

A REVIEW OF COVID NEWS IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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ABSTRACT

Coronavirus pandemic affected everything and everyone by interfering in all aspects of human life. The daily publication of news about the coronavirus affects the psychological state of readers. This paper has the aim to determine the impact of published covid news through the survey method and whether it affects the spread of panic among the readers and visitors of the most visited news portal in Bosnia and Herzegovina *Klix.ba*. Furthermore, with content analysis, this paper is examining two periods of the 2020 (March-April; October-November) to determine if coronavirus news causes more discussion among *Klix.ba* readers and whether this affects the number of news shares on social networks. Also, this paper will determine the ratio of comments and shares per article from the beginning of the pandemic in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the time Bosnia and Herzegovina have registered the biggest number of deaths and daily infections. The results have shown and confirmed the hypothesis that the quantity of published news (positive or negative, fake or true) spreads panic among the visitors of the most visited Bosnian news web portal. Content analysis has shown that news regarding the numbers of daily infected people, and the once died from the infections attracted the most comments on the portal and shares on social media.

Keywords: Panic, Pandemic, Coronavirus, News, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Social Media.

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INTRODUCTION

The globalized society has once again confirmed the fact that in addition to its technological development, the core of the community is still fragile. Communities still do not have a developed culture of memory derived from personal experience and the experience of previous generations. The coronavirus pandemic has once again confirmed Beck's claim that we live in a risk society that is out of control, filled with fears and in which nothing is certain but uncertainty. Society has not learned a lesson from previous pandemics and for that reason the coronavirus has brought us back to our harsh reality.

Former US President Franklin D. Roosevelt said: 'The only thing we have to fear is fear itself. The year 2020 was a game-changer in many aspects. The world has come together to fight a very strong invisible enemy, the coronavirus. An invisible enemy, infecting around 412 million people and causing deaths of nearly 6 million people across the world. 2020 was filled with

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statistical data about new daily cases and deaths causing the world countries to shut down their borders and economies and rigidly introducing concepts of the epidemic, quarantine, and self-isolation. Although the entire world is on the same side fighting against the common enemy, countries have turned to the local communities as one of the strongest weapons in this fight.

Even though the corona virus is not the first worldwide spread pandemic in 21. century (in 2003 the world has faced with SARS, MERS pandemics followed later by ZIKA, H1N1, and EBOLA), it is the first one that besides causing an international pandemic, caused the first *infodemic* where the media is accelerating information and misinformation worldwide and is fueling panic and fear among people (Hao and Basu 2020). To be fully accurate the first study on social media during the pandemic dates back to 2009 and the H1N1 pandemic and tracking the prevalence of misinformation, terminology use, public sentiments and fear, and relationships between case incidence and public concern (A. R. Ahmad, H. R. Murad 2020; from Chew C, Eysenbach 2010). Since this research referred only to the tweets during the H1N1 pandemic, the media, and social media during the Covid 19 pandemic has been flooded with information but also misinformation causing it to become the first social media infodemic.

A huge amount of both information and misinformation in the media and social media regarding the '*deadly, Chinese, or Asian Virus*' coronavirus was often referred to as culminated in generating panic all over the world.

Natasha Crowcraft a public health expert from the University of Toronto said that pandemics might be triggering people's survival instincts (Valiante 2020). Survival instincts awakened by the infodemic triggered people to abandon socially accepted norms and allow their feelings to overpower reason. In many countries, worldwide has been recorded massive hoarding and stocking living supplies such as the flour, pasta but even toilet paper and paper towels. In the case of Turkey, people were panicking and in rush to find and buy liters of cologne, and 80% alcohol, which is considered to be an effective sanitizer.

The difficulty of differentiating false news from the correct information brought people to panic and spend days stressing about their health and future. Living under these circumstances makes people accept misinformation and news from suspicious sources as relevant. Psychologist Andrijana Pejaković says for Radio Free Europe that the tendency of some citizens to believe rumors rather than official information in situations like this is a consequence of an emotional

A Review of Covid News in Bosnia and Herzegovina

reaction to fear. She continues explaining when emotions of fear and panic arise, when some of our vital values such as life are compromised, then we react emotionally and then, unfortunately, we tend to exclude that rational part that relates to the official, verified information sent to us by those responsible. The problem is that with fake and sensationalist news, panic spreads very quickly, which directly affects our emotions, that is, it causes fear, which is why we will not know what to do, instead of focusing on the rational and following information that is official and accurate.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has set up a web page correcting many false claims about the virus. Furthermore, to efficiently fight against the infodemic the World Health Organization issued the guidelines for media named *Word Matters*. They called for responsible and accurate coverage of the coronavirus pandemic in the media. Some of the guidelines were call to the media to stick to the facts, don't spread rumors, and avoid stigmatizing patients. They continue by saying 'it's not a "plague" or an "apocalypse"; it's not a "Chinese" or "Asian" disease, and people with COVID-19 should not be described as "spreading the virus". "Using criminalizing or dehumanizing terminology creates the impression that those with the disease have somehow done something wrong or are less human than the rest of us, feeding stigma, undermining empathy, and potentially fuelling wider reluctance to seek treatment or attend a screening, testing, and quarantine," says the WHO (Pomeroy 2020).

Panic produced by media was also a reason for European Union to raise their voice. In March 2020, they have released the document in which they are accusing Russian Media of leading a disinformation campaign against western countries to worsen the impact of the virus. Allegedly they aimed to impair the health crisis in Western countries (Emmott 2020).

Another example is coming from Turkey. Since March Turkish authorities have targeted doctors for allegedly issuing threats to create fear and panic among the public in media interviews and social media posts relating to the pandemic in Turkey (Human Rights Watch 2020).

The fact that the Coronavirus pandemic will be trending in all mainstream media and most commented topics on social media this year confirmed the research by Molla from March 2020. He followed mentions on social media for 24 hours and come up with some astonishing results. On March 11th there were 19 million mentions of covid 19 across social media. In the second place mentioned, around 4 million related to Donald Trump. In 3rd place was news regarding the

cancelation of the NBA league, under 2 million mentions (Molla 2020). As early as the beginning of 2020, it was hinted that the presence of the coronavirus pandemic in the media would have unforeseeable consequences for man and society. Karin Wahl-Jorgensen's research suggests that fear has played a particularly vital role in coverage of the coronavirus outbreak. Since reports first started circulating about the new mystery illness on January 12, and up until February 13, 2020, she has tracked reporting in major English-language newspapers around the world, using the LexisNexis UK database. This includes almost 100 high-circulation newspapers from around the world, which have collectively published 9,387 stories about the outbreak. Of these, 1,066 articles mention “fear” or related words, including “afraid” (Jorgenson 2020). Followed by this Google trends have shown a massive jump in the rise of searches related to anxiety, panic attacks, and treatments for panic attacks. ABC News reported that their research showed that coronavirus anxiety has affected the public and created anxiety. Catherine Belling, professor of Medical education at Nortwestren’s University noted that anxiety has the characteristic to spreads faster than the virus.

When it comes to Bosnia and Herzegovina the world struggle has very easily adopted in the complex Bosnian society. As Alalykin-Izvekov (2017) noted that crisis is created when there is an imbalanced and unintegrated society. The current Bosnian ones fall under that category. This panic resulting in egoism such as panic buying, hoarding and stocking life necessities, and believing in every news seen on social media is the way how to describe a Bosnian society after the first coronavirus positive case was registered on 5th March 2020. We have been witnessing major discussion regarding the existence of the virus but also widespread videos of physical fights over a bag of flour. All of these events resulted in the creation of grey zones on social media serving for unhealthy discussions but also for serving health advice on how to fight coronavirus from the anonymous and self-proclaimed experts.

According to the journalist from *Raskrikavanje.ba*, web portal working on the detection of false news in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the last two and a half years of the existence of this portal, no topic has produced as much false news as the covid-19 pandemic caused by the coronavirus.

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method and whether it affects the spread of panic among the readers and visitors of the most visited news portal in Bosnia and Herzegovina *Klix.ba*. Furthermore, with content analysis, this paper is examining two periods of the 2020 (March-April; October-November) to determine if coronavirus news with the information of daily newly infections and deaths in its headlines cause more discussion among *Klix.ba* readers and whether this affects the number of news shares on social networks. Also, this paper will determine the ratio of comments and shares per article from the beginning of the pandemic in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the time Bosnia and Herzegovina have registered the biggest number of deaths and daily infections.

Theoretical Framework

A life with pandemics thought us to live with uncertainties around us. A question mark in our heads was raised for the banalest life decisions, like when and shall we go to the market? Is it safe? Do we wash our hands often enough? Should we wash everything we bring home just in case? and so on. In the 1980s and mostly in the 1990s modernity researchers and sociologists Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens introduced the concept of the risk society, which was closely linked with modernity and technological change in modern society. Their studies fit perfectly and give a clear framework for understanding the panic, society was going through during the coronavirus pandemic. Ulrich Beck notes that risk society means that we live in a world that is out of control and that there is nothing certain but uncertainty (Beck 1992).

Beck continues by saying that the ‘novelty of the risk society lies in the fact that our civilizational decisions involve global consequences and dangers and these radically contradict the institutional language of control’ (Beck 1992). Coronavirus pandemic proves the fact that thanks to modern society risks, fears, and dangers are being globalized. 2020 was a year of the world risk society and the society reliving once again health risks, caused by the pandemic.

According to Beck besides the health and environmental crisis our globalized society with the help of technology produces new forms of risks to which we need to adapt very quickly. On the other hand, Giddens introduced two different types of risks, external and manufactured ones. The manufactured or the new risks are the ones involving society in its creation. New forms of risks are created through the shift of globally accepted social norms. Some of the risks that are created during the coronavirus pandemic are as follows: job insecurity, exclusion from society, anti-socialization, education issues, economical risks especially in the less developed countries,

and so on. New forms of risks awoke survival instinct in humans but also brought a huge amount of fear and danger into the world risk society. On this note according to Beck three dimensions of danger could be differentiated: ecological, global financial, and terrorist danger.

Anthony Giddens says that our age is not more dangerous – not riskier than those of earlier generations, but the balance of risks and danger has shifted (Giddens 1999). Beck says that fear is the driving force in the risk society. He continues by saying that the culture of fear derives from the paradoxical fact that the institutions that are designed to control produced uncontrollability (Beck 1992). In 2020 many countries and institutions failed in the fight to control the coronavirus outbreak and instead of creating an optimistic environment with different measures and restrictions created chaos and societies filled with rage, fear, and panic. An example of this practice is Italy approach from March 2020. Seeing all the coffins with dead bodies in the media and news saying that doctors have to rotate ventilators to help as many people as possible and that in some moments they have to decide to whom they shall give ventilator and who has more chance to survive created panic and dispersed fear in already scared society. Another example could be seen in Bosnia and Herzegovina regarding the coronavirus vaccine. Thanks to the complex political situation and the authorities' carelessness about the health of its citizens, Bosnia and Herzegovina will be the last country in Europe to receive the doses of the vaccine against coronavirus.

The culture of fear is a separate concept and sociological framework developed by Frank Furedi and popularized through the work of sociologist Barry Glassner. It was developed to explain the need of causing fear and panic in public for the sake of gaining certain goals through challenging emotions. The concept becomes widely popular after the 9/11 terrorist attack in the United States. According to Frank Furedi, fear became an ever-expanding part of life in the West in the twenty-first century. We live in the horror of disease, abuse, alien danger, environmental destruction, and terrorist attacks. We were bombarded with news of new concerns about our security and urged to take more precautions and seek more protection (Furedi 2005). Barry Glassner, on the other hand, discusses how the media works to manipulate audience sensibilities. In his book *The Culture of Fear*, he questions the representations of social and cultural fears in the news and on television. Based on the logic of probability, he argues that, in general, life for most people is much safer and a lot less scary than the media show (Glassner 2000).

A Review of Covid News in Bosnia and Herzegovina

David L. Altheide wrote a book *Review of Creating Fear: News and Construction of a crisis*, in which he discusses the concept of marketing of fear. Following the headlines and news from the biggest media houses in the 90s, he found huge impact and expansion of fear through the news headlines and contents. He defines it as a *problem frame* that has become a modern machine for producing fear. Allan Brawley in the review of the book notes that “Altheide contends, along with other media scholars, that the mass media and popular culture, by marketing fear in both news and entertainment communications and by increasingly blurring the line between these two formerly distinct formats, have changed our social expectations and our daily lives in ways that are destructive to our communities, our well-being and our control over our lives. In the name of informing and/or entertaining the public, the media bombard audiences and readers with problem-oriented and often anxiety-provoking reports daily. Fear is no longer limited to specific objects or events. It is experienced as the background environment or context that specific acts or events simply illustrate and reinforce” (Brawley 2003).

Just around 100 English language, newspaper-based media in the first month (12 January - 13 February) of the coronavirus pandemic published 9387 news about the outbreak. This fact is just showing that Media houses from the 80s, 90s, and today ones still share the same virtual machine of producing fear.

Research Methods

This paper has the aim to determine the impact of published covid news through the survey method and whether it affects the spread of panic among the readers and visitors of the most visited news portal in Bosnia and Herzegovina *Klix.ba*. Furthermore, with content analysis, this paper is examining two periods of the 2020 (March-April; October-November) to determine if coronavirus news with the information of daily newly infections and deaths in its headlines cause more discussion among *Klix.ba* readers and whether this affects the number of news shares on social networks. Also, this paper will determine the ratio of comments and shares per article from the beginning of the pandemic in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the time Bosnia and Herzegovina have registered the biggest number of deaths and daily infections.

Considering the aims and problems of the paper we have set following set of research questions:

1. Does the number of covid news published daily on the most visited Bosnian portal Klix.ba affect the reader's psychological state and the spread of panic among the public?
2. Does the number of comments and shares of the news which in headlines have the data related to the new infections and deaths increase as the pandemic progresses in Bosnia and Herzegovina? (Klix.ba)
3. Does the number of comments and shares per published news, published on the web portal *Klix.ba*, increase as the pandemic progresses in Bosnia and Herzegovina?

Based on the research questions the following hypotheses have been set:

1. Big amount of daily published Covid news influence the spread of panic and anxiety among the readers and visitors of the portal klix.ba.
2. The number of comments and shares of the news which in headlines have the data related to the new infections and deaths does not increase as the pandemic progressed in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
3. The number of comments and shares per published news does increase as the pandemic progressed in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

This research will use as a method combination of content analysis and survey, to accurately respond to the research questions. Content analyses will be used in examining the headlines of the covid news as well as the comments section to measure the relationship between news headlines and the number of comments and shares of the same news. The relationship between the news and the reader and how the news affects the psychological state of the reader will be measured by the survey method. The results of the research descriptively will be presented in the form of charts, tables and explanations.

The time of the research will be set in two timeframes. The first is from 1 March – 1 May 2020. This is the time when coronavirus cases started appearing in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The first registered positive coronavirus patient dates back to March 5, 2020. The second timeframe is set between 1 October and 1 December, 2020. This is the period when the outbreak reached its peaks in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Findings

The results of the research were measured and examined through the content and survey analysis. Due to the pandemic, the survey form was distributed only through the social media channels, Facebook, What's up, and Viber groups. The survey has consisted of 7 concise questions. 3 of them were related to the sociodemographic variables of study participants and the other 4 were tackling panic and anxiety concerning covid-19 news. The survey was filled by 324 participants. The survey was only available to the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and acquired results draw the relation between readers and news publishers in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Chart 1 indicates that, of 324 participants, 267 (% 82.9) were female and only 55 (17.1) were male. Two persons identify themselves neither of offered gender. Having in mind that in percentage in which males are getting more often infected with the coronavirus, this participant ratio is opening some other questions regarding the openness to communicate health issues with others.

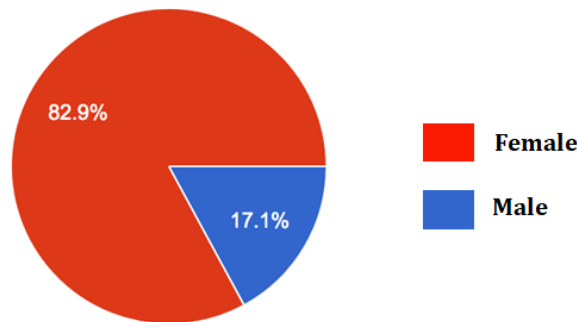


Chart 1: Gender of study participants

Table 1 shows the age distribution among the participants. The oldest participant has 55 years and the youngest is 18 years old. The survey was filled by 173 (%53,39) people in the age range from 18 to 35, 127 (%39,19) in the age from 36 to 50, and 24 (%7,4) participants older than 50 years.

Table 1: Age range of study participants

AGE RANGE	18 – 35	36 – 50	>50
No. of participant	173	127	24
Percentage %	53,39	39,19	7,4

Based on scientific qualification the most common level of education of participants was high school, 111 or %34.3 of the total number of participants. Bachelor's degree has 95 (%29,3) participants and Master degree diploma has 94 (%29) participants. Chart 2 is showing participants' distribution based on a scientific qualification.

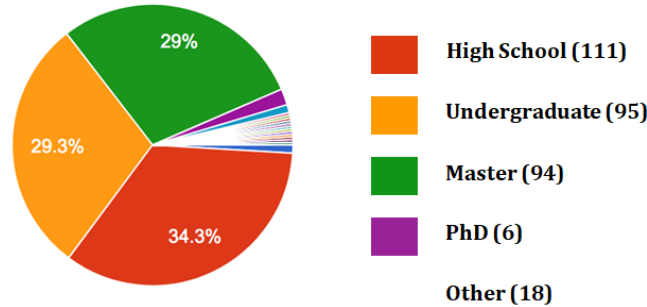


Chart 2: The Level of education of study participants

The first question (chart 3) in this study related to the covid – 19 news was how ‘Do you read the news about the coronavirus and how often?’ Four different options were offered as a possible answer: No, not at all; Yes, but not that often; Often, 5-10 news a day; Constantly, I read and explore news related to coronavirus. Chart 3 shows results that indicate that 113 (%34,9) participants have been reading coronavirus news but not that often. 96 (%29.6) participants have been reading news often, 5-10 news per day. 46 (%14,2) participants have been reading and researching about the coronavirus daily very intensely. 12 (%3,7) participants have not been reading news about coronavirus at all. The results indicate that a majority of participants have been exposed to the coronavirus news.

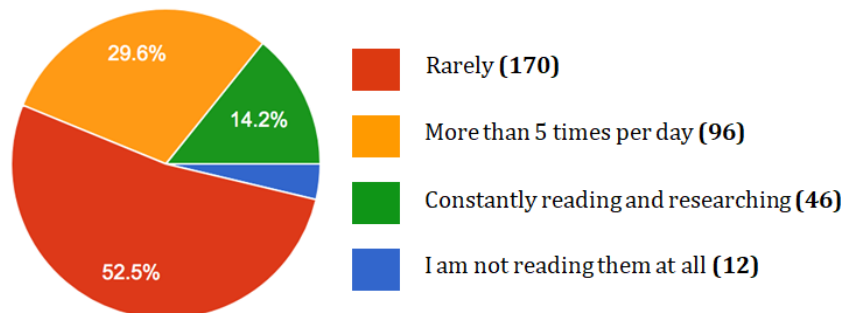


Chart 3: How often do you read news about Corona?

A Review of Covid News in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The following question was about asking participants if the coronavirus news make them anxious and created feelings of panic (chart 4). Same as in the previous question 4 possible answers were offered: No, never; Rarely; Yes, from time to time; Yes, constantly. The results indicate that %42 or 136 participants said that coronavirus news creates in them feeling of panic and anxiety from time to time. 113 or %34.9 of participants said that feeling of panic and anxiety is very rarely influenced by the coronavirus news. 45 (%13.9) participants declared that coronavirus news never produced the feeling of panic or anxiety. 30 (%9.3) participants admitted that daily published coronavirus news makes them constantly anxious and worried. With this said we can confirm that %86.1 of survey participants have been experiencing the feeling of panic and anxiety caused by the daily published coronavirus news.

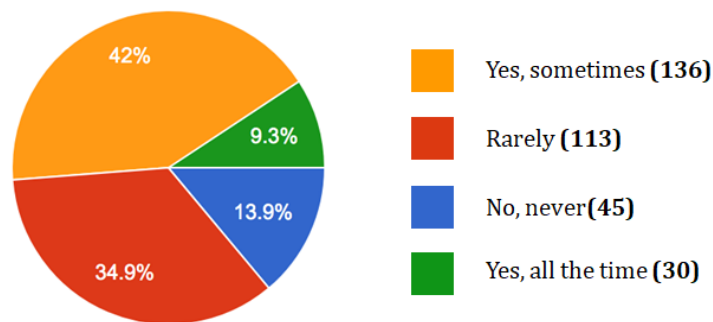


Chart 4: Does news about Coronavirus cause panic and anxiety?

The next question was reserved for those participants who answered with YES and rarely in the previous question. The question was to define symptoms the feeling of panic and anxiety is reflected through. As a ready answer, we offered the following symptoms: *Insomnia, Loss of appetite, Stomach problems, Dizziness*, but also, we have left an empty line so the participant could write every other possible symptom they have been feeling because of the panic and anxiety caused by the coronavirus news. 178 participants proceed and answer this question. The results showed a variety of answers and one general need of people to tell their stories and the need to be heard. 67 (%37.6) participants admit that the strongest indicator of panic and anxiety was insomnia and lack of sleep. 23 (12.9) participants experienced stomach problems while 22 (%12.4) of them felt dizziness. 10 (%5,6) participants claimed that they have been losing appetite due to panic and anxiety. The rest of the participants 56 of them felt the need to explain their feelings and symptoms. Some of the answers were as follows: *Often headaches, more frequent problems with the thyroid gland, lack of concentration, body restlessness, concern for family, dissatisfaction, constant*

anxiety, fear of everything, loss of breath, fear of leaving home, closed than ever before, feeling that we will be killed and that we will all go crazy...

The results indicate that constant media and coronavirus exposure can produce serious anxiety and panic issues which results in impaired mental stability. The survey results from this question are displayed in chart 5 below.

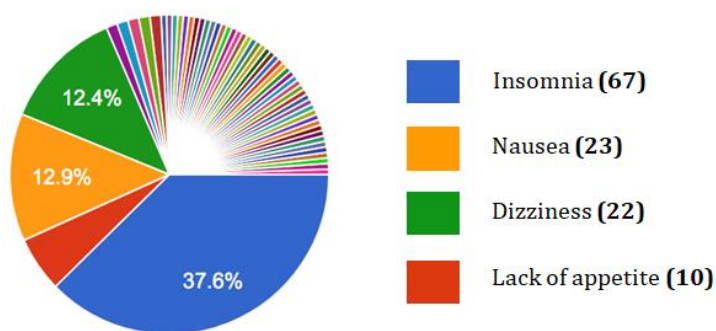


Chart 5: What are the symptoms of Panic and Anxiety Disorder?

As a final survey question, we wanted to see where on which news publisher our participants are following coronavirus news the most. Since we are using portal klix.ba as a reliable source and our content analyses is based on their coronavirus news we wanted to test the premise and to see if klix.ba is the most visited web portal in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the one where our participants are following coronavirus news the most. The question was set as follows: *On which web portals do you most often follow the news about the coronavirus?* As an answer, we have offered the 7 most important media houses in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Klix.ba, Faktor.ba, Avaz.ba, Radio Sarajevo, N1, Nova BH, Al Jazeera) plus the option other in case they were following news through some other sources. 298 participants answered this question. As we assumed the majority of participants 160 (%53,7) are following news about coronavirus on the portal klix.ba. 62 (%20.8) participants are following news about coronavirus on the N1 media house. The rest 27 percent was divided among other media houses. The results are shown in chart 6 below.

A Review of Covid News in Bosnia and Herzegovina

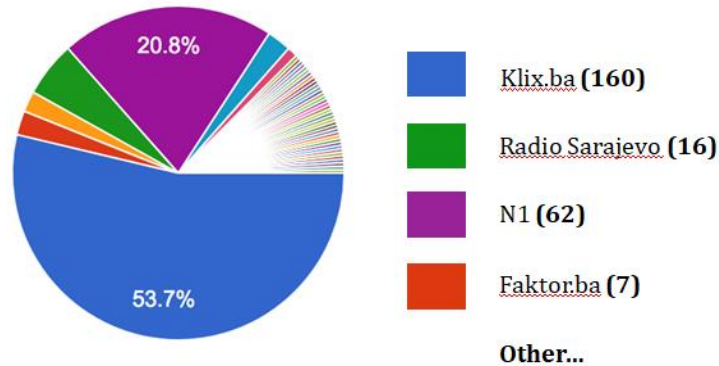


Chart 6: On which web portals do you follow the news about the Coronavirus the most?

When it comes to the content analyses we have examined the headlines of the coronavirus news in the periods from March – April and October – November on the web portal klix.ba to measure the number of comments and shares of the news having the data about daily infections and deaths in their headlines and body of the news. Furthermore, we were curious to find out the number of monthly published news about the coronavirus on the same portal. The cumulative results for all four months have presented in table 2 below. Results indicate that the shares and comments of daily news about new infections and deaths were the densest in March with 38552 shares and 8426 comments, as a reaction at 1595 published news during March. As a reminder, the first covid-19 positive case registered in Bosnia and Herzegovina was on March 5th. The following month, in April number of shares and comments, decreased by half (15326 shares and 4110 comments), when people already get to accept the existence of the virus in communities. The decrease in number of published news during the month of April was obvious. In total *klix.ba* published 1558 news during the month of April. Even though October and November were the months when the virus reached its peaks with new daily infections and death that did not increase shares and comments of news with daily statistics. October and November had nearly 30 000 fewer comments and shares than in March. The decrease was also noticeable in number of published news. The quantity of news was decreased in half, with 656 news in October and 520 news in November. The jump in shares and comments was very often connected with the news having in headlines phrases like ‘new record’, ‘record’, ‘the biggest number of’ and so on. With this said we can conclude that the number of comments and shares of the news which in headlines have the data related to the new infections and deaths did not increase as the pandemic progressed and reached its peaks in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Table 2: The total number of shares and comments per month on klix.ba about daily new infections and deaths in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Month	March	April	October	November
No. of published news	1959	1558	656	520
No. of shares	38552	15326	8887	8775
No. of comments	8426	4110	6251	4348

Interestingly, while the numbers of published news were decreasing the number of shares per article showed significant increase (table 3). In table 3 it is noticeable that 1558 news stories published in April received 15326 shares, or 9,83 shares per article. 520 news articles published in November received 8775 shares, which mean 16.87 shares per article. Therefore, the decrease in the number of news published in the period from April to November creates a situation as if the sharing has decreased, however, the share rate per news has not decreased during this time, on the contrary, it has shown a significant increase, and was much closer to the data from March with 19,67 shares per article.

Table 3: Number of shares per news

Month	March	April	October	November
No. of published news	1959	1558	656	520
Shares per news	19,67	9,83	13,5	16,87
Comments per news	4,3	2,63	9,52	8,3

When it come to number of comments per article a significant increase happened during the October and November. While March and April had 4,3 and 2,63 comments per article, that number jumped to 9,52 comments per article in October and 8,3 comments in November. This shows us an increased involvement of audience and readers with the covid news even if the number of published news were decreasing over time.

CONCLUSION

The results have confirmed the hypothesis of the research. With the survey method, we were wondering does the number of covid news published daily affects the reader's psychological state and the spread of panic among the public? The results showed that a majority of participants

A Review of Covid News in Bosnia and Herzegovina

experienced a certain level of anxiety, panic, and worries caused by the news about coronavirus. The second research hypothesis was also confirmed and showed us that the number of comments and shares of the news did not increase as the pandemic progressed in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The results showed that the shares and comments were the densest at the beginning of the pandemic in Bosnia and Herzegovina with the appearance of the first positive cases. The third hypothesis showed that over time, a significant increase in the number of shares and comments per article has been obvious. This fact shows that the interests and interaction of readers about the news about coronavirus has not diminished despite the decrease in the number of published news about covid. This was a research based on a first year of covid outbreak in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Proved hypothesis confirmed in how fragile society we are living. The culture of risk and fear has led us to doubt and question everything and everyone around us. Although previous pandemics have not been a lesson for humanity to prepare against an invisible enemy, it is hoped that the current pandemic will make world leaders aware of the importance and readiness to fight natural disasters. Also, the coronavirus pandemic showed a low percentage of the development of media literacy in our society, and the inability to clearly distinguish between information and misinformation, which affected the emergence of the first major infodemic. Research results are presented descriptively and can serve as a good base for future research and analysis.

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A Review of Covid News in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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