

COMMUNICATING COVID-19 PANDEMIC: MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE HEADQUARTERS AND THE USE OF PERSUASION STRATEGIES IN CROATIA

Marijana Grbeša

Fakultet političkih znanosti
Sveučilište u Zagrebu
E-mail: grbesa@fpzg.hr

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Abstract In February 2020 Croatia was affected by the COVID-19 global pandemic. A challenging task of communicating the pandemic was assumed by the people associated with the Headquarters of Civil Protection of the Republic of Croatia. The goal of this study was to examine how three of them were covered in the media and to test if and how they were using pandemic-related strategies of persuasion to achieve public compliance. The findings indicate that the coverage of the key communicators during the first three months of the pandemic was overwhelmingly positive. Moreover, in the early stages of the pandemic none of the examined news sites was really pushing issues or angles that questioned pandemic-related policies or actions of the Headquarters. Examination of the rhetoric of the key coronavirus communicators has established that they have embraced persuasive strategies that are typical of pandemic communication, most notably the use of fear appeals, military metaphors and insistence on messages of 'togetherness' and conversely, 'pandemic shaming'. The article concludes that professional credibility and favorable media representation of Croatian coronavirus envoys, along with adopted persuasive strategies, have probably encouraged people to trust their decisions and comply with restrictive measures that have suspended their freedoms and changed their life routines almost overnight.

Key words COVID-19 pandemic, coronavirus, communication, persuasion, experts, fear-appeals, Headquarters, Croatia

Introduction¹

In January 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) following the outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19). In March 2020 cases of the COVID-19 in-

fection were reported across the globe leading WHO to declare global pandemic. Hasty spread of the virus and the galloping number of infections forced leaders to call for desperate measures, including restriction of people's movements, closure of borders, schools, stores and restaurants, curfews etc. The world has found itself in an unprecedented crisis.

¹ I thank Petra Domazet, a graduate student at the University of Zagreb, for her help with coding.

The first case of the coronavirus infection in Croatia was registered in February 2020. Shortly after, The Civil Protection Headquarters of the Republic of Croatia was appointed to manage and communicate all pandemic-related matters. Four people from the team soon emerged as the faces of the battle against the virus: Vili Beroš, Croatian Minister of Health, Davor Božinović, Minister of Interior Affairs, Krunoslav Capak, the head of Croatian Institute for Public Health, and Alemka Markotić, the head of the Clinic for Infective Diseases 'Dr. Fran Mihaljević'. They communicated mainly through daily press conferences that became the central media event for citizens confined to their homes. The media and pundits praised 'the fantastic four' for their expertise, credibility, and sober communication. Commonly skeptical and distrustful citizens championed the efforts of the Headquarters and went along with their instructions.

The underlying assumption of this paper is that the flattering media image of the key communicators, along with their use of specific persuasive strategies, played important role in convincing people to adapt their behavior and comply with measures that heavily restricted their freedom during the 'first wave' of the pandemic in Croatia. Achieving compliance in a country with one of the lowest levels of trust in institutions in the EU was a daring task. Therefore, the idea of analyzing the factors that might have convinced the public to trust public authorities and consequently align with their recommendations seems both intriguing and relevant.

The goal of this study is two-fold. First, it wants to test the impression that the media coverage of the key communicators during the 'first wave' of the pandemic was unusually favorable. Such impression stands in stark contrast with commonly negative news coverage of

public authorities in Croatia. The second goal is to establish how the crisis team in Croatia was using specific persuasive strategies that had proven effective in achieving compliance in previous pandemics.

The theoretical section of the paper looks at the elements that contribute to efficient crisis risk communication in times of health emergencies. It specifically focuses on the role of experts and their contribution to achieving public trust, as a crucial precondition for people to accept proposed behavior changes. Previous research has shown that in health crisis people tend to trust experts more than they trust politicians, while politicians on the other hand refer to 'epistemic authority' of experts to justify unpopular measures. The section then discusses the use of fear-based tactics, including the use of military metaphors and 'pandemic shaming' that seem abundantly present in the discourse of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic.

The analytical section of the paper examines media coverage of the three most prominent Headquarters' figures, Vili Beroš, Davor Božinović and Alemka Markotić and their rhetoric. The first part of this section builds on the idea that experts assume public stage in pandemics, and it investigates how Beroš, Božinović and Markotić were represented in the media. Although Beroš and Božinović are politicians, Beroš and Markotić assumed role of chief medical experts and the impression was that the credibility assigned to the team by the media was the one of experts capable to navigate the crisis. It uses quantitative content analysis to examine sentiment of news reports and then it resorts to qualitative analysis to deconstruct exemplary patterns used to report about selected Headquarters' members from February to May 2020.

The second part of the research section examines if and how the rhetoric of the Headquarters in Croatia embraced persuasive strategies that are typical of pandemic communication, most notably the use of fear appeals, military metaphors and insistence on the messages of togetherness and conversely, 'pandemic shaming'.

Compliance and behavior change in health communication

Health communication is a discipline aimed at preventing diseases through 'behavior modification' (Freimuth et al. 2000: 337). According to Reynolds and Seeger (2005), in times of large-scale threats, effective health communication should be a merger between *crisis communication* and *emergency risk communication*. The central goal of crisis communication is 'to strategically defend and explain the organization's position in the face of crisis induced criticism, threat, and uncertainty' (Reynolds and Seeger 2005: 46.). The main objective of risk communication is to persuade the public that their wellbeing is at risk and that they should modify their behavior and introduce changes into their lifestyle in order to alleviate the threat (Reynolds and Seeger 2005: 47). Risk communication commonly relies on different persuasive strategies to convince the public that the threat is real and that they should adhere to proposed behavior changes. Two strategies seem especially efficient in that respect: the use of credible experts with solid communication skills and the use of fear appeals.

Freimuth et al. (2000: 338) argue that 'scientifically based messages from credible sources' are a vital part of all health communication. Reynolds and Seeger (2005: 45) likewise suggest that 'credibility is important to the believability and effectiveness of messages'. Evidence from previous pandemics indeed

demonstrates that trust in health agents positively affected people's willingness to accept recommended behavior (Siegrist and Zingg 2014).

The dripping evidence from the COVID-19 pandemic also indicate that medical experts appear crucial in achieving compliance and accepting proposed behavior changes. According to Lavazza and Farina (2020: 1), in the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic medical experts of all sorts but especially 'virologists, epidemiologists, public health scholars, and statisticians' have been instrumental in fighting the virus. Their knowledge has been used by policy makers to tame and fight the pandemic while their 'epistemic authority' has been employed to justify and implement unpopular measures that limited people's freedom. The authors rely on WHO data to argue that despite increasing doubt in mainstream medicine, the rise of anti-vaxxer movement and other similar trends, 'experts still maintain their epistemic authority among the public in the biomedical field' (2020: 2). They believe that in the 2020 pandemic, trust in experts and their authority has been crucial in persuading people to adhere to 'socially demanding measures (such as enforced quarantine)' (2020: 5). In that respect, Renata Rašović from *Večernji list* wonders: if it wasn't for perceived expertise of the front figures of Croatian crisis team, 'would we be willing to sacrifice our personal freedom and uncritically obey the orders issued by Vili Beroš, Alemka Markotić and Krunoslav Capak?' (Večernji.hr 2020). After realizing the scale of the threat, 'most of the people began trusting experts more than their elected representatives', assert Lavazza and Farina (2020: 2). Media facilitated the process by giving experts a forum and hailing their competence and credibility. Moreover, chief doctors and epidemiologists across

the world acquired the status of 'household names' (Henley 2020) and even superstars. This is very much in line with arguments about increased 'celebrization' of society and 'celebrification' of individuals by which ordinary people or public figures from different social fields acquire celebrity status (Driessens 2013: 643). According to Driessens (2013), the process of celebrification has transgressed the boundaries of showbusiness or fashion and is nowadays well present in academia, medicine, and numerous other fields. Craig (2020: 3) observes that Anthony Fauci, the top infectious disease expert in the US, 'has emerged as much as media metaphor as medical expert' or 'a spectacularized Marvel superhero'. Building on the evidence that celebrities have 'significant influence on a range of health behaviors' (Caulfield and Fahy 2016: 25), it seems plausible to assume that in some cases, celebrityhood of the chief medical experts in the 2020 pandemic may have amplified their epistemic authority.

The accounts of previous pandemics indicate that the impact of experts' messages is greater if some level of 'efficacy', meaning notion that proposed measures and actions are indeed reducing the risk of the disease, is involved (Witte and Allen 2000). The same is true for the other powerful strategy of persuasion in health emergencies – the use of fear appeals.

Fear appeals or 'scare tactics' are commonly used in health crisis to encourage behavior change. They seem especially effective when combined with what Witte and Allen (2000: 607) identified as 'high-efficacy messages': people will act in line with recommendations if they believe that proposed safeguarding measures are efficient and that they are able to protect themselves. Witte and Allen (2020) recommend a range of fear-based tactics that may enhance compliance.

For instance, they instruct communicators to emphasize the severity of the threat, to use strong language and pictures to portray the consequences of the disease, and to personalize the language in order to make people believe that they are personally vulnerable and susceptible to the disease (2000: 606).

Media, with their tendency to 'reduce and simplify, exaggerate and sensationalize' (Bjørkdahl and Carlsen 2017: 359) act as a reliable helping hand in disseminating fear appeals. When analyzing the media coverage of the H1N1 pandemic in 2009, colloquially known as the 'swine flu', Bjørkdahl and Carlsen (2017) concluded that the 'panic, in this first period, seemed to be spreading faster than the disease itself'. More than a decade later, in the midst of the 2020 pandemic, almost the same phrasing was used to address frantic media reporting about the novelty virus (e.g. Specia 2020), as well as the spread of rumors and disinformation via social media, consequently dubbed as the 'infodemic' (e.g. Radu 2020).

In the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, common scare tactics included the use of exaggerated and provocative language, display of explicit images of the people who died from coronavirus and stigmatization of those who do not comply with the rules (those who do not physically distance, wear masks etc.) (Stolow et al. 2020: 531). The latter came to be known as 'pandemic shaming'. Jeniffer Weiner from *The New York Times* (2020) argues that the fear and uncertainty may have encouraged people to scrutinize, shame and 'snitch' uncompliant neighbors. Fear has been a key divider between 'us', who share a strong sense of connectivity, care and togetherness, and 'them' who refuse to respect the rules and consequently put 'us' at risk. Implicit to this divide between 'us' and 'them' is social inequality which

is why Sobande (2020: 2) finds the framing of the COVID-19 pandemic as a 'force that is bringing people together' hypocritical. Gardiner and Fulfer (2020) similarly argue that the solidarity that has been communicated throughout the 2020 pandemic is a narrow, limited kind of solidarity because it is based on fear for our individual health and safety while on the other hand it neglects or even amplifies social inequities. They argue that 'a positive view of solidarity in pandemic times must move beyond compliance with government or public health directives' towards a more inclusive political community (2020: 8). Their discussion builds on Hanna Arendt's (1968) differentiation between 'negative' and 'positive' solidarity. Negative solidarity is based on fear and common experience of suffering and sense of togetherness is being generated through 'identification with a common *bad*' rather than through 'pursuit of a common *good*' (Hayden and Saunders 2019: 15, original emphasis) On the other hand, Arendt's positive solidarity occurs when individuals 'put their efforts towards actively resisting oppression and injustice' and 'improving their common condition' in 'the inclusive space that lies between unique yet equal people' (Hayden and Saunders 2019: 15).

Another powerful fear-based instrument that has been extensively used in pandemics is the metaphors, especially military metaphors that are, according to Craig (2020: 2) 'abundant in discourses of plagues'. Machin and Mayr (2012: 165) argue that metaphors are an important discursive strategy used to 'transport processes of understanding from one realm or conceptual domain to another'. They can be 'deliberately persuasive and often conceal underlying power relations' (2012: 221). Craig (2020) critically addresses instrumental use of metaphors to frame diseases.

He brings up Susan Sontag's acclaimed 1989 essay about AIDS in which she condemns stigmatizing power of metaphors. She argued that metaphors were used to politically weaponize AIDS (Craig 2020: 2). Craig draws a parallel with the rhetoric of the COVID 19 that includes use of 'military commands', such as 'stay at home', 'shelter in place', appreciation for 'front-line workers' and other military associations (3). Discontent with the use of language of war in communicating the 2020 pandemic seems widespread and has given rise to the projects such as #ReframeCovid which is aimed at promoting 'non-war related language on Covid-19'.²

The evidence from 2020 crisis seems to confirm findings from previous pandemics about the fundamental role of experts and efficacy of fear appeals. Lavazza and Farina (2020) assert that countries that give priority to the authority of experts over political authorities are more likely to gain public trust. Early accounts from COVID-19 pandemic indicate that fear-based messages and strategies have been prominently used by governments in fighting coronavirus. At the same time, scholars and citizens raise concerns about militarization of pandemic discourse and the advance of discriminating discourses that encourage social divides. Finally, they criticize the hypocrisy of alleged togetherness and question the frankness of pandemic solidarity.

COVID -19 in Croatia: The Context of the 'First Wave'

At the time of the coronavirus outbreak, Croatia was governed by the conservative Croatian Democratic Union (*Hrvatska demokratska zajednica*, HDZ) and its partners. The Prime Minister was a

² <https://sites.google.com/view/reframe-covid/initiative> (Accessed on: 1 October 2020).

moderate conservative Andrej Plenković who took over the helm of the party and the country in 2016. From January until June 2020 Croatia presided the Council of the European Union. Its entire presidency was marked by an unprecedented global crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The trust in institutions in Croatia is generally amongst the lowest in the EU (Henjak, 2017). According to the Eurobarometer, only 15% of respondents in Croatia tend to trust the Government while 16% tend to trust the parliament.³ In comparison, the average trust in national governments and parliaments in the EU is 34%, for both institutions. Moreover, in February 2020, just before the outbreak, 70 percent of respondents included in a regular monthly IPSOS survey believed that Croatia was heading in the wrong direction.⁴

The first COVID-19 case was reported in Croatia on 24 February 2020. Shortly after, The Civil Protection Headquarters of the Republic of Croatia was appointed the main decision making and crisis communication body for all epidemic (later pandemic) related matters. It has been mainly represented by four people who came to embody the battle against the virus: Vili Beroš, the HDZ's Minister of Health, Davor Božinović, the HDZ's Minister of Interior Affairs, Krunoslav Capak, the head of Croatian Institute for Public Health and Alemka Markotić, the head of the Clinic for Infective Diseases 'Dr. Fran Mihaljević'. Božinović has been the leader of the Headquarters, Ca-

pak has been the member while Beroš and Markotić have been associate members. The media will soon brand them as 'the fantastic four' (Horvat 2020).

In the early days of the spread in Croatia, the virus was perceived 'as dangerous as a flu' (Večernji.hr 26 February 2020). However, as the alarming scenes from Italian regions Veneto and Lombardy were mounting and the number of infected people in Croatia started to rise, the rhetoric of the Headquarters became more upsetting. On 26 February 2020 Davor Božinović introduced daily press conferences that will become the main media event in the following weeks. The conferences first took place twice a day, at 9 AM and 4 PM and afterwards once a day, at 2 PM. They were held continuously until 18 May 2020. The most anticipated information delivered at the conferences was the number of people directly affected by COVID – 19 – infected, deceased, people in quarantine etc. The main speakers at the conferences were Beroš, Božinović, Markotić and Capak.

On 16 March 2020, all schools in Croatia went online and soon after other restrictions were imposed: all restaurants, cafes and stores were closed except for supermarkets, pharmacies and drugstores, public events and gatherings were banned, and public transportation was halted. A week later, on 22 March 2020, Zagreb was hit by a strong earthquake that ruined parts of the city and left many people homeless. The earthquake urged many people to flee Zagreb which led the Headquarters to restrict inter-city movements of people. From 23 March 2020 commuting between cities was possible only with a special pass issued by state or local authorities. Croatia was now officially in a lockdown. According to the report released by The Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker (OxCGRT) on 24 March 2020,

³ Eurobarometer (November 2019) file:///C:/Users/Korisnik/Downloads/eb92_nat_hr_hr.pdf

⁴ Dnevnik.hr (25 March 2020): Imaju li Vlada i predsjednik podršku građana u borbi protiv koronavirusa. <https://dnevnik.hr/vijesti/koronavirus/crobarometar-ima-ju-li-vlada-i-predsjednik-podrsku-gradjana-u-borbi-protiv-koronavirusa---599087.html>. (Accessed 15 September 2020).

Croatia was among the countries with the most rigorous pandemic response in Europe.⁵ The infliction of restrictive measures was accompanied by pervasive public campaign that encouraged people to protect themselves and 'stay at home' (*#ostanidoma*). The campaign was ferociously supported by the media. On 17 March 2020 editors of selected news media were summoned by the Government to a briefing about COVID-19 reporting. The agenda of the meeting was allegedly to instruct the media to reduce the panic and stop the spread of disinformation. Croatian Journalists' Association and the media that were not invited strongly criticized the meeting. Nevertheless, all mainstream media outlets endorsed 'stay at home' directions.

On 27 April 2020, the restrictions started to loosen up. On 11 May 2020 schools re-opened for younger children, along with restaurants and bars and the ban on inter-city travels was abolished. Croatia was slowly returning to its (new) normal.

The handling of the pandemic in Croatia throughout February, March and April 2020 was generally perceived as timely, adequate, and successful, while the actions of the Headquarters were hardly challenged or disputed. In April 2020, IPSOS registered a surprising surge in public optimism: 51 percent of respondents thought the country was going in the right direction.⁶ This was probably due to a confidence the citizens felt about

how the crisis was being handled. In the same month, Minister Vili Beroš emerged as the most popular politician in the country for 29.2 respondents compared to only 2 percent in March 2020, which is the biggest surge in personal rating in the history of CRO Demoskop, a regular political monthly survey conducted by Promocija Puls.⁷

In May 2020 the public mood shifted back to pessimism, with 61 percent of respondents thinking that country was going in the wrong direction to further deteriorate in June 2020 with 70 percent of the respondents thinking that the country was not doing well.⁸ Personal rating of Vili Beroš also started to deflate – he emerged as the most positive politician for 15.4 percent of respondents in May and 8.1 percent in June 2020.⁹

⁷ Maretić Žonja, Petra (5 April 2020) Nakon tri mjeseca HDZ ponovno prvi izbor građana, a a Beroš najpozitivniji političar. *Večernji list*. <https://www.vecernji.hr/vijesti/neocekivana-promjena-u-jeku-krize-politicari-ce-morati-opravdati-velika-ocekivanja-1392018>. (Accessed 10 November 2020).

⁸ Dnevnik.hr (25 May 2020): Crobarometar otkriva odnos snaga mjesec dana prije izbora. HDZ ispred Restart koalicije, Škoro treći. <https://dnevnik.hr/vijesti/parlamentarni-izbori-2020/crobarometar-za-svi-banj-hdz-na-vrhu-ali-im-je-restart-za-pe-tama---606754.html>. (Accessed 15 September 2020). Dnevnik.hr (26 June 2020) Hrvatska u završnici izbora. <https://dnevnik.hr/vijesti/parlamentarni-izbori-2020/hrvatska-u-završnici-izbora-hdz-biraju-stariji-muskarci-a-restart-koaliciji-skloni-je-zene---610790.html>. (Accessed 15 September 2020).

⁹ Gregoret, Damira (7 June 2020): Novi CRO Demoskop: Preokret na vrhu, Restart u prednosti pred HDZ-om! Milanović najnegativniji. *RTL*. <https://www.rtl.hr/vijesti-hr/novosti/hrvatska/parlamentarni-izbori-2020/3829890/najnoviji-cro-demoskop-preokret-na-vrhu-restart-koalicija-u-prednosti-nad-hdz-om-milano-vec-najnegativniji> (Accessed 10 November 2020).

⁵ Coronavirus Government Response Tracker, <https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/research/research-projects/coronavirus-government-response-tracker>. (Accessed 15 September 2020).

⁶ Dnevnik.hr (24 April 2020) HDZ povećao prednost pred SDP-om, popularnost raste i Plenkoviću i Milanoviću. <https://dnevnik.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/crobarometar-popularnost-stranaka-i-politicara-u-vrijeme-korona-krize---602923.html>. (Accessed 15 September 2020).

However, the overall perception of the Headquarters' response to the pandemic remained flattering in June 2020. According to Promocija Plus, 76.6 percent of respondents thought that the measures imposed by the Headquarters were well balanced while 87.2 percent said that they trusted or entirely trusted the Headquarters and their measures.¹⁰ By November 2020, the support for the Headquarters shrunk to 36 percent and support for the measures to 41.9 percent.¹¹

Methodology and research design

The goal of this study is to analyze features of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic communication that may have encouraged Croatian public to comply with the new framework of life based on restrictions. It uses textual analysis to examine communication related to the COVID-19 pandemics in Croatia on two levels. First, it examines media coverage of three key individuals who acted on behalf of the Civil Protection Headquarters of the Republic of Croatia – Vili Beroš, Davor Božinović and Alemka Markotić. For the reasons of feasibility (primarily related to data processing and time constraints) the decision was made to exclude Krunoslav Capak from the study. Pilot analysis has indicated

¹⁰ Net.hr (6 June 2020). Veliko istraživanje: Jesu li mjere bile pretjerane? Građani su rekli svoje i otkrili što ako dođe do drugog vala. <https://net.hr/danas/hrvatska/veliko-istrazivanje-kako-nakon-svega-hrvati-ocjenjuju-rad-stozera-zanimljivo-misljenja-se-razlikuju-po-tome-biraju-li-hdz-ili-sdp/>. (Accessed 28 September 2020).

¹¹ Gregoret, Damira (7 November 2020): Koliko građana podržava lockdown, a što bi ostavili otvoreno?. *RTL*. <https://www.rtl.hr/vijesti-hr/novosti/hrvatska/3921186/ekskluzivno-veliko-istrazivanje-rtl-a-koliko-gradjana-podrazava-lockdown-a-sto-bi-ostavili-otvoreno-otkrivamo-i-kojem-c-lanu-stozera-najvise-vjeruju/> (Accessed 10 November 2020).

that he was the least exposed member of the Headquarters and that the study will not be compromised if this concession is made. However, further analyses of the Headquarters' role in the 2020 pandemic in Croatia should include Capak whose role and public visibility increased in the later stages of the pandemic.

The underlying assumption is that the favorable media representation of the individuals who were perceived as the faces of the battle against the pandemics may have been important in boosting their authority, and consequently their ability to persuade otherwise pessimistic and distrustful citizens.

The analysis of the news coverage relies on both quantitative and qualitative content analysis. The unit of analysis is one online article.

The second goal is to investigate discursive strategies and persuasive techniques used by Beroš, Markotić and Božinović to encourage citizens to act in accordance with imposed measures. Their statements are examined using qualitative content analysis. The 'statement' is here understood as the totality of all direct or paraphrased words assigned to one person in one article. All media outlets covered press conferences of the Headquarters and most of them aired or published same or similar reports, based on what was said that day at the conference. Although unmediated transcripts from press conferences would be more appropriate for this type of analysis, the presence of exhaustive press conference reports across different media outlets, including Index.hr and Večernji.hr, justifies the choice of material. This limitation of news articles is the immanent presence of the media filter that needs to be acknowledged and properly addressed by researcher.

The analysis on both levels includes articles related to the pandemic that

mention Vili Beroš, Davor Božinović and/or Alemka Markotić published on Večernji.hr and Index.hr from 24 February to 11 May 2020. The starting date is the day when the first COVID-19 case was reported in Croatia and the end date is the day when children returned to schools and other lockdown measures were significantly reduced. The articles that mention Beroš, Božinović and/or Markotić in passing but make no further reference to any of them were excluded from the sample

Večernji.hr is the online edition of one of the two leading Croatian broadsheet newspapers, *Večernji list*, owned by the Styria publishing company. *Večernji list* has a reputation of a mainstream, conservative-leaning newspaper. Bilić et al. (2018) classify it as a center-right private news organization. Its main competitor is *Jutarnji list* owned by Hanza Media, which is commonly perceived as a liberal-leaning newspaper. Bilić et al. (2018) identify it as a center-left private news organization. According to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report (2019), the main sources of print news in 2019 were the left-leaning tabloid *24 sata* owned by the Styria (37%, weekly use), *Jutarnji list* (29%) and *Večernji list* (19%).¹² The online edition of Večernji.hr has a weekly reach of 20 percent and is the best ranked conservative-leaning news site, according to the Reuters Institute.

Index.hr is the second most popular online news site after 24sata.hr (weekly reach of 56% and 57% respectively) and the most popular native digital news site in Croatia, according to the Reuters Institute (2019). It was established by journalist Matija Babić and has a reputation of an independent, liberal, and strongly oppositional outlet. Its editorial policy

¹² Peruško, Zrinjka (2019): *Reuters Digital News Report*. <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2019/croatia-2019/>. (Accessed 20 August 2020).

towards HDZ's Government is aggressively critical while Večernji.hr is more accommodating. Finally, *Večernji list* was part of the group that was invited to the Government meeting concerning the Covid-19 reporting while Index.hr was not.

The rationale behind the choice of outlets was to include two influential media that have significant market share, different ownership, contrasting ideological positions and opposite tone towards the Government. Future studies should include more outlets that should lead to more conclusive findings.

The final sample includes 475 articles, 226 in Večernji.hr and 249 in Index.hr.

Findings

Media Representation of the Headquarters

The content analysis was conducted on 475 articles. Vili Beroš is mentioned in 217 articles (136 published on Večernji.hr and 91 on Index.hr), Davor Božinović in 177 (70 published on Večernji.hr and 107 on Index.hr) and Alemka Markotić in 123 (61 published on Večernji.hr and 62 on Index.hr). The articles were first coded for the presence of positive sentiment towards Beroš, Božinović or Markotić; then they were coded for the presence of negative sentiment towards them and finally, the articles were coded for the presence of unpleasant topics or arguments that do not necessarily involve criticism of analyzed people but may be potentially challenging to their image. For instance, articles that question if Croatia is testing enough, if there is enough medical equipment, or if nurses would be adequately paid for their work, were coded as positive in this category. The category was introduced because the pilot study indicated that the overall media coverage of the Headquarters

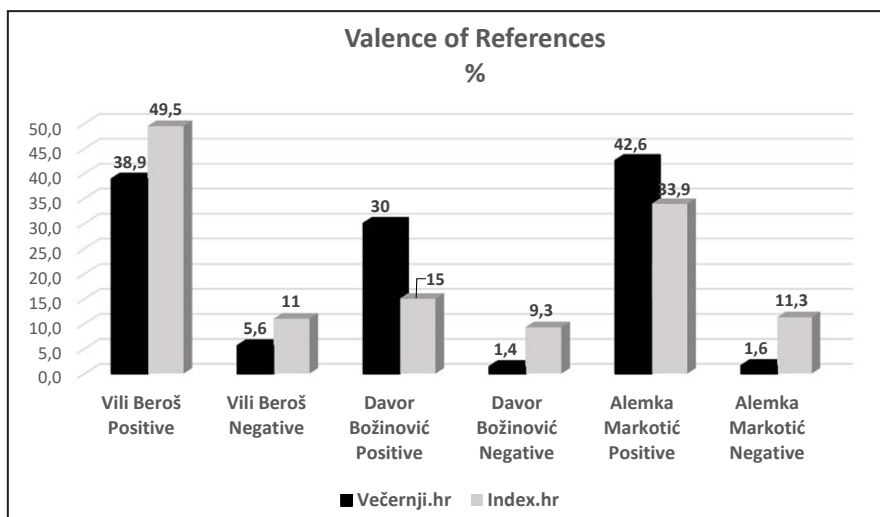


Figure 1. Valence of References

was not only favorable but that the media were also quite reluctant to question decisions of the Headquarters and bring up provocative issues in the early days of the pandemic. The agreement between coders across all categories ranged from Cohen's kappa .823 to 1.00

The analysis has revealed that the sentiment towards three most prominent figures who personified the battle against the virus, Vili Beroš, Davor Božinović and Alemka Markotić was exceptionally favorable. Figure 1 shows that Vili Beroš was the most praised person, followed by Alemka Markotić and finally by Davor Božinović.

Interestingly, Index.hr that is routinely aggressively negative towards governing political establishment and especially towards HDZ, had more positive references to Beroš than Večernji.hr (49.5 % compared to 38.9%). On the other hand, Index.hr had also significantly more negative comments than Večernji.hr (11% compared to 5.6%). The most acclaimed person on Večernji.hr was Alemka Markotić, with 42.6% articles that contain positive mention.

Her portrayal on Index.hr was also overwhelmingly favorable, with 33.9 % of articles that contain some positive remark. Davor Božinović was the least praised member of the team, with 30% positive references on Večernji.hr and 15% on Index.hr. Nevertheless, positive comments were convincingly more dominant than the negative ones. The highest total of 7.8% negative comments on both news sites was registered for Beroš, compared to 6.5% for Markotić and 6.2% for Božinović. As suggested in Figure 1, Index.hr was generally much more prone to negative comments than Večernji.hr. However, percentages are still surprisingly low, given the profile and fundamentally critical discourse of the site.

Figure 2 shows that negative comments about Beroš, Markotić or Božinović were almost nonexistent in February and March. The criticism started to show only in April, while the time span for May is too short to demonstrate the actual monthly trend.

In sum, results presented in this section confirm the initial impression that

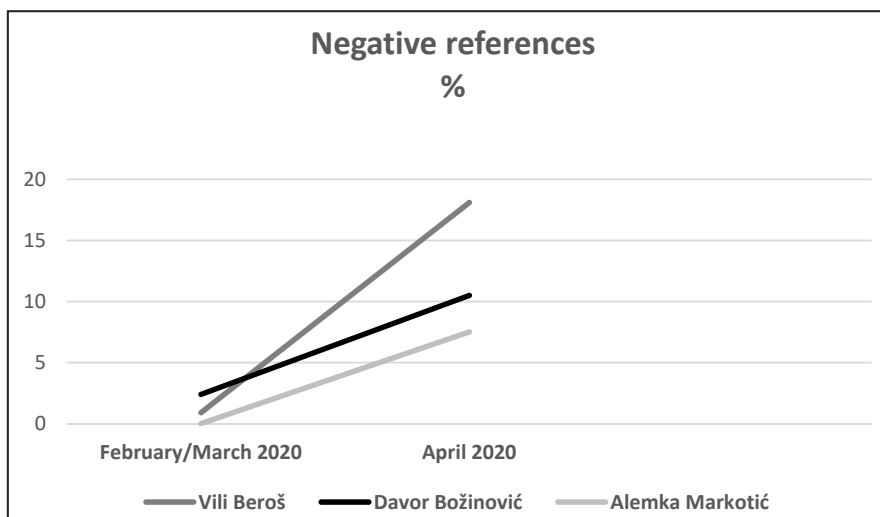


Figure 2. Negative references

the news coverage of the main pandemic envoys on Večernji.hr and Index.hr was exceptionally affirmative, especially during the first month of the crisis.

Inquiry into the presence of provocative and potentially damaging topics indicates that Index.hr was much more willing to address provocative issues and raise critical arguments (see Figure 3).

Figure 4 demonstrates that analyzed outlets were very conciliant in February and March while their tone became more confronting in April 2020.

However, the overall percentage of articles that contained contesting arguments remained relatively low – 19.35% for Vili Beroš, 16.95% for Davor Božinović and 10.57% for Alemka Markotić.

Media Representation of the Headquarters: Qualitative Findings

This section uses qualitative analysis to illustrate the findings from the previous section. Vili Beroš and Alemka Markotić were mostly praised for their expertise, communication skills and integrity.

Their media portrayal was especially flattering in February and March 2020, at the beginning of the crisis.

On 18 March 2020 Večernji.hr wrote: 'Vili Beroš has become the strongest link. The citizens simply trust him. His right and left hand, Alemka Markotić and Krunoslav Capak demonstrate supreme expertise and communication skills on every occasion'. On the same day, Index.hr (18 March 2020) quoted a letter from Croatian Patients' Association in which the president of the Association praises Beroš for his 'professional leadership of the defense against the pandemic' and says: 'Your calming public appearances and actions will hopefully save many lives of Croatian citizens, especially of the elderly... We, the Association... are immensely grateful for that'. Such messages of people's support and gratefulness were observed in both analyzed outlets but were apparently present in other mainstream media as well. Prominent was also the practice of quoting Beroš's social media posts and reporting about mainly delighted citizens' reactions. 'Beroš is a

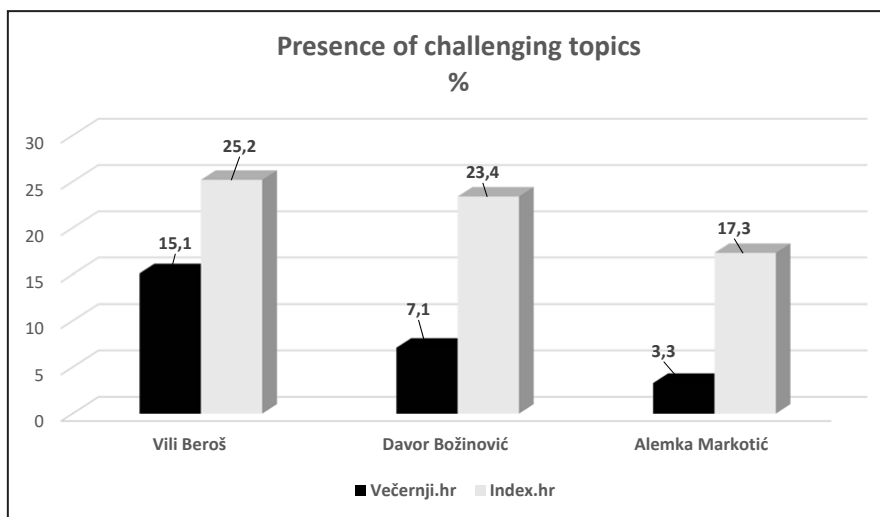


Figure 3. Presence of challenging topics

hit on social media, Croats adore him', wrote Index.hr (26 March 2020) and carried messages of enchanted citizens: 'Minister, thank you for your serenity and encouragement for all of us. You are our hope', 'You are the man who can be trusted', 'Vili for Prime Minister', etc. (Index.hr, 26 March 2020).

His 'calm' communication was the subject of numerous commentaries and news reports: 'New minister of health has swiftly gained huge public trust, mainly because of his calm and clear communication with the public' (Index, 22 March 2020); 'Minister Beroš won sympathies of Croatian citizens during battle with coronavirus with his communication style' (Index, 23 March 2020); 'He is ready to answer all journalists' questions, he is not arrogant and he remains calm when many have succumbed to panics' (Večernji.hr, 18 March 2020), etc. Even when crisis communication of the Government in general was criticized, Beroš was being praised as 'calm and relatively good communicator' (Index.hr, 19 March 2020).

Similar was representation of Alemka Markotić whose communication was described by Index.hr (26 February 2020) as 'professional and calm' and by Večernji.hr as 'clear, precise, calm and corroborated' (26 February 2020). Večernji.hr (11 March 2020) even suggested she should be awarded a title of the 'communicator of the year'.

Davor Božinović was not praised as often as the other two, but he was also complimented for his communication and organizational abilities, especially by Večernji.hr: 'If we are talking about deserving and committed individuals, Davor Božinović... should not be denied the merit of uniting superb experts into a harmonious team' (Večernji.hr, 18 March 2020).

One of the labels commonly assigned to the members of the Headquarters that stood out in the analyzed articles but seems to stretch across different media, is a label of a hero. 'Hero of the nation who did not want to be a hero' is how Večernji.hr described Vili Beroš (30 March 2020); 'A heroine, or just a woman who does her job wholeheartedly?'

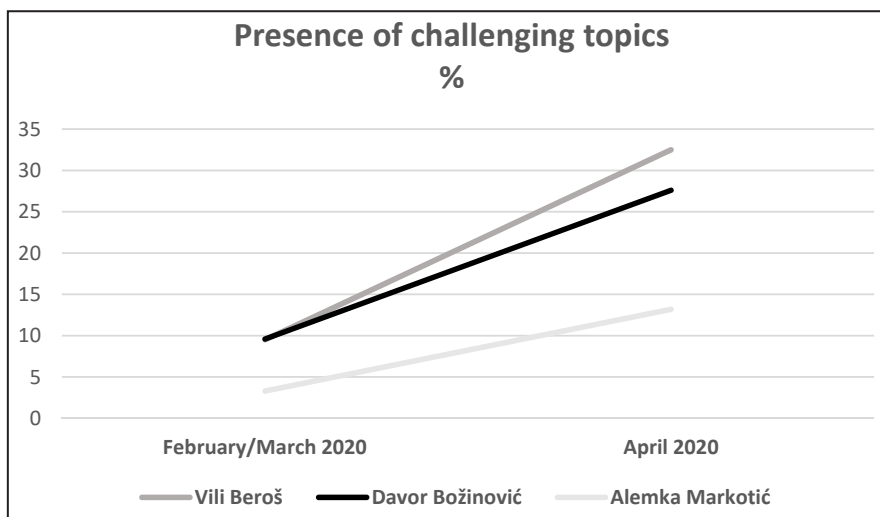


Figure 4. Presence of challenging topics across time

wrote Index.hr about Alemka Markotić (1 April 2020).

A trend has started when a boy named Šimun from village of Nuštar made a drawing of Beroš as Superman, Božinović as Flash Gordon, Capak as Batman and Markotić as Wonder Woman. The drawing was initially posted on Nuštar's official Facebook page, but it went viral when Beroš commented on the post: 'Dear Šimun, thank you. Take care of your family. You are their shield and my hero. Hi from Vili' (Index.hr, 27 March 2020). Božinović also reacted to the boy's drawing. He shared the drawing along with a message that was reported all over, including Index.hr (27 March 2020) and Večernji.hr (27 March 2020): 'We'll do anything to return childhood to our children. Šimun, thank you for your support, we shall never get tired because of you'. Other children's creations also got significant media attention, from drawings ('Heartbreaking: A girl from Murter drew a banknote with Alemka Markotić', Večernji.hr, 26 March 2020) to Lego constructions ('Davor Božinović sent a present to lit-

tle Dominik who used Lego figurines to impersonate the members of the Headquarters', Index.hr, 29 February 2020).

Creating bond with children was not the only technique used to 'humanize' Beroš, Markotić and Božinović. 'Humanization' is a political communication technique commonly used to soften politician's image and to demonstrate that he or she is not only outstanding professional but also good and caring human being (see Grbeša, 2010; Holtz-Bacha, 2004). Both Index.hr and Večernji.hr 'humanized' them by sharing information from their private lives. For instance, they published several interviews with Beroš's wife and we learned the names of Beroš's children and his dog. Alemka Markotić's life story and her war experience were also widely covered (e.g. 'She saved people in war', Index, 1 March 2020, etc.). Another related technique used to portray the members of the Headquarters was celebrification (e.g. Driessens, 2013). For instance, both Index.hr and Večernji.hr shared a post of Croatian actress who 'dreamt' that she and Minister Beroš 'fell

in love' (24 March 2020). Besides, Beroš was often referred to as 'my friend Vili' (e.g. Index, 26 March 2020), which is a direct reference to a famous American movie "Free Willy" (1993) that brings a story of a goodhearted whale who befriends a little boy.

Media representation of Croatian corona envoys on Index.hr and Večernji.hr has been exceptionally positive. This finding is in contrast with usually intensively negative news coverage of political institutions in Croatia (Grbeša 2017). They were praised for their professional competence, communication skills and character. The image that was projected by both analyzed outputs in examined period is the one of credible experts and likable people that were awarded the status of 'heroes' that people can look up to. The media portrayal of them as both exceptional professionals and kind, caring people has possibly inspired public sympathies and encouraged people's compliance with restrictive measures that have utterly shattered their lifestyle and daily routines. Outstanding personal rating of Vili Beroš and unexpected jump in public optimism measured in April 2020 speak in favor of this assumption

However, the immaculate media image of the Headquarters started to deteriorate in April 2020, probably because their decisions were perceived as inconsistent and speculative. For instance, they closed stores on Sunday with no convincing argument; they allowed church mass gatherings, while other venues were still closed, and people were encouraged not to leave their homes etc. In addition, they were repeatedly criticized for politicizing their role and acting as a megaphone of the ruling HDZ. Vojislav Mazzocco from Index.hr (2020) wrote: "The Headquarters was presented as a super competent team that is going to save us. They did part of the job ex-

ceptionally well, and then they started to politicize and make moves that are so typical of Croatian bureaucracy – pointless and harmful'. Perceived intrusion of politics into the actions of a team that was complimented for being 'professional', seems to have crucially tainted their reputation in the analyzed media.

The Rhetoric of the Headquarters

Preliminary analysis of statements of Vili Beroš, Davor Božinović and Alemka Markotić indicates that they were heavily relying on pandemic-related communication strategies that were discussed in the theoretical chapter: use of fear appeals and metaphors of war, encouraging sense of togetherness and pandemic shaming.

Fear appeals

Fear appeals permeated the discourse of the main key communication envoys in Croatia during the first wave of the pandemic. Although initial messages were intended to reduce the panic and minimize severity of the threat, the tone of the messages soon became more disturbing and consequently, more pressuring. Fear appeals were used on three levels: (a) to induce fear from the disease and its consequences on individual and social level, (b) to indicate that people who do not comply with the rules represent a danger, and (c) to threaten with sanctions those who challenge the rules or undermine attempts of the Headquarters.

As suggested by Wilke and Allen (2000), fear appeals are the most effective when combined with high-efficacy messages. The rhetoric of the Headquarters was a constant mix of scare tactics and efficacy messages. For instance, 'until now there were no cases among children but now we have more and more cases among children, even some death cases. Middle-aged and young people

should not think that they are not in danger' (Alemka Markotić, Večernji.hr, 11 April 2020), and then 'all these protective measures that we have been introducing wouldn't be efficient if citizens did not comply with them' (Alemka Markotić, 23 April 2020) or 'our destiny is in our hands... If we act in accordance with the rules, we may prevent further spread' (Vili Beroš, Večernji.hr, 30 March 2020).

The efficiency of Croatian approach was additionally accentuated by promoting comparative statistics that suggested that Croatia was more successful in combating the virus than some more advanced countries, such as France, Italy and Germany (Vili Beroš, Večernji.hr, 27 March 2020).

Disobedience was represented as the biggest threat to the efficiency. Those breaking or challenging the rules were identified as an immediate threat to the wellbeing of individuals and society. While addressing those who resisted the measures, Alemka Markotić has authored some of the most memorable pandemic soundbites: 'Breaking self-isolation is the same thing as having a gun and wanted to kill someone because you are irresponsible' (Večernji.hr, 16 March 2020) and 'Maybe I was too gentle when I compared it to shooting a gun. I'll be more severe now – it is like shooting a rifle in a shopping mall, it is terrorism' (Večernji.hr, 20 March 2020). She also coined the term 'corona party' (Alemka Markotić, Večernji.hr, 21 March 2020) referring to the people who were leaving their homes and gathering in the open. The specific technique used by Markotić to identify those noncompliant as 'assassins' and 'terrorists' is known as 'name calling' and entails assigning unattractive labels to individuals, groups or practices we want the public to condemn and reject (Sproul 2001).

The last set of fear appeals was based on threat of sanctions for breaking the rules. The most vocal about sanctions was, expectedly, Minister of Internal Affairs, Davor Božinović. He warned that 'Croatian police is going to monitor how people comply with the measures; if they don't they (the police) are going to react...', and 'I saw people walking in pairs this morning. This should not be happening. Keep the distance or police will punish you' (Index, 21 March 2020).

Finally, members of the Headquarters repeatedly condemned communication that was considered 'disinformation' or just hostile towards the efforts of the institutions: 'Information that have been circulating since yesterday that the number of infected is being concealed are a deep insult to the people who have been protecting health of this country; institutions will know how to protect themselves, if these insults continue' (Alemka Markotić, Večernji.hr, 12 March 2020). Interesting in that respect is a request from Davor Božinović regarding April Fool's Day to refrain from sharing jokes that could turn into disinformation. 'Let's keep humor funny', he pleaded (Večernji.hr, 31 March 2020).

Metaphors of War

As argued in earlier chapter, war metaphors are a distinctive feature of pandemic discourse. 'Covidian military metaphors', as Craig (2020) branded them, were abundantly present in Croatian public discourse during the first wave of the pandemic. Aside from concepts and expressions that are part of the global Covid-19 novel language, such as the "stay at home" (*#ostanidoma*) mantra, the use of words 'headquarters', 'isolation' and 'quarantine' and exploitation of generic war metaphors, association to the state of war was achieved through constant reminiscence of the 1990s Homeland War.

Davor Božinović (Večernji.hr, 31 March 2020) asserted:

'Like 29 years ago, we are faced with unfamiliar and unpleasant scenario... I can only wish for ourselves to be responsible, solidary and united in empathy and taking care of each other as our soldiers were in the war... I would like to thank the police, civil protection services, army, and of course, health workers. All these services were first on the ground in the war, and they are first on the ground today'.

Similarly, Alemka Markotić (Večernji.hr, 16 March 2020) commented: 'The Minister has declared mobilization and they (health workers) will go wherever they are needed... The Homeland War did not happen such a long time ago; the reaction and organization of our health service back then was exceptional. Our people are very competent. We are good when circumstances require us to be'. She also pleaded: 'During the war we were all confined for months; why can't we endure now, in the comfort of our homes, with everything we have in there' (2 April 2020). In addition to the Homeland War, national unity was promoted by evoking some other glorious and unifying moments in Croatian history, such as the performance of Croatian soccer team at the World Championship in Russia in 2018: 'It all reminds me of the World Cup. It is nerve-reckling. As we know, Croats were winning in the extra time and penalties. But you know it is unnerving. I wish we do not do that and that we win in those ninety minutes' (Alemka Markotić, Index.hr, 1 April 2020).

Aside from these specific national metaphors, examples of commonly used generic military metaphors include: 'battle with coronavirus' (e.g. Vili Beroš, Index.hr, 1 March 2020); 'I am

only a soldier in this battle' (Vili Beroš, Index.hr, 17 March 2020); 'our strategy of defense' (e.g. Vili Beroš, Večernji.hr, 15 March 2020); 'mobilization of health workers' (Vili Beroš, Večernji.hr, 15 March 2020); 'first line of defense' (Vili Beroš, Večernji.hr, 25 March 2020); 'every war has its spies (*peta kolona*)' (Vili Beroš, 25 March 2020) etc. Common was also honoring of professions whose contribution is crucial in times of war, such as the army, police, health workers and journalists. For instance, 'You journalists are doing a great thing and I congratulate you on your professionalism' (Vili Beroš, Večernji.hr, 4 April 2020).

Sense of togetherness

The discourse of togetherness in Croatia was built around shared sense of solidarity: 'We need to be compassionate', said Vili Beroš (Večernji.hr, 8 March 2020). However, what togetherness really meant was collective compliance with public health directives. Indeed, the most prominent aspect of togetherness was to praise those who comply with the rules and thus contribute to positive outcome of the battle against the virus. For instance, 'our message is – respect our decisions; that is the only way in which we can succeed. I would like to compliment all the citizens who comply with the rules, I would like to compliment everyone who helps our elderly citizens' (Davor Božinović, Večernji.hr, 20 March 2020) or 'If we are right after Japan (in terms of the success rate), it means that we have perfect citizens' (Alemka Markotić, Večernji.hr, 4 April 2020).

The technique that was abundantly used in constructing this idea of collectivity and shared experience is 'bandwagon'. It is aimed at creating an impression that 'everybody is doing it', which is why we should do it as well (Sproule 2001: 136). In this case 'everybody' is all compliant citizens who are repeatedly

praised for their resilience and discipline. For instance, 'The result we have is an accomplishment of all citizens who comply with the measures', (Davor Božinović, Večernji.hr, 11 April 2020) or 'I compliment all health workers and citizens who follow instructions of the Headquarters because your self-discipline led us to such good results. Thank you all!' (Vili Beroš, Večernji.hr, 19 April 2020).

Aside from sharing the same notion of good behavior, 'togetherness' of good citizens is being constructed in relation to the 'others' who misbehave and undermine rules and efforts of the Headquarters. Accentuating difference between 'us', who respect imposed frames of conduct and contribute to public health, and 'them' who represent a threat to public safety, the Headquarters was relying on 'negative solidarity' as the driving force behind collective pandemic identity.

Pandemic shaming

Finger-pointing and attribution of blame were standard techniques used to shame those who do not comply with the rules. For instance, 'I am proud, and we need to thank majority of Croats who have complied with the measures. However, those who have been obstructing our measures, need to be criticized' (Vili Beroš, Večernji.hr, 26 March 2020).

Certain parts of the country were identified as particularly troublesome and were consequently subjected to geographical shaming. This is particularly true for the coastal Mediterranean region of Dalmatia, known for its easy-going mentality and relaxed lifestyle. For instance, Vili Beroš warned: 'The situation is good because citizens respect the measures. However, I am saddened by the news coming from Zadar, Šibenik and

Split (cities in Dalmatia) where young people are gathering, drinking drinks and having fun. They are endangering themselves, health of their family and their nation' (Večernji.hr, 2 April 2020). Stereotyping people in Dalmatia as 'special' and 'different', and therefore probably more prone to ignorant behavior is implied in Alemka Markotić's patronizing statement: 'Our South, Dalmatia and Dubrovnik have been an avant-garde for centuries, in culture, sports, science, in everything, so we are sure they will be an avant-garde in defense against the virus' (Večernji.hr, 4 April 2020) and 'I ask them (Dalmatians) to be patient and to stop the spread of coronavirus; then we, the outsiders, we'll join them on our sea and we will not lose the tourist season' (Index.hr, 01 April 2020).

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to deconstruct media coverage of the people who were perceived as the faces of the battle against coronavirus in Croatia and to test if and how 'corona communicators' were using pandemic-related strategies of persuasion to achieve compliance. The incentive for this study was the impression that the coverage of the key communicators was exceptionally positive, that media tended to glorify the members of the Headquarters and that according to the relevant opinion polls, public tended to trust them.

The findings of the study point to three main conclusions. First, content analysis of the two online news sites, Večernji.hr and Index.hr showed that the coverage of Vili Beroš, Davor Božinović and Alemka Markotić was indeed overwhelmingly positive during the first three months of the pandemic. Negative comments were surprisingly rare even on Index.hr that was generally more critical than Večernji.hr but still far less than expected, given its editorial policy and usual-

ly harsh style of reporting. Moreover, during February and March, none of the news sites was really pushing issues or angles that challenged pandemic-related policies or actions. Qualitative analyses revealed that Beroš and Markotić were often praised for their competence, clarity, and sobriety, while Božinović was saluted for his organizational abilities and determination. Humanization technique was used to present primarily Beroš and Markotić, but also Božinović, as not just outstanding professionals, but also as caring human beings. This was achieved mainly by sharing stories about their lives, hobbies, and families. Another strand of humanization was to report about children's affection for the members of the team and vice-versa. Children were crucial in branding the team as "heroes" because the media built on children's creations that portrayed Beroš, Markotić, Božinović and Capak as superheroes. In addition, the 'heroism' was constructed around people's admiration for the members of the team, especially for Vili Beroš who was often glorified as the 'savior'. These findings are in line with evidence from other studies about the role of chief medical experts in health crisis risk communication and arguments about their 'celebrification' in the 2020 pandemic.

Second, the Headquarters was, intuitively or strategically, promoting tactics and discourses that were observed in previous pandemics or registered in other countries during the 2020 pandemic. Fear was abundantly present in the discourse of all three examined individuals. It was used to scare the public about the disease and its consequences, to identify those who resist the rules as dangerous, and to threaten those who break the rules with sanctions. As recommended by risk communication scholars, fear appeals were commonly combined with 'high-efficacy' messages. Military meta-

phors, as another prominent feature of the 'discourse of plague', were routinely present in communication of Beroš, Božinović and Markotić. Aside from generic war metaphors, a particularity of Croatian corona communication is the use of associations to the Homeland War. These associations served to evoke the feelings of unity, discipline, endurance, and victory. Finally, the idea of togetherness and solidarity permeated the rhetoric of Beroš, Božinović and Markotić and was often combined with the 'shaming' of uncompliant citizens. Interestingly, 'pandemic shaming' during the first wave in Croatia involved geographical stereotyping of Dalmatia, coastal region whose inhabitants are typically perceived as relaxed which in the discourse of the pandemic, translates into ignorant and unruly.

In sum, favorable media representation of Croatian corona envoys has probably encouraged people to trust their decisions and comply with restrictive measures that have suspended their freedoms and changed their life routines almost overnight. This suggestion is in line with previous findings about correlation between experts' integrity and trust in times of pandemic. However, as soon it was perceived that decisions of the Headquarters may be driven by politics rather than expert judgments, the media image of the key communicators started to deteriorate. Over the course of time, the public image of the Headquarters has also declined. With the loss of trust in the Headquarters, Croatia has lost important asset in fighting the virus. Achieving compliance in 'the second wave' with fallen heroes, exhausted citizens, and media back in the usual tracks of cynicism and negativity, will be a demanding mission.

Given the normally critical position of the news media towards political institutions and low public trust in institutions

in Croatia, these findings, although indicative rather than conclusive, call for comprehensive research of the influ-

ence of crisis communication envoys and their mediated image on public and achieving compliance in times of crises.

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Komuniciranje o pandemiji COVID-19: medijsko praćenje stožera i uporaba strategija uvjeravanja u Hrvatskoj

Sažetak Hrvatsku je globalna pandemija COVID-a 19 pogodila u veljači 2020. Iza zovni zadatak komuniciranja tema vezanih za pandemiju dobilo je četvero ljudi povezanih sa Stožerom civilne zaštite Republike Hrvatske. Cilj je ovog rada istražiti kako je troje članova bilo prikazano u medijima te jesu li i kako koristili strategije uvjeravanja uobičajene za stanja pandemija kako bi dobili pristanak javnosti. Nalazi istraživanja ukazuju na to da je izvještavanje o ključnim komunikatorima tijekom prva tri mjeseca pandemije bilo uvjerljivo pozitivno. Štoviše, u ranoj fazi pandemije nijedan od analiziranih portala nije inzistirao na temama ili perspektivama koje propituju politike ili mjere Stožera vezane za pandemiju. Analizom retorike ključnih ljudi koji su komunicirali o koronavirusu utvrđeno je da su oni prihvatili strategije uvjeravanja tipične za komuniciranje u pandemijama, ponajprije uporabu poruka straha, vojnih metafora i poruka koje inzistiraju na "zajedništvu" i "pandemijskom sramoćenju". Autorica zaključuje kako su pozitivna medijska prezentacija komunikatora i strategije uvjeravanja koje su koristili vjerojatno potaknuli ljude da vjeruju njihovom odlukama i pristanu na restriktivne mjere koje su suspendirale njihove slobode i gotovo preko noći promijenile njihove životne navike.

Ključne riječi pandemija COVID-a19, koronavirus, komunikacija, strategije uvjeravanja, stručnjaci, poruke straha, stožer, Hrvatska