European Parliament and Croatian Government in Crisis Communication: A Comparative Study of Crisis Communication During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

An unprecedented challenge has been set upon world leaders and governments. The COVID-19 virus has stopped the world in its tracks and has halted the economic growth of the globalized world. Nobody seemingly had an answer to the pandemic and panic has taken over the minds of people. This paper aims to prepare a comparative study of the crisis communication of the European Parliament and the Croatian Government during the COVID-19 pandemic. It presents a quantitative analysis of some chosen and available communication channels through which the European Parliament and the Croatian Government communicated, from the first recorded cases until September 1, 2020. The purpose of this paper is to contribute to establishing strategic and first-rate service that will communicate effectively in these kinds of situations. The objective of comparing responses of the Croatian Government and the European Parliament is to show that good practices can be implemented effectively to the benefit of the public.

Keywords: crisis communication, COVID-19, European Parliament, Croatian Government

1. Introduction

Crisis communication is exceptionally challenging for any type of organization, and especially for institutions. Namely, citizens expect them to always have relevant, verified, and timely information about any situation. The fear of public reaction in the face of uncertainty has pushed governments to use a very risky strategy: "Early messaging by public officials that the COVID-19 pandemic was 'under control' reduced the authority and messaging being delivered by technical experts regarding the true nature of risk" (Malecki et al., 2021, p. 10). However, as the scientists, governments, and the public gained more information about the COVID-19 virus, everything started to change. More knowledge about the virus brought new rules. This presented a huge problem for the politicians and governments who claimed that they have everything "under control".

2. Crisis Communication

Mario Plenković (2015, p. 116) explains what is important for a good crisis communication strategy: "Crisis communication is creative holistic communicative process of selecting the optimal reflection and understandable instructive directions of crisis action." If the government has no crisis communication strategy, it can seriously endanger all stakeholders involved. Furthermore, if citizens have incomplete and false information because their government has failed to communicate appropriately to the situation, the blame lies with people who failed to lead them in such trying times. Tom Christensen and Per Lægreid (2020, p. 3) state that the government must do the following: "It must act, it must make sense of the unfolding situation, it must make decisions and collaborate across horizontal and vertical boundaries, and it must formulate and communicate a convincing and enabling understanding of what has happened and what should be done to minimize the consequences of the crisis".

Plenković (2015, p. 115) emphasizes key elements that need to be included in crisis communication strategy: "This day and age, that is a new historical period of crisis communication, is more and more determined by digitized communication (IT), information and communication processes, media convergence, interpersonal and interactive communications, multimedia communications, new media, smart mobile technology, social networks and the unstoppable

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expansion of the network of Internet citizens". Communication experts need to consider different elements that were mentioned in this paragraph and make sure to create a holistic crisis communication strategy.

3. Political Communication

Although there are many definitions of political communication, two of them contain the core principles. Denton and Woodward (1991, p. 11) defined political communication in terms of intentions of the communicators to influence the political environment (as cited in McNair, 2003, p. 4). Moreover, they have said that the crucial factor that makes communication political is content and purpose. Furthermore, one of the more interesting and illuminating definitions is the following definition: "First, political communication is rather less about political science and more about how sociology, psychology, and economics have helped illuminate the role of communication in shaping the conduct of politics" (Bennett, Iyengar, 2008, p. 712).

3.1. Use of Social Media in Political Communication

Political communication has changed in an impressive and intimidating way with social media as the main communication tool. Zeng et al. (2010) claim that "social media represents the ideal vehicle and information base to gauge public opinion on policies and political positions as well as to build community support for candidates running for public offices" (as cited in Stieglitz, Dang-Xuan, 2012, p. 2). Pew Research Center (2007, 2009a, 2011) pointed out that one of the most important reasons for the usage of social media for political communication is that there has been a significant decline in traditional media's reach (as cited in Himelboim et al., 2012, p. 92-93). Namely, the main problem of traditional media is that it cannot offer a platform for citizens to interact among themselves and with the politicians: "Citizens have new opportunities for political participation and communication by joining interest groups, interacting with political institutions and candidates, and exchanging and discussing political information with other citizens" (Krueger, 2002, as cited in Himelboim et al., 2012, p. 92-93).

4. Populism in Political Communication

First of all, it is very important to define what populism is and which techniques are used to attract potential voters. Berto Šalaj and Marijana Grbeša (2017, p. 326) claim that an integral part of populism is the demand for the implementation of social and political changes that would abolish the domination of elites and renew the idea and practice of politics as an expression of the will of the people. Simply, Taggart (2000) and Canovan (1981) have defined populism as "a communication frame that appeals to and identifies with the people and pretends to speak in their name (as cited in Jagers, Walgrave, 2005, p. 3)".

Populism is a very interesting phenomenon in politics, namely because it has no political color, meaning that it can be on the left and of the right on the political spectrum (Jagers, Walgrave, 2005, p. 3). Šalaj and Grbeša (2017, p. 327) emphasize that populism can be both progressive and reactionary, which largely depends on the political and economic context in which it occurs, as well as on values of the elites it opposes.

5. Research Methodology, Hypothesis, and Discussion on the Results

Content analysis is an empirical method in which the content of a message is analyzed based on meanings, ideas, thoughts, and judgments, and data for description and explanation are provided based on quantitative judgments about communication features (Žugaj et al., 2006, as cited in Čendo Metzinger, Toth, 2020, p. 32). Furthermore, content analysis is an ideal method for researching various messages and information materials such as books, magazines, newspapers, radio, television, internet, etc. (Čendo Metzinger, Toth, 2020, p. 32). It is important to point out the advantages of conducting the content analysis. Namely, they are reflected in its low cost and relatively simple implementation as well as in a wide range of applications in data discovery and collection (Milas, 2005; Tkalac Verčič et al., 2010, as cited in Čendo Metzinger, Toth, 2020, p. 33).

The aim of this paper is to prepare a comparative study of crisis communication of the European Parliament and the Croatian Government during the COVID-19 pandemic. Precisely because of that aim, it was important to uncover how much the institutional

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announcements (European Parliament and Croatian Government) on social media (Twitter and Facebook) had an impact on articles in online media portals. Based on the aim of the paper, two hypotheses were devised and checked with the help of an analytical matrix that included 35 variables for articles on online media portals and 13 variables for owned media (*Twitter* and *Facebook*). Key variables that were used included in analytical matrix: *usage of opinions of politicians, experts, and citizens in post/article, purpose of the post/or article, clarity and consistency of posts/articles and clarity and consistency of epidemiological guidelines.*

The two hypotheses that were devised for the research are:

• The European Parliament had concise and coherent communication.

• The Croatian Government had trouble establishing concise and coherent communication.

It is important to point out that hypotheses refer to crisis communication and prioritizing the issue of public health and not to logistical or technical problems that the institutions experienced.

With the content analysis method for the selected articles on online media portals, (in the case of the European Parliament, the analysis included the largest European online media portals (Statista.com, 2017; Feedspot, 2021) such as Politico, Deutsche Welle, Reuters, TechCrunch, Euractiv, The Parliament Magazine, New Europe, Sky.com, The Guardian, Brussels Times, Euronews, BBC and in the case of the Croatian Government, the analysis included the most visited (SimilarWeb, 2021) online media portals such as Index.hr, Večernji list, Dnevnik.hr, Telegram.hr, Lider Media, Netokracija, Tportal, Jutarnji list, 24sata, Slobodna Dalmacija, Nacional and Net.hr) 100 articles were analyzed in the period from January 24, 2020 (emergence of COVID-19 virus in the European Union) and February 25, 2020 through September 1, 2020. Furthermore, the content analysis included 828 posts from *Twitter* and *Facebook* from January 24 (first recorded cases in the European Union) and February 25 (first recorded cases in Croatia) to September 1, 2020.

Comparing the results, it was peculiar to see what the data suggests and how the institutions handled this crisis. The analysis showed that most articles concerning the European Parliament were written by an author (76%), followed by editorial articles and agency articles. On the other hand, in articles concerning the Croatian Government, just 44% of articles were written by the author. More articles, in this case, were signed by the editorial board - 32%.

Furthermore, it was very interesting to analyze how many articles mentioned the subject (COVID-19) in the title. This could be very indicative of how the threat of the pandemic was perceived by journalists, but also how it was perceived by legislators.

Table 1. Mention of the subject (COVID-19) in the title of the article - European Parliament and Croatian Government

	Mention of COVID-19 in the title	%
European Parliament	Mentioned	70.0
	Not mentioned	30.0
Croatian Government	Mentioned	22.0
	Not mentioned	78.0

The results showed that 70% of articles regarding the European Parliament mentioned COVID-19 in their title, which suggests that it was an important topic in the period from January to September 2020 (Table 1). In comparison, in articles concerning the Croatian Government, 78% of articles avoided mentioning COVID-19 in the title. This suggests that journalists from Croatia tried to avoid using COVID-19 in the title. Furthermore, the analysis provided interesting data about how many times the subject COVID-19 was mentioned in the text. In the case of articles about the Croatian Government, 64% of articles used the subject multiple times, followed by twice (14%) and once (12%). However, articles concerning the European Parliament mentioned the subject in 36% of cases, followed by twice and once with 30%.

The results showed that the articles in both cases have a firm connection between text and the title. This is important because it shows that this topic was very important for journalists and everyone involved. The analysis showed that there were no clickbait titles. We also wanted to analyze what the connotations of the said titles were. In both cases, most of the articles published had neutral titles. However, there was also an overwhelming number of titles that have negative connotations - 42% in the articles about the European Parliament, and 40% in the articles about the Croatian Government.

In addition, the results from the analysis of the form of the articles were very different. Interestingly, articles concerning the European Parliament were predominantly in the form of news (68%) and just 6% of reports. Contrarily, articles about the Croatian Government

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were mostly in the form of reports (72%), followed by news (18%) and interviews (6%). This difference comes from the fact that the Croatian Government had daily news conferences in which experts and ministers provided updates.

The number of sources is always a good indicator of the quality and objectivity of the article. The analysis showed that, in both cases, journalists used three or more sources (the case in 54% of articles about the European Parliament and in 62% of articles about the Croatian Government). Nevertheless, journalists used just one source in 30% of articles concerning the Croatian Government. That number is significantly lower in the case of the European Parliament, where it is just 18%. Again, this could be related to the fact that journalists in Croatia covered daily news conferences. We noticed a very different situation with unnamed sources. For instance, 98% of articles in the case of the Croatian Government did not use unnamed sources. At the same time, articles about the European Parliament fully used unnamed sources (2%) and partly relied on unnamed sources (24%).

As was already mentioned, we could find a lot of difference between articles about the European Parliament and the Croatian Government because Croatians organized daily news conferences. This is the reason that articles about the Croatian Government consist of 84% information and only about 16% had information and attitudes mentioned. On the contrary, articles about the European Parliament consisted of 64% information and 36% information and attitudes expressed.

One of the most important questions in our analysis was about different media and graphics being included in articles. Unfortunately, the results showed that, in both cases, journalists used predominantly photographs (94% of articles about the European Parliament and 90% of articles about the Croatian Government). Articles about the European Parliament did not use video content at all, however, articles about the Croatian Government used video content in 6% of cases. Once more, the reason for this difference in the data is because of the daily news conferences in Croatia. Besides, European, and Croatian journalists avoided using content created on social media. In just 22% of articles about the Croatian Government, there was the usage of social media content. Moreover, just 14% of articles about the EP used content from social media.

Equally important in the analysis was to compare the data about usage of comments from different groups related to the problem of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 2. Usage of opinions from experts – European Parliament and Croatian Government

	Are opinions from experts used in the articles?	%
European Parliament	Yes	16.0
	No	84.0
Croatian Government	Yes	56.0
	No	44.0

Surprisingly, articles concerning the Croatian Government were largely using opinions from experts (56%), while articles about the European Parliament used experts' opinions in just 16% of cases (Table 2). On the other hand, European journalists used opinions from politicians in 90% of articles. A similar situation has happened with Croatian journalists who used opinions from politicians in 76% of articles (Table 3). It is evident from the data that journalists valued more the opinions from politicians than those from experts.

Table 3. Usage of opinions from politicians - European Parliament and Croatian Government

	Are opinions from politicians used in the articles?	%
European Parliament	Yes	90.0
	No	10.0
Croatian Government	Yes	76.0
	No	24.0

Further analysis of the articles showed that journalists in both cases did not include opinions from users of social media, other journalists, and citizens. Only European journalists included opinions from citizens in just 4% of all analyzed articles.

Moreover, our analysis includes the purpose of the articles. It was important to obtain data about purpose because it shows what was the priority for both governments and journalists.

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Table 4. The purpose of the article - European Parliament and Croatian Government

	Does the article serve as a guide for citizens?	%
European Parliament	Yes	2.0
	No	98.0
Croatian Government	Yes	58.0
	No	42.0

This part of the analysis showed the considerable difference between reporting about the European Parliament and the Croatian Government, namely, because it demonstrates the diverse purposes and motivations behind the articles. Firstly, the analysis showed that 58% of articles about the Croatian Government served as a guide for citizens. In comparison, only 2% of articles about the European Parliament served as a guide for citizens (Table 4). Similarly, we researched how many articles served as a warning for citizens. Again, the situation is quite clear. In the case of the Croatian Government, 40% of articles served as a warning for the citizens. However, in the case of the European Parliament, this drops to just 4%.

With further analysis, we wanted to obtain data about the clarity of the messages conveyed by the European Parliament and the Croatian Government. The analysis showed that articles about the European Parliament had entirely clear messages. However, 4% of articles concerning the Croatian Government had unclear messages. Furthermore, there were similar problems concerning guidelines about epidemiological measures.

Table 5. Guidelines about epidemiological measures - European Parliament and Croatian Government

	Guidelines about epidemiological measures	%
European Parliament	Clear	10.0
	Unclear	2.0
	Inconsistent	0
	Not applicable	88.0
Croatian Government	Clear	44.0
	Unclear	12.0
	Inconsistent	2.0
	Not applicable	42.0

Table 5 demonstrates how haphazard the communication about epidemiological measures was. While articles about the European Parliament were unclear in just 2% of cases, the situation with articles concerning the Croatian Government is more complicated. The results show that, in the latter case, 12% of articles were unclear and 2% inconsistent about epidemiological measures. Likewise, there were problems with communication messages on pandemic predictions. As it was mentioned, in crises such as this, there must be predictions based on data and strategy. Articles about the Croatian Government were inconsistent in 4% of all articles, and about the European Parliament in 2% of analyzed articles. Furthermore, it is interesting to see how communicators influence confidence about the situation. In 2% of articles, communicators of the European Parliament did not instill confidence. On the other hand, in 10% of articles communicators of the Croatian Government did not instill confidence about handling the COVID-19 pandemic (Table 6).

Table 6. Communicators - European Parliament and Croatian Government

	Communicators instill confidence	%
European Parliament	Yes	58.0
	No	2.0
	Not applicable	40.0
Croatian Government	Yes	56.0
	No	10.0
	Not applicable	34.0

Information in both cases came mostly from verified sources. Regrettably, 2% of articles concerning the Croatian Government came from unverified sources. In the analysis, we also wanted to see if articles are responding to some false statements. Interestingly, 6% of articles about the Croatian Government were a response to some of the false statements that started to appear around the COVID-19 pandemic. Not a single article concerning the European Parliament responded to rumors, conspiracy theories, and false statements.

Since our analysis includes only the "first wave" of the pandemic, there was not much debate about vaccines. Surely, vaccines started to be mentioned at the beginning, however, it was not such an important topic at the time. Table 7 demonstrates that, in both cases, just 6% of articles mention vaccines as a potential solution to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Table 7. A vaccine as a solution to the COVID-19 pandemic - European Parliament and Croatian Government

	A vaccine as a solution	%
European Parliament	Yes	6.0
	No	94.0
Croatian Government	Yes	6.0
	No	94.0

To conclude the part of the analysis about articles, it is interesting to see what the most important part of the communication messages was. As mentioned, the European Parliament was very concerned about the economic situation. A staggering 64% of articles about the European Parliament mentioned the economic situation. Contrarily, only 24% of articles concerning the Croatian Government mentioned the economic situation. This data is very important for understanding what the priority for both institutions was.

Table 8. Economic situation - European Parliament and Croatian Government

	The vaccine as a solution	%
European Parliament	Yes	6.0
	No	94.0
Croatian Government	Yes	6.0
	No	94.0

Today, social media is a very important part of the communication plan of every single organization and institution. This is the reason why we included an analysis of the *Facebook* and *Twitter* profiles of the European Parliament and the Croatian Government. Firstly, we wanted to find out how many times the subject was mentioned in posts on Facebook. The analysis showed that the European Parliament mentioned the subject COVID-19, 91.1% times. On the contrary, the profile of the Croatian Government mentioned the subject just 54.2% times in the post.

The analysis showed that, once again, experts were mainly excluded from the communication on *Facebook*. Table 9 shows that more than 90% of all analyzed posts contained information and comments that did not mention the opinion of experts. In any situation, it is not wise to exclude expert opinion because an organization or institution loses the credibility and trust of the public.

Table 9. Usage of opinions from experts - European Parliament and Croatian Government

	Are opinions from experts used in the articles?	%
European Parliament	Yes	2.6
	No	97.4
Croatian Government	Yes	1.0
	No	99.0

On the other hand, both profiles used opinions from politicians. Namely, 27.7% of *Facebook* posts of the European Parliament used opinions from politicians. Similarly, the profile of the Croatian Government used the same opinions in 18.8% of all analyzed posts. However, opinions from citizens were again largely ignored. They were mentioned in 3.1% of posts of the European Parliament's profile and just 1% of posts of the Croatian Government.

Furthermore, it was interesting to analyze the purpose of the posts that were published on *Facebook*. There was a significant difference between the profiles of the European Parliament and the Croatian Government. The posts of the European Parliament did not serve as a guide for the citizens in 70.7% of cases (Table 10). On the other hand, 77.1% of posts on the *Facebook* profile of the Croatian Government served as a guide for citizens (Table 10).

Table 10. The purpose of the post - European Parliament and Croatian Government

	Does the post serve as a guide for citizens?	%
European Parliament	Yes	29.3
	No	70.7
Croatian Government	Yes	77.1
	No	22.9

Furthermore, we wondered how many posts served as a warning to the citizens. The results show that, as in the latter case, the difference is significant. In just 14.7% of posts, the European Parliament warned citizens about the COVID-19 pandemic. Contrarily, the Croatian Government warned citizens about the pandemic in 47.9% of posts on *Facebook*.

The results of the analysis showed problems in the question of guidelines about epidemiological measures (Table 11). The European Parliament had 14.1% posts that were completely clear and 1.6% posts that were unclear. This goes to show that the European Parliament

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had different priorities while communicating on *Facebook* during the "first wave" of the pandemic. On the other hand, the Croatian Government had 47.9% posts that were clear and 5.2% that were unclear.

Table 11. Guidelines about epidemiological measures - European Parliament and Croatian Government

	Guidelines about epidemiological measures	**%**
European Parliament	Clear	14.1
	Unclear	1.6
	Inconsistent	0
	Not applicable	84.3
Croatian Government	Clear	47.9
	Unclear	5.2
	Inconsistent	0
	Not applicable	46.9

Communication about epidemiological measures should have been completely clear, coherent, and simple. Especially because citizens are worried, and they want clear instructions on what to do in these types of situations. Both the European Parliament and the Croatian Government did poorly in communicating with their followers on *Facebook*.

Table 12. Answering users' questions on Facebook - European Parliament and Croatian Government

	Answering users' questions	**%**
European Parliament	Yes	0
	No	72.3
	Responding to some comments	27.7
Croatian Government	Yes	0
	No	65.6
	Responding to some comments	34.4

This can also be confirmed with Table 12. During any crisis communication, community managers become crucial for handling the users' requests and questions. The communication on social media must be timely and useful to users. Unfortunately, it was very clear from the results of the analysis that the communication teams in both cases failed. The European Parliament did not respond to 72.3% of comments and the Croatian Government

did not respond to 65.6% of comments. It should have been a priority to respond to users' questions for communication teams in both cases.

The analysis of *Twitter* profiles of the European Parliament and the Croatian Government had very similar results as the analysis of *Facebook* profiles. Similarly, as on *Facebook*, the subject COVID-19 was mentioned in 89.8% of *Twitter* posts of the European Parliament. Again, it was mentioned less on the profile of the Croatian Government, in 51.5% of posts.

Twitter posts were interesting to analyze because of the comments used in the posts, namely, because there was a meaningful difference between the two profiles.

Table 13. Usage of opinions from politicians - European Parliament and Croatian Government

	Are opinions from politicians used in the posts	%
European Parliament	Yes	18.9
	No	81.1
Croatian Government	Yes	93.0
	No	7.0

Profile of the Croatian Government used opinions from politicians in 93% of posts (Table 13). On the other hand, the profile of the European Parliament used opinions from politicians in just 18.9% of posts (Table 13). Furthermore, the Croatian Government did not include a single opinion from experts or citizens in their *Twitter* posts. In contrast, the European Parliament used opinions from citizens in 0.8% of posts, and opinions from experts in 5.7% of *Twitter* posts.

Table 14. The purpose of the post - European Parliament and Croatian Government

	Does the post serve as a guide for citizens?	%
European Parliament	Yes	32.1
	No	67.9
Croatian Government	Yes	33.1
	No	66.9

Furthermore, we compared the purpose of *Twitter* posts in both cases. Results showed that the posts were not meant to serve as guides for citizens (Table 14). Just 32.1% of posts on

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the European Parliament's *Twitter* were used as a guide and only 33.1% of posts on the profile of the Croatian Government. Even fewer *Twitter* posts were used as a warning for citizens. Namely, just 16.6% of posts were used as a warning on Parliament's profile and 17.6% of posts in the case of the Croatian Government. It was obvious that in both cases, priorities were not on warning and offering guidelines to citizens.

It is also important to mention that the results showed inconsistencies in communication messages on *Twitter*. The European Parliament had unclear communication messages in only 1.1% of all analysed posts. On the other hand, the Croatian Government had 15.8% of unclear communication messages and 0.7% of inconsistent messages in *Twitter* posts. Since the situation is threatening to public health, there should have been a clear communication strategy. With a prepared plan, there would not have been unclear and inconsistent messages. Furthermore, the Croatian Government had problems with guidelines about epidemiological measures. European Parliament had unclear messages about guidelines in 0.4% of *Twitter* posts (Table 15). In comparison, the Croatian Government had 18.4% of unclear messages and 0.7% of inconsistent messages in *Twitter* posts (Table 15). Moreover, the European Parliament and the Croatian Government failed to offer clear guidelines about such an important matter - epidemiological measures.

Table 15. Guidelines about epidemiological measures - European Parliament and Croatian Government

	Guidelines about epidemiological measures	%
European Parliament	Clear	12.8
	Unclear	0.4
	Inconsistent	0
	Not applicable	86.8
Croatian Government	Clear	20.2
	Unclear	18.4
	Inconsistent	0.7
	Not applicable	60.7

As mentioned earlier, communication teams made a very serious mistake on *Facebook* because they did not answer and acknowledge questions. Regrettably, the situation is much worse on *Twitter* profiles in both cases.

Table 16. Answering users' questions on Twitter - European Parliament and Croatian Government

	Answering users' questions	%
European Parliament	Yes	0
	No	99.2
	Responding to some comments	0.8
Croatian Government	Yes	0
	No	99.6
	Responding to some comments	0.4

The European Parliament did not answer 99.2% of comments (Table 16) and the Croatian Government did not answer 99.6% of comments (Table 16). Both communication teams failed in the most important part, and that is answering and being available to the citizens. It is not always easy to answer all the requests, especially on social media. Nevertheless, those comments should have been answered. A communication strategy was hardly existent, and was frivolous and careless in both cases.

6. Conclusion

With this paper, we wanted to provide a comparison between crisis communication of the European Parliament and the Croatian Government during the "first wave" of the COVID-19 pandemic. With the analysis, we gained valuable insight into the quality and strategy of crisis communication from both institutions.

Firstly, the analysis of the European Parliament's *Facebook* profile showed that the posts did not have the purpose of warning or instructing citizens about the COVID-19 pandemic. The topics of the posts on *Facebook* were related to the plenary sessions, the problems with the budget, and the Recovery Plan of the European Union. This should not have been the primary topic of the *Facebook* posts. Moreover, the greatest problem was the lack of communication with followers who left comments to posts.

Posts on the *Twitter* profile of the European Parliament, similar to the example of *Facebook*, did not serve to instruct and serve citizens. The announcements were again focused on the budget and the Recovery Plan of the European Union. Communication with users was even

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worse than on *Facebook*. Furthermore, if they chose communicators, they relied again on politicians. In situations such as a pandemic, the main communicators should have been experts. That would create trust between the institution and the public.

Lastly, the analysis of articles concerning the European Parliament showed similar results. Communicators of the European Parliament were again more concerned with the economic crisis than the pandemic itself. In the articles, the relationship between the European Parliament, the Council of Europe, and the European Commission were much more important than the health crisis. All efforts were redirected to agreeing on a budget that everyone would be satisfied with.

The *Facebook* profile of the Croatian Government in the period from February to September was focused on epidemiological measures and instructions for citizens. This is evident especially in March. After that, the posts had different purposes and topics, such as problems in the economy. Similar to the profile of the European Parliament, politicians were used as the main communicators. Comments from experts were used in just 1% of *Facebook* posts. Again, the Government's social media team missed the opportunity to gain the trust of the followers.

A different communication strategy is visible on the *Twitter* profile of the Croatian Government. Many posts consisted of links to content from various news portals. Moreover, most of the content on the *Twitter* profile did not serve as a guide or warning for citizens. It is important to point out that 93% of posts use the comments of politicians, but none of the posts used the comments of experts.

The situation with the articles was quite similar to the social media of the Croatian Government. Although, it should be said that, at press conferences, they included some experts. Unfortunately, those experts were associated to politics and with the ruling political party, so they did not instill confidence. On the contrary, this made matters worse, and citizens were very suspicious about their intentions. The guidelines on epidemiological measures were mostly clear in the articles, however, in 12% of the articles, they were unclear, and in 2% inconsistent. Compared to the European Parliament, less than 24% of the articles mentioned the economic situation.

Our analysis showed that neither the European Parliament nor the Croatian Government had a crisis communication plan or strategy. Institutions should have been prepared for crises in public health and they should have anticipated situations such as a pandemic and prepared themselves. With the analysis of the media and own platforms, we have established that the European Parliament and the Croatian Government had not prepared for crisis communication. They failed to respond to citizens' questions and requests, which should have been a priority. Furthermore, they struggled with prioritizing the matters at hand. The economic situation is certainly very important, however, it should not have been prioritized over guidelines about epidemiological measures.

What institutions should learn from this situation is that it is crucial to have a crisis communication plan. Especially for problems that concern public health. Scientists are warning that there will be other pandemics, and institutions must learn from their mistakes. More importantly, institutions must communicate with citizens since they have the perfect communication channel for that - social media. Furthermore, social media channels need to be used wisely and methodically. Furthermore, it is important not to use the voices of only politicians. On the contrary, in situations concerning public health, independent experts and scientists should have been the main communicators.

Our research disproved the hypothesis that the European Parliament had concise and coherent communication. On the other hand, our research confirmed the hypothesis that the Croatian Government had trouble establishing concise and coherent communication.

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Nikolina Lednicki

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Nikolina Lednicki je magistrica komunikologije. Tijekom studiranja volontirala je u nekoliko studentskih udruga za što je dobila dvije nagrade Voditelja Hrvatskih studija. Radno iskustvo stjecala je u Uredu Europskog parlamenta u Hrvatskoj, marketinškoj agenciji Younited Agency, kao stručna savjetnica u Gradu Slavonskom Brodu te u udruzi Glas poduzetnika. Tijekom rada u Glasu poduzetnika osvojila je nagradu „Grand PRix" Hrvatske udruge za odnose s javnošću za projekt „#Manjiporezi: Stop parafiskalnim nametima!" Danas radi kao suradnica za diseminaciju i komunikaciju na projektu European Processor Initiative na Fakultetu elektrotehnike i računarstva u Zagrebu.

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