be mentioned that most LBS applications use Google maps which involve their own digital representation of points of interest (Google Pois) making the map, in an urban environment, even more complicated to be read.

The abovementioned user interaction with the application requires cognitive effort and visual attachment on the mobile phone screen, mitigating its attention and its interaction with the real world, therefore affects and degrades user experience exploring the world using conventional LBS services.

## **Related Work**

Mutation of physical world perception due to time and cognitive demand of user interaction with mobile phone visual interfaces has been a research field for many years (Hyman et al., 2009). Researchers attempt to point to the real world with their devices to reduce the time and effort in seeking of information procedure. As mobile phones enhance with evolved networking modules, orientation sensors and GPS units the technique of pointing and scanning of surroundings become more capable and efficient.

Studies using mobile phones as pointing device differentiate into mode that information is obtained. In the work of Lei and Coulton (2009), Carswell et al. (2010), Pombinho et al. (2010) and Meek et al. (2013) screen is used for information retrieval consequently the visual attachment is still present and interaction with real world is weakened.

In the studies by van Tonder and Wesson (2011), Jacob et al. (2012), Szymczak et al. (2012), Pielot et al. (2012) and Jacob and Winstanley (2013) is attempted to eliminate the necessity for mobile phone screen by providing information via haptic signals like patterns of vibration defined by strength and duration. Although users are released from dedication to mobile device screen the received information is plain, lacking details like the next navigation direction, the distance from desiring POI and the goal achievement.

The emerging Augmented Reality (AR) technology affects among other fields the POI discovery. As reported by Yovcheva et al. (2012), Ruta et al. (2014), Kamilakis et al. (2016) and Ioannidi et al. (2017) users locate, explore POIs and retrieve information about these ones through smartphone camera, specifically by camera image overlays with POI markers. Throughout the process their attention devotes to the real world even through smartphone screen, nevertheless come out difficulties in markers selection, overloaded screens with visualized information, mobility restrictions while using the AR apps and the necessity of handling smartphone with two hands.

In contemporary and sophisticated research, the developed systems exploit parts of users' body like hands and eyes using modern vehicle equipment and wearable devices to point neighboring POIs. In Rümelin et al. (2013) study, in an adapted car environment, information is obtained

through infotainment system for POIs identified via pointing gestures. Although the encouraging results of system operation, driving safety issues may have arisen as users had reduced speed during the gesture procedure. In the previous survey, so as in the Gomaa et al. (2020) the hypothesis of controlled and relaxed driving conditions brings general use restrictions.

Hsieh, Jylhä et al. (2018) and Hsieh, Orso et al. (2018) developed a POI exploration system based on wearable glove with embodied actuators for providing exploration and detection information through haptic feedback and a headset for POIs details retrieval. Despite the performance and the acceptance of the system the audio information is predefined for specific POIs and the content lacks real time update and connectivity with a ubiquitous service for points of interest exploration. Still, actions to information navigation are not supported, except the acceptance or refusal of the audio message delivery.

## **EaSI Service**

Considering the peculiarities and deficiencies of previous research studies, as described above and taking in to account some directions for research of a similar work of Komninos et al. (2018), we designed and developed the EaSI (EASy Seeking of Information) service aiming the elimination of the necessity for visual interface in POIs exploration, contributing to enhanced visitor experience. The service is based on head gestures and in an auditory interface for locating and retrieving information for points of interest near the user who carries a pair of glasses, a smartphone and a pair of headphones.

The cornerstone of the service, the DA14583 IoT sensor (Image 1), a small unit that might be embodied to wearable devices like glasses or smartwatches, consists of a 6-axis inertial measurement unit, including an accelerometer and gyroscope and 3-axis geomagnetic field sensor. Communication with the smartphone established by a Bluetooth system-on-chip module using the Bluetooth Low Energy (BLE) Protocol.



**Image 1.** Dialog Semiconductor 14583 IoT Sensor Board (source: <https://www.digikey.sg/en/products/detail/dialog-semiconductor-gmbh/DA14583IOTSENSDNGL/5887065>)

The DA14583 IoT sensor, adjusted in user glasses captures its line of sight via magnetometer values and head commands via accelerometer values. The Foursquare API accessed for the relative information and text to speech libraries of android ensure the modification of text to natural speech.

The concept of the EaSI operation is effortless. When the user identifies the point for which he is interested, approaches it, and performs a gesture that start the service -the Trigger Gesture- which is to look down, restores his head to a horizontal level and to resume the previous movement sequence. An audio message informs him to stare at desired point after a played sound tone. For a few seconds, the application monitors and calculates the user bearing. A call to Foursquare API based on user location and bearing made for retrieving the neighboring POIs. The POI that has the minimum bearing deviation from user bearing is considered the desired point of interest. A new call to Foursquare brings back the defined information in text format and android text-to-speech libraries alters it to spoken words. Users might control what listens to, according to a head-based gesture interface which simulates a classic audio control interface, such as that used in audio players.

### *Gestures design*

The trigger gesture that initiates the seeking process of POIs was associated with accelerometer values. It was observed that by moving the head on the vertical axis Z altered the value of Accelerometer Z from 1g (the user looks straight) to 0.5g (the user looks vertically towards the ground). The standard acceleration due to gravity is denoted by g. Values are non-zero due to gravity rather than non-movement of the user's head.

To avoid spurious gestures, we set as Trigger Gesture the above sequence twice, i.e., head down → head up → head down → head up (4 movements). 1g and 0.5g values were slightly differentiated to 0.9g and 0.6g to not require the user to restore his head to a perfectly horizontal plane or look vertically down and be easier to achieve the gesture.

A time limit is also set to accomplish each of four head movements at 2.5 sec, so giving support for a wide range of head movement speed. If after 2.5 sec, the next head movement non take place, then the process should start from the beginning thus eliminating the correlation of successive false movements (eg the user looked down and brought back his head)

The auditory information can be controlled with head gestures, enabling functions like pause, resume, stop, forward and rewind. Two focus groups were designed and were guided according to the guidelines of Kontio et al. (2004) and Krueger (2002). The purpose was to export new ideas and explored the simplicity, effectiveness and usability of the interface for the association of the classic audio control actions with head gestures.

Five people, men aged 39 to 46, from the same workplace were selected in the 1st group. They are all Information Technology graduates. All of them are motivated in technological developments and use applications and services of information and communication. In the 2nd

team, five people, 3 women and 2 men aged 38 to 44 years old, were selected from the friendly environment. They are characterized as average tech users that use mobile applications and services to retrieve information and manage their personal data.

The dominant view of the two focus groups, as the most intuitive matching of the control functions of audio information with head gestures, was:

- Forward → head movement right
- Rewind → head movement left
- Stop → head movement up
- Pause/Play → head movement down

Of the 3 sensors of the DA14583 IoT only the gyroscope can monitor the head movement in horizontal and vertical plane. After testing, the 120 degrees/sec was set as the Gyroscope Threshold to monitor the head movement. The gyroscope records the angular rotation speed of the head, allowing to record gesture with a slight shift of the head in a very short time. The gesture to control the audio information was to set the movement of the head in the direction - which was decided after the conduct of the two focus groups - and the restore of the head to the original position.

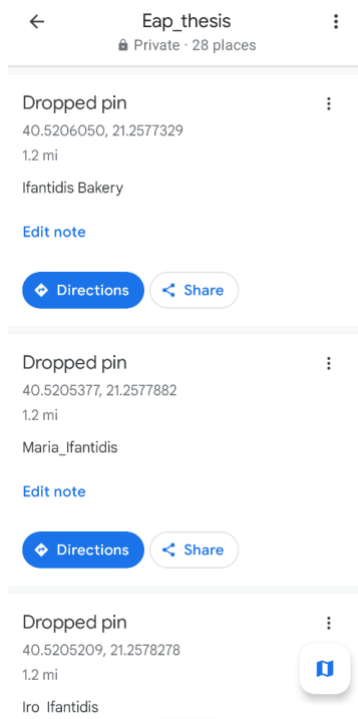
Therefore, each Gesture involves 2 head movements. The 2nd head movement was defined to be done within 2 sec when the first is recorded. It was also observed that when the head been returned to the initial position, sometimes there was an imperceptible oscillation of it, which triggered a new gesture. A time of 0.5 sec was set as an idle time, so when a gesture will be captured could not start a new one in this time interval.

#### *Limitation of search radius of neighboring POIs*

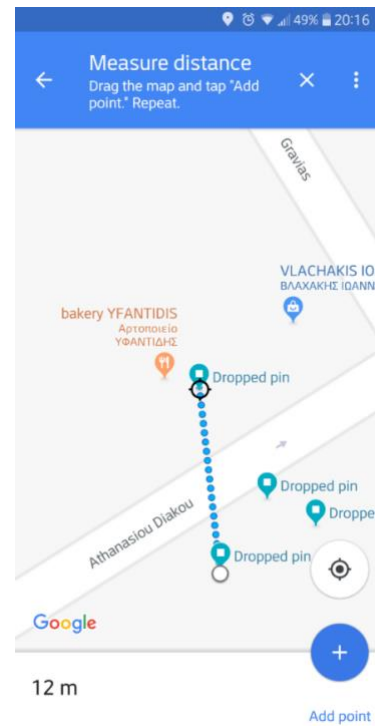
After extensive testing in the field to control the application function, the following phenomenon was observed. The user's distance from POI, for which it intends to retrieve information, affects the output of the application. Specifically, the longer the user's distance is from the desired point, the more likely is the application to wrongly calculate the desired POI. To deal with the above problem, the application should have a limit on the search radius of points of interest. This limit was defined by an experiment, which identified the maximum distance from which a group of people collect information about points of interest.

Five participants would give information for four POIs following experiment coordinator suggestions. The geographic location from which each participant would provide information on the requested POI, would be recorded on a mobile device (**Error! Reference source not found.**) The five chosen participants did not know the POIs, for which would give information. Points of interest of the experiment could be accessed from 70 meters due to the arrangement of the surrounding area, giving participants the choice to describe them from the distance they want, without being forced into approaches from nearby distances. After completing the experiment, the distances were measured with the Google Maps tool "Measure Distance"

between the positions of the participants and the corresponding locations of POIs (**Error! Reference source not found.**).



**Image 2.** List of participants locations in the experiment.



**Image 3.** Distance measurement on Google Maps

The furthest point from which one user described a point of interest was measured at 20 meters. Based on the specific experiment and its results, a search limit in android application for neighboring POIs was set at 20 meters.

### *Android application implementation*

The EaSI application was developed in Android Studio (target SDK 26) consists of two services, two asynchronous interfaces and the main activity (Image 4). In BLE Service the connection of the DA14583 IoT Sensor to GATT Profile set up, ensuring the communication among the IoT Sensor and the application, the discovery of IoT sensor features and the capturing of the sensors' values. Location Service guarantees the monitoring of user location and broadcasts this to UI Thread.

Utilizing received data in main activity of accelerometer, magnetometer and gyroscope, application captures the trigger gesture, user orientation, and the control gestures of auditory information respectively. User bearing calculated by magnetometer data is affected by the slope of sensor level from the horizontal level in user glasses. To deal with this issue we compensated the slope, considering pitch, roll and the accelerometer normalized values as analyzed in Using LSM303DLH for a tilt compensated electronic compass (2010) application note.

Foursquare and DetectLanguage interfaces were developed for supporting asynchronous data retrieval from corresponding APIs. Two calls are made in Foursquare API, the first returns the POIs in range 20m from user location and the second call fetches the data in text format of the selected POI like name, category, price category, number of likes, rating and one user tip. The desired POI among the neighboring POIs is set this with the minimum bearing deviation from user bearing.

The accurate transmission of the auditory information is considered critical for user experience and was developed via asynchronous call in the Language Detection API. We observed that text-to-speech libraries in android transform text to speech in predefined language, lacking the flexibility of multi-language support. POI's names and tips are written in several languages, so the language detection ensures the accurate and native speaking of information.

Finally, a testing interface was designed as depicted in **Error! Reference source not found.** The buttons serve to control the application connection with the IoT sensor and for battery saving. TextViews were implemented to inspect app operation, control and evaluation. It is clarified that the service automatically initiates when we open the EASI application, it works while the screen is off, enabling users to bring the mobile device to their pocket or bag. All the above interface elements (Buttons, TextViews) could be absent without affecting the running of the application.

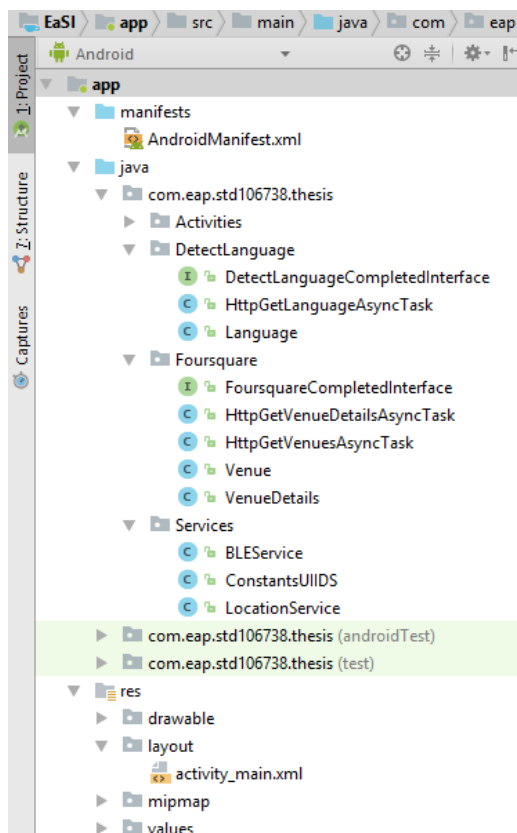


Image 4. EaSI application structure

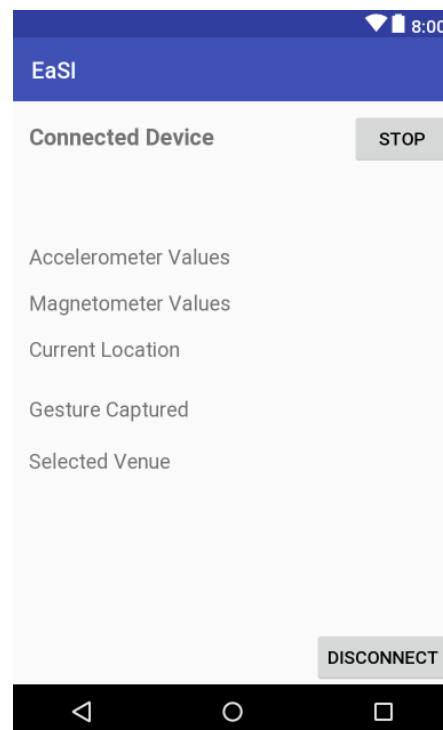
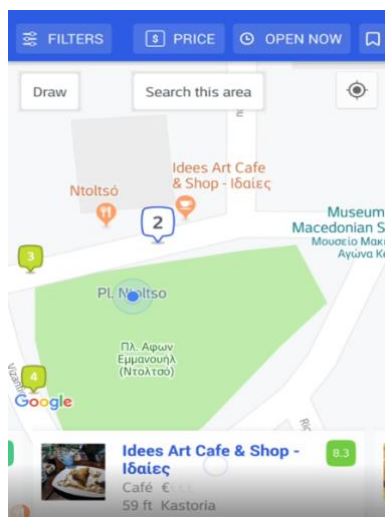


Image 5. EaSI application layout

## EaSI Evaluation

EaSI evaluation examines whether the developed system can reduce user time and effort to interact with the application in POIs exploration by offering a more user-friendly and entertaining mode of interaction than the traditional systems that based in visual interfaces. In relevant research studies of new interfaces for POI discovery, which are implemented with new technologies such as Virtual and Augmented Reality Maps (Giannopoulos et al., 2017; Kamilakis et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2012) the evaluation was held via an experiment in which the novel interface is compared with a conventional one, regarding time of handling the experimental tasks as well as user interaction actions. Similar comparative evaluation methodology is also adopted in our research to compare EaSI application with Foursquare application.

Additionally, is attempted to examine the usability and user experience of using EASI application through the User Experience Questionnaire (UEQ) and the Nasa-TLX tasks. The experimental procedure consists of two tasks. In first task users have to identify the indicated POI “Idees art Cafe” from a location point that isn’t visible its name, using both applications EaSI and Foursquare. POI’s name is the requested and metrics are the successful identification, the execution time, the number of gestures that made in EaSI and the number of actions in digital map of Foursquare. In the second task, users using both applications are asked to identify the indicated POI “Sokaki Restaurant” and answer questions associate with information retrieval like the price category, rating and one user tip. Metrics are the number of questions that answered correctly at first attempt and if not, the navigating actions in both apps for seeking of answers. Ten users participated in the experiment. A significant amount of time was given to be familiarized with the two apps after an extended demonstration. All users' actions in both interfaces were recorded with a screen recording application and analyzed after the end of the procedure for the results retrieval.

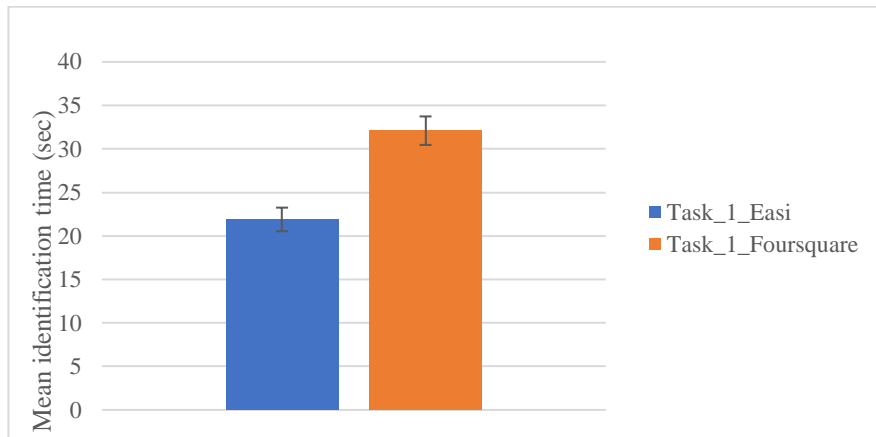


**Image 1.** Locate POI “Idees art Cafe” in Foursquare interface



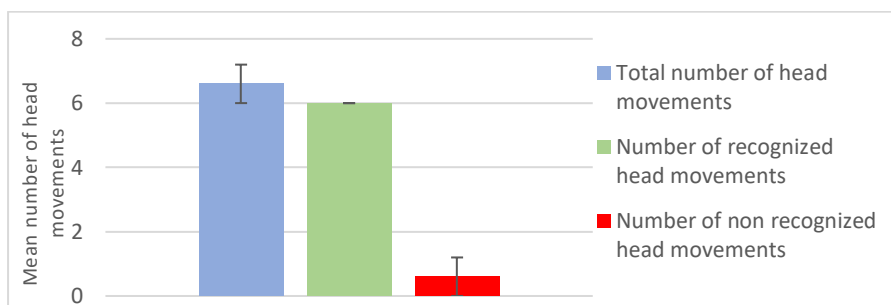
**Image 2.** Identify POI “Sokaki Restaurant” with EaSI app

In 1<sup>st</sup> task all the users successfully identified POI “Idees art Cafe” using both apps. The mean time needed for POI identification was in EaSI application 21.9 sec and in Foursquare application 32.1 sec (Figure 1). Confidence level is calculated for all the graphs at 95%. Comparing the mean identification times, using the T-test method and Alpha level: 0.05, significant difference between the two distributions is observed.



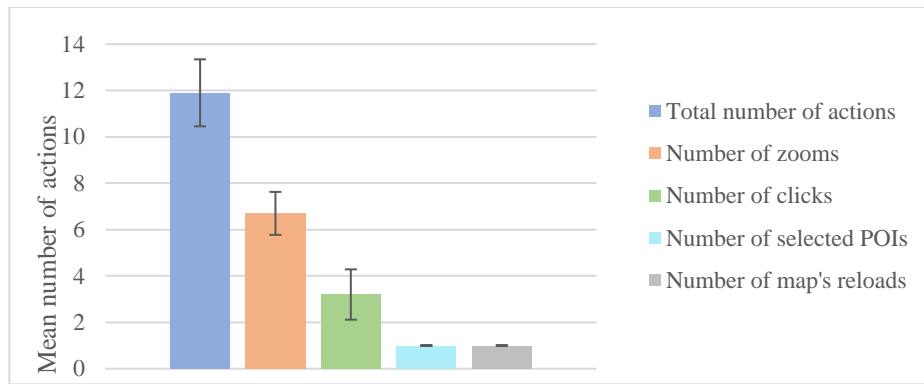
**Figure 1.** Mean identification time of POI “Idees art Cafe”.

Using EaSI in first task, users had to make the trigger gesture to start the identification process (4 head movements) and after listened the name of POI make the stop gesture (2 head movements) to stop the reproduction of the remaining message. All users successfully accomplished the trigger gesture and 3 out of 10 didn't execute the stop gesture at the 1st attempt but did it in 2nd.



**Figure 2.** Mean number of head movements in POI “Idees art Cafe” identification using EaSI app.

Users’ actions in the identification process in the Foursquare application map interface in Task\_1 are depicted in the figure below.

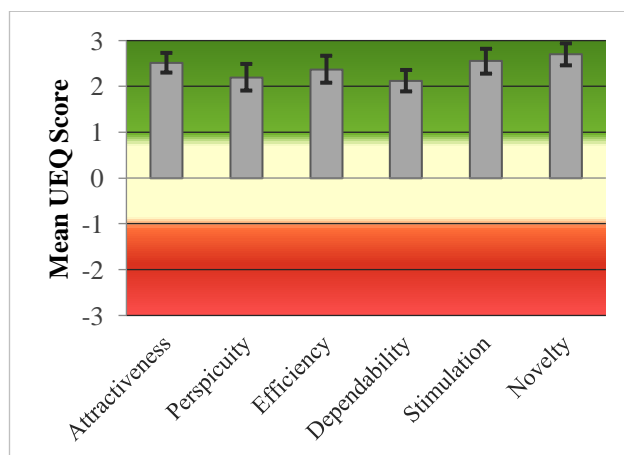


**Figure 3.** Mean number of actions in POI “Idees art Cafe” identification using Foursquare app

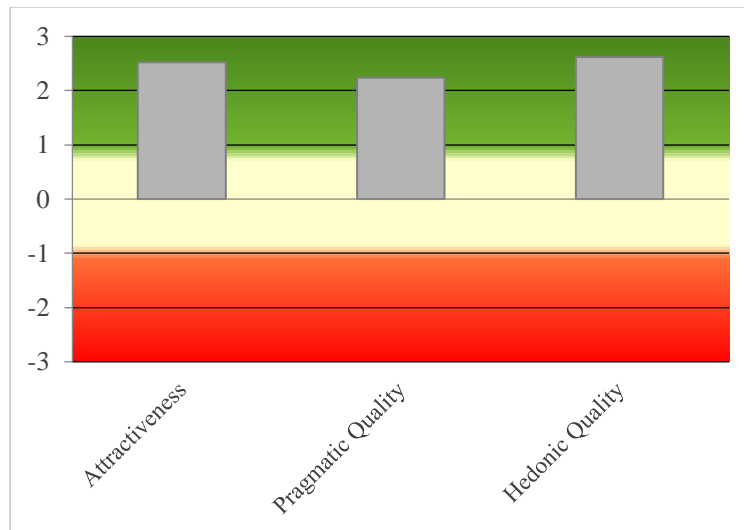
By trying a correlation between the gestures with the actions made on the map, aiming at comparing the two mean values, as a comparison of the burden to identify points of interest using the two applications, is deduced that there is a significant difference between the two. The result was obtained by the Ttest method and alpha level:0.05, for the distribution of the number of gestures, with mean value 6.6 and for the distribution of number of overall actions on the map, with mean value 11.9.

In the 2nd task all users answered directly and correctly to 3 questions using the EASI app. Using the Foursquare app 8 out of 10 users answered directly and correctly to 3 questions, 2 users answered directly and correctly to 2 questions, while in one they did not answer at all and came back to the interface of Foursquare sought for the answer. From analysis of these statistics there is no significant difference in information retrieval using the two applications.

In Figure 4 is depicted the score of the EaSI evaluation using the UEQ method. The range of the scales is between -3 (horribly bad) and +3 (extremely good). The scales of the UEQ grouped into pragmatic quality (perspicuity, efficiency, dependability) and hedonic quality (stimulation, originality) as depicted in Figure 5. Users evaluated with mean value, greater than 2, all the scales of measuring the user experience. This grade expresses the positive views of users to identify and obtain information on points of interest using the EASI application.



**Figure 4.** Evaluation of the EASI application to identify and obtain information of interest points



**Figure 5.** Pragmatic and Hedonic Quality scale of the EaSI app evaluation

By checking consistency, according to Cronbach's Alpha-Coefficient, for scales attractiveness, perspicuity, efficiency, stimulation and novelty the coefficient was calculated above 0.7, exposing the adequacy of consistency (Table 1). For the dependability the index was less than 0.7. Due to the small number of participants <50, no negative conclusion can be drawn for the consequence of that scale.

**Table 1.** Cronbach's Alpha-Coefficient for EaSI app in 2nd task

UEQ Scales	Cronbachs Alpha-Coefficient	> 0.7
Attractiveness	0.76	Yes
Perspiciuity	0.81	Yes
Efficiency	0.82	Yes
Dependability	0.46	
Stimulation	0.82	Yes
Novelty	0.81	Yes

At the end of the experiment, several users expressed their enthusiasm for the functionality and innovation of the EaSI application, noting that the search time is significantly shorter. Two users were impressed with how smoothly the gestures controls are captured. Three users expressed that they prefer the intake of information in an audible manner, rather than the visual way.

On the contrary, one user expressed that he feels more familiar and prefers visual intake of information. Finally, one said that has cervical syndrome, had difficulty with the execution of vertical movements of the gestures (Trigger Gesture, Pause/Play, Stop) and failed to execute the stop gesture at first attempt at Task\_1.

## Conclusion and Future Work

Our prototype developed aiming to enhance visitor experience in situ seeking of information. The gestural interaction and the auditory feedback, vital elements of our system, eliminate entirely the need for visual interaction. Additionally, we offer real time updated information, multi-language support and gestural control of spoken information.

User time and effort in POIs exploration reduced significantly, comparatively with a conventional app such as Foursquare, as was deduced from the evaluation procedure. Specifically, the mean identification time of the requested POI is calculated using EaSI application at 21.9 sec and using Foursquare at 32.1 sec. Also, the mean number of actions needed for POI discovery were 6.6 gestures using EaSI service and 11.9 overall actions in digital map using Foursquare.

EaSI service gained high praise and total acceptance as advocated from the user experience questionnaires. The attractiveness, realistic quality and hedonistic quality of the EaSI service use were evaluated with mean value, greater than 2 in a scale from -3 (horribly bad) to +3 (extremely good).

Our future vision is the evolution of EaSI by enhancing the robustness, and the quality of service through error correction of the monitoring values. Specifically, using a filter Kalman for enhance user location accuracy and a correlation algorithm of magnetometer values with these of gyroscope for magnetic interference mitigation in calculation of user orientation.

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