

The Framing of the COVID-19 Digital Green Certificate

Content analysis on the framing of the COVID-19 Digital Green passport by news media channels in Malta compared to Bulgaria

Bachelor's Thesis in Communication Science (BSc)

Prepared by
Kristofar Krikoryan
s2167654

Supervisor
Dr. Joris J. van Hof

Department
Communication Science
Faculty of Behavioural, Management and Social Sciences (BMS)

University of Twente

June 1st, 2022

Table of Contents

List of Tables & Figures.....	4
Abstract	5
1 Introduction.....	6
1.1 The span of COVID-19.....	6
1.2 The COVID-19 Digital Green Certificate.....	6
1.3 The influence of mass media.....	7
1.4 Research Scope/Interest something.....	7
2 Theoretical Framework.....	8
2.1 Communication during national crisis.....	8
2.2 Mass media framing.....	10
2.3 Malta and Bulgaria.....	11
2.4 Research Aim and Questions.....	16
3 Data Collection.....	17
3.1 Design.....	17
3.2 Corpus.....	17
3.3 Codebook.....	17
3.4 Reliability.....	20
4 Results.....	21
5 Discussion.....	36
5.1 Findings of framing within Bulgarian and Maltese news articles.....	36
5.2 Limitations and Future research.....	39
5.3 Practical Implications.....	40
5.4 Conclusion.....	40
6 Reference.....	42
7 Appendix.....	48

List of Tables & Figures

List of Figures

Figure 1 Timeline of positive COVID-19 cases in Malta (Cuschieri et al., 2020).....	13
Figure 2 COVID-19 cases per month in Bulgaria (Wikipedia contributors, 2022a).....	15
Figure 3 Comparison between Bulgarian and Maltese newspapers regarding COVID-19 Digital Green Certificate framing (obtained by ATLAS.ti)	21

List of Tables

Table 1.....	17
Table 2.....	19
Table 3.....	20

Abstract

Aim: The COVID-19 pandemic caused tremendous negative consequences for both societies and economies. For the purpose to recover from the crisis and resuming the normal way of operating, governments came up with the plan to implement COVID-19 Digital Green Certificates. Moreover, the goal of the certificate was to enable people to engage in social activities, visit venues and resume international traveling. In the last two years, the media channels had extensive news coverage regarding the pandemic and developments around it. Also, numerous studies point out that news can affect the behavior, opinions, and attitudes of the general public, especially in times of crisis. Many countries were successful in implementing the certificate, such as Malta. However, some countries did not achieve the wanted results and have a lower percentage of vaccinated people, like Bulgaria, with 30% of the total population. Therefore, a framing analysis of Maltese and Bulgarian newspapers is conducted. The goal is to find differences between the two countries regarding the framing of the COVID-19 Digital Green Certificate to the general public.

Method: For the purpose of the study, a codebook was developed. Moreover, it contains eight main code categories with 43 codes in total. The analysis combined inductive and deductive approaches to determine, which codes are appropriate for the study. The corpus was composed of 140 articles of which 68 were Maltese and 72 Bulgarian. The articles were retrieved from the database of Nexis Uni, previously known as LexisNexis. In order to test the reliability of the codebook, a second coder analyzed 10% of the total corpus. After an agreement between the two coders, the rest of the corpus was analyzed.

Findings: The data results revealed differences in the emphasis between Maltese and Bulgarian news publications. For example, Bulgarian news articles predominantly set their focus on conflicts between political parties, industries, and institutions. Despite the communicated advantages of the COVID-19 Digital Green Certificate, it appears the general public does not perceive them well because they were mostly communicated/expressed by politicians. The observed sentiment within Bulgarian news articles is mainly either negative or neutral, the positive sentiment is rare. In contrast, Malta emphasized saving the tourism industry and consistently communicated the advantages of implementing the certificate to the general public. Conflicts were also observed in Maltese articles between the hospitality industry and the government. Sometimes, it was related to criticism from the European Union due to discriminatory travel policies, which the government quickly resolved. However, the Maltese newspapers did not put great emphasis on the conflicts compared to Bulgaria. In overall, more positive sentiment was observed in Malta than in Bulgaria.

Conclusion: In conclusion, there are substantiative differences in framing the COVID-19 Digital Green Certificate. The results add to the framing theory. The Bulgarian findings correlate with other studies that in times of crisis, the news media channels prefer breaking news rather than reporting consistently and unambiguously. Malta proves that when the communication is transparent and consistent, it can be successful, and people adopt specific behaviors. Also, it is important for the receiver of the message to have trust in the sender, which was absent in Bulgaria.

Keywords: COVID-19 Certificate, Digital Green Certificate, Malta, Bulgaria, Frames, Newspapers, Crisis Communication, Agenda-Setting Theory

Content analysis on the framing of the COVID-19 Digital Green Passport by news media channels in Malta compared to Bulgaria

1 Introduction

1.1 The span of COVID-19

In late 2019, the Chinese government reported the first case of COVID-19 virus. Coronaviruses spread through saliva or discharge from the nose when infected individuals cough or sneeze (*World Health Organization, 2020*). Three months into 2020, the World Health Organization declared (WHO) the virus COVID-19 a pandemic. Since the announcement went live, the world we knew changed significantly. The virus affects the respiratory system, which causes fever, dry cough, and exhaustion. According to the World Health Organization (2020), when people get infected with COVID-19, they can experience mild to moderate respiratory difficulties. However, the group at utmost risk is the elderly and people with accompanying diseases, which in most cases leads to further complications in their recovery process. After China was heavily affected by COVID-19 European countries, Australia, the United States, and many more shared a similar fate. On the 15th of February, 2020, France reported the first casualty of COVID-19 in Europe (*BBC News, 2020*). Quickly after that, most of Western Europe was heavily affected by the first wave of COVID-19. Unfortunately, the population experienced multiple infectious waves over the course of two years. In order to prevent the spread of the virus, governments focused on limiting personal contact through lockdowns. People were allowed to go only to the supermarkets, public transportation was limited, international flights were canceled, people had to work from home as much as possible and businesses had to shut down.

1.2 The COVID-19 Digital Green Certificate

With the progress of the vaccination initiative, health institutions and governments began the discussion about the possible implementation of COVID-19 passports around February 2021. According to recent research by Gostin et al. (2021), digital health passes can offer both health and economic benefits. The economic benefits come through the gradual re-opening of communal venues such as gyms, restaurants, cinemas, theatres, and entertainment. Also, the certificates can be a stimulus for people to get vaccinated instead of regularly testing themselves before engaging in social activities. Within the European Union, these passports are named Digital Green Certificates. According to the European Commission, people can obtain the certificate if they meet one of the following requirements: The person is vaccinated, has a negative test result, or recovered from COVID-19 (Press Corner, 2021). Thus, its purpose is to prove that the individual cannot be a threat and spread the virus. The Digital Green Certificate allows a person to avoid additional COVID-19 restrictions when engaging in social activities, visiting venues, or traveling internationally. The document can be either digital or paper, and it must contain a unique barcode compatible with the technological systems implemented by the Member States because tourists use it to access the country, engage in social activities and venues (COVID pass certificate, 2022). Moreover, when authorities scan the certificate, it shows the name, date of birth, and type of vaccine. However, the available vaccines still lack transmission validity of COVID-19 due to the emergence of new pathogens, resulting in the World Health Organization issuing a recommendation to avoid the implementation of such certificates for international traveling (The Lancet Microbe, 2021).

1.3 The influence of mass media

The COVID-19 Digital Green Certificate was the key for many countries to reignite their economies. However, the successful implementation of the certificate requires people to support the idea. Also, it is necessary for countries to have moderate to high vaccine rates since being vaccinated is one of the main requirements to obtain the document. One way the general public informs itself about pressing issues in times of crisis is through the news media channels. According to Miles and Mores (2007), mass media can alter their audience's behaviors and opinions, especially in times of public danger such as natural disasters or pandemics. The analysis is possible because McCombs and Shaw (1972) have developed the agenda-setting theory. Moreover, the theory explains that when news media gives more attention to certain aspects of the issue, people perceive them as more pressing and adopt behaviors. Also, in times of crisis, communication with the general public should be clear, consistent, and unambiguous (Evensen & Clarke, 2011). However, according to Ogbodo et al. (2020), the news media coverage related to COVID-19 was inconsistently framed with fear and hope. Also, the practitioners concluded that the media predominantly focuses on breaking news rather than informing objectively and accurately. Similarly, another study by Milutinović (2021) concluded that the media in Serbia frames the COVID-19 pandemic in an inconsistent manner. According to the author, journalists did not publish independent, thorough, and conclusive news. Instead, the focus was on political differences and their attitudes towards handling the COVID-19 pandemic,

1.4 Research Scope/Interest something

Previous studies point that media can influence society by reinforcing opinions and behaviors, especially in times of crisis. For the purpose of better understanding the willingness of people to obtain the COVID-19 Digital Green Certificate, it is necessary to analyze how diverse news media channels frame the document. Therefore, Bulgarian and Maltese newspaper articles were chosen. The motivation to choose these two countries is because there is a number of differences. First, Malta is highly dependent on tourism since it accounts for 27% of the GDP, while in Bulgaria, it is 12%. Malta was at the forefront of adopting the document when the European Union started the talks about the implementation of certificates along with countries like Greece. The second and most important difference is the number of vaccinated people: Malta has approximately 90% while Bulgaria has only 30% of the total population. Thirdly, there are major differences related to the political landscapes. For instance, Bulgaria was in a state of conflict, which triggered mass protests, and people went to the streets to demonstrate against the ruling government in 2020 and 2021. In addition, there was tremendous dissatisfaction, distrust, and negativity towards the politicians due to corruption scandals. Compared to Malta, where the general public has a higher percentage of trust and satisfaction with their government. Also, there were no public protests demanding earlier elections in the country. In fact, Maltese businesses were in favor of implementing the COVID-19 Green Digital Certificate as an access requirement and supported the government, while Bulgarians were reluctant despite the communicated advantages. Therefore, it is interesting to see how the two countries framed the document and what they emphasize.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Communication during national crisis

During a pandemic, clear and consistent communication with the population is fundamental factor. Nowadays, technological advancements and mass media have become a crucial part of the daily life of people. Moreover, news media channels have significantly increased their public outreach due to the available technology. Also, the mediums used by mass media to communicate are highly diverse and rich with information (e.g., podcasts, newspapers, digital articles, blogs, etc.). The government and the relevant health institutions are responsible for sufficiently informing the general public about the developing situations and how they should act (Glik, 2007). During the COVID-19 pandemic, risk communication theories were the most widely applied responses (Macnamara, 2021). Therefore, a further elaboration on the strategy is necessary to understand better how mass media informs the general public in times of a pandemic.

Distress makes it more difficult for people to process information clearly and act upon it. Risk communication can be applied in different situations such as disasters and health crises. According to Lundgren and McMakin (2004), risk communication is described as “the interactive process of exchange of information and opinions among individuals, groups and institutions concerning a risk or a potential risk to human health or the environment” (p. 438). The strategy aims to sufficiently inform communities about possible risks during outbreaks or disasters and how to act to reduce the consequences (Glik, 2007). The communication is mainly done by government agents who are expected to be visible to the public since they act as first responders during crisis times (Pribble et al., 2010). Moreover, for the risk communication strategy to be effective and successful, health care workers' communication skills have to be addressed through courses. It is a necessity for government agents because it is their responsibility to report in a consistent, transparent and accurate way to the public. Also, because through successful communication lives can be saved. According to Sandman (1989), based on the severity of the risk and the public outrage, there are four types of risk communication approaches:

1. Low outrage, low hazard -
2. Low outrage, high hazard - Forceful engagement with people (e.g., climate change)
3. Medium outrage, medium hazard – This is related to local environmental issues in communities, which pose a threat to their normal way of living.
4. High outrage, high hazard – Crisis risk communication. For example during a pandemic when people are told to stay inside, wash their hands or avoid contact with people. This kind of communication requires to be transparent, accurate, consistent and applicable.

In late 1999 there was an outbreak of a virus called the West Nile Virus (WNV) in the United States. The contagious disease was rapidly spreading across the country and the cause for that was mosquito bites. People infected with WNV is highly possible to not experience any symptoms (*West Nile Virus*, 2017). However, in some cases it could lead to serious damages to the neurological system of people. For example a more vulnerable group is people above 50 years old and transplant patients. The government was tasked with the job to inform

sufficiently the general public about the possible health risks and how to mitigate the consequences. With the advance of time the spread affected almost every single state of the country. Therefore, sufficient communication from government agents and news media was necessary. In research from Evensen and Clarke (2011), personal and social efficacy information in news media coverage during the endemic outbreak in the US on the infectious disease health risks are studied. Moreover, the authors concluded that print newspapers ultimately fail to communicate sufficiently the health risks. In order to improve, the presented information must be clear and objective when informing the general public. According to Bandura (1997), personal efficacy relates to the ability to engage in an action/behaviour that can lead to expected results, such as to reduce unwanted health consequences during emergencies. Moreover, social efficacy in the case of news media reporting have to do with call-out actions from government agents towards communities at risk or the general public. The social efficacy messages give an overview of the actions intended to be taken by government entities to tackle public health hazards. Mesch et al. (2012) found proof that in spite of the decrease in interest towards news media channels, people still were forming opinions and adopting behaviours due to media disclosures. One way mass media can play a part in the forming of social efficacy is by nurturing “ a sense of collective identity and empowerment so that individuals and groups come to believe that their actions can make a difference” (Nicodemus, 2004, p. 163) However, the messages can be used as a tool to hold health care agents responsible if they fail to act as promised or for the acts that have been taken but the results are not what the general public expected. According to Evensen and Clarke (2011), journalists are obligated to critically evaluate information efficacy before including it in their news media coverage reports on infectious diseases. Also, for the risk communication strategy to be successful, it is necessary for government agents and health officials to exchange information with journalists about health risks. Thus, continuously ensuring high levels of efficacy information. If the communication between the relevant parties responsible for informing the general public fails, it results only in the spread of knowledge without prompting the expected public behavior (Fox et al., 2006). In times of natural disasters and health hazards, communication strategies must be carefully planned to include people from different social backgrounds and economic levels. For example, in 2005, an unsuccessful risk communication prior to the flooding of New Orleans resulted in a considerable proportion of the evacuees to have missed the orders to leave on time (Brodie et al., 2006). Most of the people who have missed the critical calls for evacuation were families with low-income with African American origin. Moreover, the cause for the ineffectiveness of the risk communication can be related to complex messages (e.g., vague terms), distrust towards the sender, receiver and media problems (e.g., oversimplifying and overemphasizing) (Covello et al., 1986). During the COVID-19 pandemic, both the infectious disease and the many alternative vaccines are considered as public health risks. Moreover, after obtaining a vaccine shot, people were given “corona passports” as proof of their vaccination, which gave the holder of this passport more access and freedom. Therefore, it resulted in massive vaccination campaigns calling for action (societal efficacy) by depicting the benefits to the general public. However, the excessive use of many informational mediums to form opinions and behaviours results in overloading both information and concern among the population, which can be an example of message and receiver problems

(Farooq et al., 2020). Additionally, in one of the recent WHO reports on COVID-19, it is further stated that the population faces a tremendous “infodemic”, which makes it harder to filter the available information in the mass media about the pandemic (WHO, 2020b). Therefore, it is essential to choose the correct approach to dispatch the information to the general public in a transparent, honest, and concise way.

2.2 Mass media framing

In times of a pandemic or crisis, mass media is one of the tools used by the general public to inform themselves about the situation and how to act upon it. The COVID-19 outbreak affected health institutions, governments, and businesses. Also, there was a negative influence on peoples' social, economic, and mental wellbeing. The stress people experienced caused by the uncertainty of how the situation unfolds was further fueled by the constant news media coverage and the extensive lockdowns imposed by governments. Therefore, it is necessary to look at how and what frames the mass media use to draw up the crisis and the possible solutions to the occurring problems.

One of the functions of mass media is to inform the general public about pressing issues and concerns. According to Miles and Mores (2007), news media channels are responsible for sufficiently advising the population in times of public danger. Also, the authors reflect on the fact that media channels can assist people when they form opinions and adopt specific behaviors, especially when it comes to health hazards. During the COVID-19 pandemic, healthcare agents and political party leaders were in charge of the continuous update on the situation. This way of communication with the general public can be related to the multi-step flow theory suggested by Katz and Lazasfeld (1995). The proposition reflects the message exchange between opinion leaders, the general public, and the mass media. According to Milutinović (2021), the news media channels in Serbia frame the COVID-19 pandemic inconsistently because of political influences. Moreover, this causes further strain on society because it creates information overload. Also, the politicians have used the crisis to gain more support by expressing controversial attitudes and opinions, which negatively influenced the general public's perception. Unfortunately, this creates further division in society and makes it harder to support the government and adopt behaviors. A recent study by Ogbodo et al. (2020) revealed that news media channels tend to frame the COVID-19 pandemic simultaneously with fear and hope. Moreover, the focus of the news was on captivating headlines, which contributes to the inconsistent and ambiguous reporting. In turn, the general public perception of the pandemic alters, and it causes further challenges. Also, the intended behavioral change, such as getting vaccinated or maintaining social distancing, fails because of the news reporting. To support the claims, research by Shih et al. (2008) has found evidence that in times of health hazards, news media channels give more awareness to matters that are easy to exaggerate, especially political altercations. The most distinguishable frames in their analysis related to the framing of diseases (Mad cow & Avian flu) are conflict and reassurance. Mostly, this way of framing was due to differences in opinions and attitudes of scientists and politicians. From the analysis it becomes clear that news media channels focus their attention towards distinguishable conflicts, which can also be described as breaking news. However, news framing can have positive effects on society. For example, recent research by Bhatti et al. (2022) revealed that the Pakistani print media emphasize reassurance and the advantages of adopting a specific behavior (e.g., face mask, vaccination, gaining access based on a COVID-19 certificate). Moreover, this way of framing the pandemic reinforces the attitudes of people positively, which can help to further explain the high number of fully vaccinated, which is 62% of the total population. Also, according to

the researchers, the Pakistani newspapers report about the COVID-19 pandemic unambiguously, which positively reinforces their attitudes and opinions. Another study by Steffen and Cheng (2021) found effects of news framing related to social distancing and face masks. According to their findings, people are more likely to adopt specific behaviors during the COVID-19 pandemic when framing is related to gains or losses. Research by Ophir et al. (2021) has found positive effects of news media framing during the pandemic. Moreover, the study concluded that when the media applies containment frames related to lowering the risks of getting infected, people would stay at home as much as possible. Thus, the infectious rates would go down because people adopt specific behavior.

One way to better understand the influence on the general public is to apply the agenda-setting theory. The theory was first brought to life by McCombs and Shaw (1972), and since then, it has been widely used by many academic practitioners to study how mass media frames issues. The rationale behind the ideology is that when the news media gives more attention and coverage to specific matters, the general public will perceive these issues as more pressing, can form opinions and adopt behaviors. Moreover, the agenda-setting theory divides into three categories: Policy, Media, and Public agenda (Coleman et al., 2008). Policy agenda relates to issues within politics, economy, or science. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many new policies were introduced and implemented regarding safe traveling. Also, a lot of analyses were conducted by experts on the economic consequences of shutting down businesses and restricting international travel. Thus, the urge to find ways to restart economies started to emerge. The public agenda forms through free access to the news articles, while the media agenda contributes to it by deciding which printings to release to the general public. According to recent research by Frangogiannis (2020), mass media prefers to reflect on COVID-19 issues with a dramatic approach rather than objective and accurate.

As illustrated by the examples above media attention can have negative and positive effects when people form opinions and adopt behaviors. By manipulating the media agenda, governments can attempt to reduce the damage of the crisis. However, in times of pandemic, the communication with the general public must be transparent, factual, and truthful to avoid ambiguity and trigger the adoption of wanted behaviors. When news media channels emphasize issues, the general public views can be altered in a negative way. To conclude, "framing analysis shares with agenda-setting research a focus on the relationship between public issues in the news and the public perceptions of these issues" (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p.93).

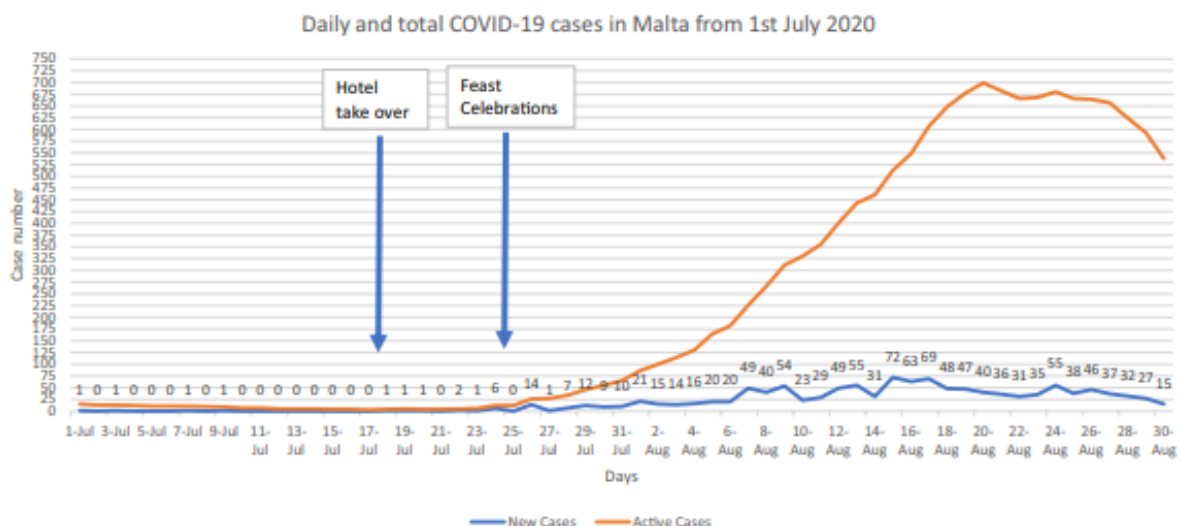
2.3 Malta and Bulgaria

2.3.1 Malta

The closure of numerous borders significantly affected countries especially those depending on tourism. Malta is a relatively small island with a total population of 525 285, located close to Italy within the Mediterranean sea. During the first wave of COVID-19, the Maltese government controlled the situation, and the number of cases per 100 000 was relatively small (Cuschieri et al., 2020). The first case within the country was reported on the 7th of March, 2020 (Times of Malta, 2021). The infected people turned out to be a family from Italy, with their daughter aged 12 tested positive first. Unfortunately, a month later, the first victim of the pandemic in Malta was reported to be a 92-year-old woman. On the 11th of March, the Maltese government declared the closure of their borders, allowing only cargo transportation (Al Jazeera, 2020) Moreover, the announcement stated that returning passengers from France, Germany, Switzerland, Spain, and Italy are obliged to fulfil a 14-day quarantine. The

next day was followed by additional measures to battle the spread of the virus within the island. Moreover, it resulted in the closure of all study institutions, elderly centers, prohibiting any religious activities and gatherings, football behind closed doors, and no political activities. On the 22nd of March, 2020, the Minister of Health declared additional steps to halt the contamination (Al Jazeera, 2020). Moreover, they outlined the necessity to close non-essential stores (e.g., appliance stores), non-essential services (e.g., restaurants, gyms, bars), prohibit social gatherings, and people aged above 65+ to stay at home. The announcement led to stress resulting in mass queues of people looking to stock on food and other supplies in front of supermarkets. People who broke the imposed government regulations, such as mandatory quarantine or social meetings, must pay a 3000€ fine. Thus, marking the first lockdown of the small island country Malta. The tourism sectors accounts for 27% of the total GDP of the country (Reuters, 2021) After a month of restrictions, Malta gradually started to lift the imposed measures. The country's efforts to protect the population's health during the first COVID-19 wave were praised as successful and the best within the European Union (Urpani, 2020). Towards the end of May 2020, the country started to prepare for the summer season by gradually lifting the measures. Moreover, this was possible due to the observed low curb since the first COVID-19 case on the island, as seen in **Figure 1** (Ritchie, 2020a). In addition, a number of days without any reports of COVID-19 cases further stimulated the relaxation of restrictions. The transition was supported by media coverage regarding the developments of the situation. At the beginning of the first lockdown, Charmaine Gauci, the Superintendent of Public Health, used to have daily press conferences to update the population of Malta (Farrugia, 2021). Also, they were well perceived by the general public and she had received praises for handling the situation. After four months of lockdown, on the 1st of July, the governments announced the re-opening of bars, restaurants, gyms, and the airport (Borg, 2020). Thus, allowing Malta to begin their "transition phase" and restart its economy by slowly going back to "normal" life, opening up its borders, and allowing social activities and gatherings. During the re-opening ceremony of the country, the Tourism Minister of Malta stated that more than 81 flights are expected to the country within the first week (Malta Independent, 2020). Moreover, the predictions were further backed up by reports stating that around 20,000 tourists have arrived in Malta in the span of one week. However, this was possible due to the implemented airport travel measures. The policy contained mandatory face masks, thermal temperature scans, and thorough hand sanitizing upon arrival. However, a negative test was deemed unnecessary to grant tourists access to the country. As a result, Malta's economy slowly started to restart due to the surge of tourists and locals visiting restaurants, venues, and stores. However, the COVID-19 scenario from 0 reported cases swiftly changed, and the infectious quickly started to grow. The main reason for that was a series of mass events such as weekend pool parties followed by Catholic feast celebrations, both events amassing more than 800 people (Farrugia, 2020; Times of Malta, 2020). Moreover, this was possible because Malta did not have any restrictions on social events compared to other European countries, which resulted in alluring young people looking to party. After the rise in COVID-19 cases, sectors outside the healthcare were sending false messages such as that there are no issues, everything is under control and that they are looking to continue doing business (Cuschieri et al., 2020). However, this led to dissatisfaction among health practitioners who threatened to stop their services until there were restrictions on reckless social gatherings and events due to overloading of the healthcare system (Times of Malta, 2021). Following the turmoil, the government imposed restrictions, such as a maximum of 100 people indoors and 300 people outdoors. However, on the 7th of August 2020, barely two months after lifting most of the bans, the government reintroduced COVID-

19 measures. To fight back against the positive curb of cases, on the 17th of August, the government implemented stricter regulations such as mandatory face masks everywhere, negative tests upon arrival in Malta, and the ban of parties to halt the contamination (Cuschieri et al., 2020). Thus, marking the second wave of restrictions and COVID-19 for the small island country. Malta status as a country that fought well against the pandemic quickly changed. Moreover, the spike in cases led to many unfavorable outcomes for the economy. As mentioned before, the goal of lifting the restrictions was to stimulate and restart the economy. Unfortunately, Malta was labelled as a "high-risk" destination, and countries like the UK, Finland, and Italy imposed restrictions on tourists coming from there. Visitors from the UK are crucial to the Maltese economy since it is the country's largest market for tourism (Cuschieri et al., 2020). In addition, the second wave brought damages to the economy and put a lot of pressure on hospitals due to the growth in testing and the low rate of COVID-19 cases before the lift of restrictions. In March 2021, the government started the vaccination campaign on the island, intending to try to restart the economy by opening its borders and allowing tourists to come once again. For this purpose, Malta took an interesting approach to gain an advantage over other tourist destinations for summer 2021. For instance, the Tourism Minister announced that visitors from other countries who book a hotel between 3 to 5 stars would receive a financial gain of up to 200 euros (Reuters, 2021). However, the tourist sector faced challenges such as staff shortages and mandatory vaccines for NON-EU workers (Arena, 2021; Carabott, 2021). Despite the hurdles Malta was at the forefront to adopt the COVID-19 Digital Green Certificate from 1st of July, 2021, which is right before the start of the tourism season. It can be said that the small island country was successful in its initial plan to save the economy of the country by implementing the document. Another evidence is the high number of fully vaccinated people, which is approximately 90% of the total population (Ritchie, 2020b).



2.3.2 Bulgaria

Bulgaria is one of the oldest countries in the Balkans, founded in 681. Moreover, the country has a coastline in the face of the Black Sea, many mountains, and the Danube river passes. Bulgaria has a population of approximately 7 million people. However, in the past 15 years, the country has had a negative trend forecast regarding media freedom, trust in government, economics, healthcare, legislation and mortality rates. Also, Bulgaria is known for its corruption scandals and is characterized as one of the poorest countries in the European Union (*Bulgaria*, 2022). Currently the Tourism sector accounts for approximately 12% of the Bulgarian Gross Domestic Product (*Development and Importance of Tourism for Bulgaria*, 2021). The trust in the Bulgarian government during the ruling of the Prime Minister, Boyko Borisov, in the summer of 2020 was around 28%, which is significantly low. Last but not least, the percentage of people who have received at least 1 dose of a vaccine is 29,7% (Ritchie, 2020b).

At the start, the government of Bulgaria decided to take a centralized approach to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, this resulted in forming a crisis management team and structures led by the Prime Minister, Boyko Borisov. With the announcement from WHO that COVID-19 is a pandemic, the Bulgarian government limited the inbound and outbound passengers by closing its borders. The first two cases were reported on March 8, 2020. Moreover, the infected people were respectively a 27-years man and a 75-years lady from different cities. On March 11, 2020, the first casualty of the pandemic was reported to be a 66-years-old lady (Todorov, 2020). Two days later, the Bulgarian government voted unanimously to announce a state of emergency for one month. Moreover, it led to the complete shutdown of schools, malls, restaurants, non-essential stores, parks, and many businesses. The rate of infectious continued to rise steadily, which led to the implementation of checkpoints for leaving specific neighbourhoods identified as COVID-19 clusters in various cities. Also, on March 17, the first local lockdown was imposed on the mountain vacation village of Bansko (Yankov, 2022). By the end of April, the number of positive patients has reached 1,500 people. Thus, the Minister of Health came out with an announcement declaring mandatory face masks in public spaces such as transportation or supermarkets. However, the following day a massive public outcry against the news shared in a press conference held by General Mutafchiiski (chairman of the national crisis management team) marked the day resulting in the reverse of the face mask order. On May 14, the General erupted during an interview by angrily stating that the expectations are tons of people to die very soon. Also, he stated it is the news media outlets' fault because they keep asking doubtful questions regarding how the Crisis Management Team deals with the pandemic and the implemented policies, which undermines their efforts (Atanasova, 2020). Afterward, he proceeds by abruptly smashing the microphone into the ground and leaving the room. This specific event led to tremendous public dissatisfaction towards the Prime Minister and the Crisis Management Team. According to recent research by Džakula et al. (2022), communal trust declined due to the growth of political influence in decision-making and the adoption of policies. The experts who gave updates, suggestions, and opinions were perceived to be politically orientated, which resulted in further negativity towards the ruling government. Therefore, "information provided by national authorities became vague, unclear, and ambiguous, and concerns were raised about the accuracy of official information and the accountability of national authorities" (Džakula et al., 2022, p. 6). Several Health Act amendments threatened to consolidate power in the hands of the Minister of Health, who could solely decide to impose movement restrictions, which facilitated more negativity. With

the approaching summer, the Bulgarian authorities gradually started to lift the restrictions and resumed international flights under strict requirements. The Minister of Tourism encouraged the population to spend their summer vacation on the Bulgarian Black Sea coastline resorts with the goal of boosting the economy. Moreover, the appeal came after it became clear that because of the pandemic developments in other countries like the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Spain, and Italy, the tourists coming to Bulgaria are expected to decline significantly. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the summer of 2020 was marked by massive protests amassing around 500 000 people against the ruling government in multiple cities due to grown dissatisfaction with the Chief Prosecutor, the Prime Minister, and the crisis management team of Bulgaria (Velinova, 2021). People demanded earlier parliament elections and the immediate resignation of the Chief Prosecutor. Thus, the first COVID -19 wave and the summer of 2020 were filled with distrust and dissatisfaction towards the Bulgarian authorities. People continued to protest for 75 days in a row. Nevertheless, this negative trend continued until the end of 2020 and 2021 until there were new parliament elections. In November 2020, the second wave of COVID-19 infectious surged drastically compared to the initial wave in March (**Figure 2**). According to recent research by Rangachev et al. (2022), during the first pandemic wave, Eastern European countries like Bulgaria were not significantly affected compared to Western countries such as Spain, Italy, and the Netherlands, which have reported high mortality rates of 600 people per million by June 2020. However, the difference vanished once the second wave came, and countries all over Europe started to report high numbers of COVID-19 infections and deaths. The second wave of COVID-19 was marked by a lot of criticism for closing schools, restaurant and many other controversial decisions. Moreover, week in and out, the crisis management team announced new COVID-19 measures, which further fuelled the dissatisfaction among people and businesses. They had little to no time to react to the changes. The handling of the pandemic was used as a political campaign against the corrupt government. Also, many new upcoming parties were ensuring the general public that they would have a different approach. Moreover, this led to many heated debates and discussions. Thus, the COVID-19 crisis was used as a political tool for leaders to gain momentum and support from the population. In early 2021, there were several elections for new political leaders. However, the first three votes did not lead to the wanted results, and the parties involved did not reach an agreement and form a coalition. Moreover, this forced the President of Bulgaria to declare an interim government until the new elections and an agreement between the chosen political parties. Therefore, “good governance, underpinned by state capacity, political leadership, and community engagement, is key to responding effectively to a pandemic such as COVID-19 (Džakula et al., 2022, p. 6)”.

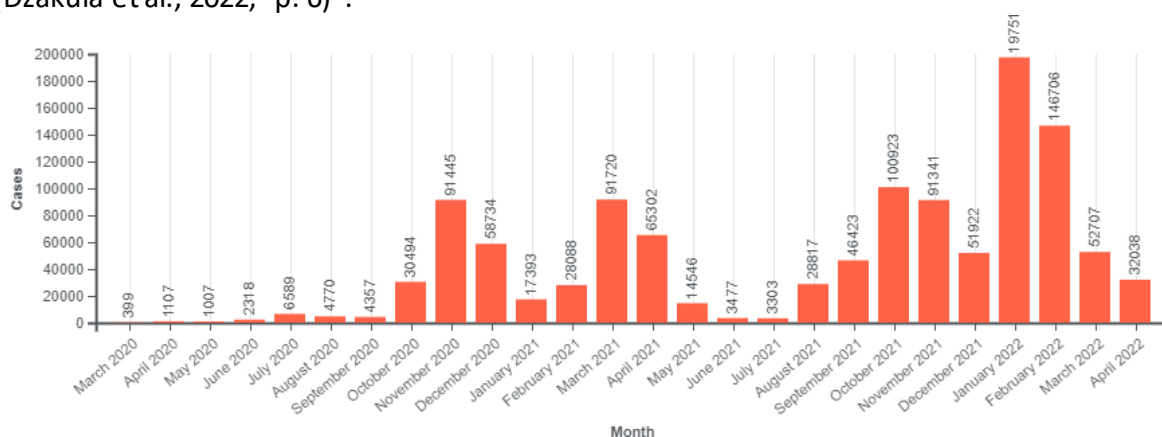


Figure 2 COVID-19 cases per month in Bulgaria (Wikipedia contributors, 2022a)

2.4 Research Aim and Questions

This research aims to provide insights regarding how news media channels frame the COVID-19 Digital Green Certificate. Thus, content analysis of Bulgarian and Maltese news articles was carried out. As mentioned above, there are a sufficient number of differences between the countries and how they handled the COVID-19 crisis. For instance, the Superintendent of Malta had been praised and was well perceived by the public, while the Crisis Management Team of Bulgaria was negatively accepted. Moreover, the scenario in Bulgaria during the COVID-19 pandemic was marked by protests and many controversial restrictions. People demanded change and did not like the political orientations to use the crisis as a tool to gain more support. Also, this caused further complications in how the general public perceives the ruling government and its decisions. Malta was praised during the initial wave of infectious, while Bulgaria maintained its negative status in handling the situation. Also, Malta is dependent on its tourism sector since 27% of the Gross Domestic Product comes from the industry, while in Bulgaria, it is 12%. Another significant difference is the number of vaccinated people in both countries. For example, in Malta, approximately 90% of the population has at least one vaccine dose, while in Bulgaria, it is only 30%. Despite the advantages, it seems Bulgarians are reluctant to get vaccinated. Although there is sufficient research on how the COVID-19 pandemic was framed in different countries, there are not many studies regarding the framing of the Digital Green Certificate. However, this can be related to the novelty of analysing the framing of the certificate. Therefore, it is interesting to see how the two countries framed the COVID-19 Digital Green Certificate.

RQ1: How is the COVID-19 passport framed to the public by news media channels in Malta and Bulgaria?

RQ2: What are the differences in framing the Digital Green Passport?

3 Data Collection

3.1 Design

In order to find out differences in news media framing of COVID-19 Digital Green Passports between Malta and Bulgaria, a comparative content analysis method will be applied. In this research, the approach consists of both qualitative and quantitative aspects. The focus will be on counting and measuring the frequencies of the relevant frames by newspapers (quantitative) and understanding the text (qualitative). Moreover, when analysing, it is essential to recognize the meaning of the text to form conclusions (Boeije, 2009). For the purpose of the study, content analysis is the most suitable approach because it allows for qualitative and quantitative address, provides insights into text interactions and meanings over time, follows a systematic procedure, and determines frequencies of frames. Thus, the results are expected to be of high relevance to the goal of the study.

3.2 Corpus

The selected corpus consists of N = 140 articles, 68 of them are Maltese newspapers in English, and the other 72 are Bulgarian news in their native language. Moreover, the news articles were retrieved from the database of NexisUni, previously known as LexisNexis. Several criteria were applied to select relevant news pieces for the purpose of the study. Moreover, the applications of keywords such as *COVID-19*, *COVID-19 certificate*, *Digital Green Certificate/Passport*, and *COVID-19 digital pass* were essential to obtain the articles. Also, a time period was necessary to filter the news because the talks about possible implementation of the COVID-19 Digital Green Certificate started approximately two months into 2021. More specifically, from the 1st of February, 2021, until 1th of June, 2022. The newspapers chosen for the purpose of the study can be found in **Table 1**. Moreover, the three Maltese publications are among the top 5 most read sources in the country (Ganado, 2021). Times of Malta finds itself on top of the rank list with the widest audience including students. All of the Maltese newspapers were obtained in English as it is the second official language of the country. In regards to the Bulgarian newspapers, Kapital and 24 Hours are the biggest daily newspapers. The articles that fit the search criteria were collected after thoroughly reading the content and sorted into folders.

Table 1

Overview of chosen newspapers for the content analysis

Maltese newspapers - 68	Bulgarian newspapers - 72
Malta today – 23	Kapital - 16
Malta Independent - 25	Dnevnik - 28
Times of Malta - 20	24 hours - 29

3.3 Codebook

After careful selection of the corpus, the codebook necessary for the content analysis of Maltese and Bulgarian newspapers was composed (**Table 2**). Moreover, it contains

both deductive and inductive coding methods. According to Boeije (2009), the deductive approach consist of already existing codes used in previous academic researches while the inductive relates to codes, which are defined throughout the analysis. Due to the novelty of researching how the COVID-19 Digital Green Certificate is framed, both approaches are necessary to be applied in order to achieve sufficient data results.

In the codebook, the first two codes *1. Newspapers* and *2. Stakeholders* are used as form codes and are applied to the whole article. Moreover, for the purpose of analysis the following codes by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) *5.1 Conflict*, *5.2 Human Interest*, *5.3 Economic Consequences*, *5.4 Morality* and *5.5 Responsibility* were applied. The codes are used in multiple researches in the context of mass media framing during crisis (Ogbodo et al., 2020; Bhatti et al., 2022). In a research by Shih et al. (2008), the following frames were identified consequence, uncertainty, action, reassurance, conflict. Based on the goal of the study and reading through the articles only the frames *5.6 Consequence*, *5.7 Reassurance*, *5.8 Conflict* were chosen to be part of the codebook. Similarly to the codes that were earlier identified by Semetko & Valkenburg (2000), these so called dominant frames by Shih et al. (2008) are used in many content analysis related to crisis communication (Bhatti et al., 2022). Based on a research by Bhatti et al. (2022), some of the codes in the codebook were adapted. For instance, the codes *5.9 Collective Action* and *5.10 Individual action* were considered as important because in times of crisis there are multiple calls from politicians to the population to take individual steps such as to maintain 1.5 meters distance, wear face-mask, quarantine, and get vaccinated. Moreover, the collective action relates to calls for steps or actions that are already taken by governments, institutions or NGOs. Also, the code *4. Contextual Frames* with subcodes *4.1 Social*, *4.2 Economic*, *4.3 Political*, *4.4 Science* was derived from the research of Bhatti et al. (2022). They were considered as important due to the diverse nature of the news articles and their focus, which allows for further comparison between the two countries newspapers. The code *5.11 Information about the certificate/vaccination campaign* is inductive based on reading through the articles. According to Kahneman and Tversky's (1979) prospect theory, the application of frames during crisis related to gains and loss may influence the perception of people towards the implementation of regulations and restrictions. Therefore, code *6. Prospect frames* with subcodes *6.1 Gains* and *6.2 Loss* was chosen to be part of the codebook. It is stated that the population would perceive the regulations better if the gains are well expressed and vice-versa. Another inductive code that was developed throughout the analysis is the *7. Sentiment towards the certificate/vaccines* with subcodes *7.1 Positive* and *7.2 Negative*. Moreover, this code was considered necessary because after reading through the articles, it became evident that people share their views and attitudes towards the COVID-19 Digital Green Certificate. Also, the decision to include vaccines as part of the code was made because a person is required to get vaccinated in order to obtain the certificate. The codes *8. General Information* and *3. Sentiment of the article* with subcodes *3.1 Positive*, *3.2 Neutral*, *3.3 Negative* were generated by inductive approach. Moreover, the sentiment of articles was included because it shows how the media reports COVID-19 certificates and allows for comparison between Maltese and Bulgarian newspapers. The following codes were applied to the whole article *1. Newspaper*, *3. Sentiment of the article*, *4. Contextual Frames*, and *2. Stakeholders*. It is important to note that more than one *4. Contextual frame* and *2. Stakeholders* could be applied to an article. Moreover, the rest of

the frames stated within the codebook are applied either to segments of the news articles or whole paragraphs. In order to come to the final version of codebook, approximately 15 articles were test-coded to see if the frames fit. For the purpose, both Maltese and Bulgarian publications from the corpus were analyzed. This was conducted twice in order to revise the codebook and discover possible limitations. Lastly, the software Atlas.ti was used for all coding necessities.

Table 2

Codebook

Main code	Sub-code	Description
1. Newspaper	Malta Today	
	Malta Independent	
	Times of Malta	
	Kapital	
	Dnevnik	
	24 Chasa	
2. Frames	Conflict	Conflict between individuals, groups or organizations
	Human interest	Emotional/personal angle to the presentation of an event
	Morality	Moral side
	Economic consequence	Financial consequences for individuals, groups, organizations or countries
	Responsibility	Someone who is held responsible for the cause or the solution to the problem
	Consequences	Number of people recovered/ infected/ administered in the hospitals, economic/ social impact, social/political issues or discussions stimulated from the COVID-19
	Travel/Tourism	Travel bans, international/local restrictions, COVID-19 impact on tourism industry, lifting of restrictions related to tourism/ travel both locally and internationally. Information related to travel regulations & restrictions.
	Collective Action	Call for action or steps taken by NGO, governments, corporations, scientists, institutions, universities.
	Individual action	Call for action such as 1,5 meter distance, face-mask, handsanitizer, get vaccinated, stay at home etc.
	Reassurance	Underlying the success and attempts of governments to gain their trust/confidence in how the COVID-19 pandemic is handled. Providing necessary help and support such as testing, hospital capacity, workforce, financial help etc. Sharing scientific information to further back up the implementation of policies.
	Information about the certificate	How to obtain it, required number of vaccine doses, validity when a person has recovered, validity, gained access to social places like malls, cinemas, theatres, workplaces and etc.
	General Information	Capacity of social places and hospitals, when schools reopen, opening of new testing locations information that is not directly related to the certificate, reports about new and upcoming regulations
3. Sentiment towards the certificate/ vaccination	Positivity	
	Negativity	
4. Sentiment of the article	Positive	
	Neutral	
	Negative	
5. Contextual Frames	Social	
	Economic	
	Political	
	Science	
6. Stakeholders	Politicians	
	Healthcare workers	
	Celebrities	
	Companies	
	Institutions	
	Scientists	

7. Prospect gains	Gains	Positive outcome/positive action or what is gained by taking action
	Loss	Negative outcome/action or what is lost by failing to take action.
8. General Information		

3.4 Reliability

After composing the final version of the codebook, it was necessary to ensure reliability. For this purpose, it was essential to find a second coder who could understand both languages, English and Bulgarian. In order to conduct the reliability test, a corpus of 15 articles in total from both countries was assembled. Afterward, the sample corpus was forwarded to the second coder. The objective of inter-coder reliability is to find to what degree the two coders agree in terms of coding the text. Moreover, the exact number of 15 articles represents approximately 10% of the whole corpus (n=140), which is the requirement for inter-coder reliability (Boeije, 2009). Also, for the results to be sufficient is necessary to calculate Krippendorff's alpha for all codes. For the purpose, the software Atlas.ti provides tools for immediate computation of the Krippendorff's alpha, which is convenient. The exact results from the inter-coder reliability can be found in **Table 2**. Due to all values being higher than .7, the agreement between the two coders and the reliability of the developed codebook is considered to be sufficient

Table 3

Results from inter-coder reliability (obtained by ATLAS.ti)

Main Codes	Krippendorff's alpha
1. Newspapers	1
2. Stakeholders	.716
3. Sentiment of the article	.935
4. Contextual Frames	.974
5. Frames	.792
6. Prospect Frames	.829
7. Sentiment towards certificate/vaccines	.953
8. General Information	.842

4 Results

This chapter presents the outcome of the performed content analysis on Bulgarian and Maltese newspapers and how they framed the COVID-19 Digital Green Certificate. The results of analyzing newspapers will be discussed in systematic manner depicting the differences in framing. Also, tables showing the frame frequencies within the articles are included. In the end, overall comparison on frames used by the two countries is presented (**Figure 3**).

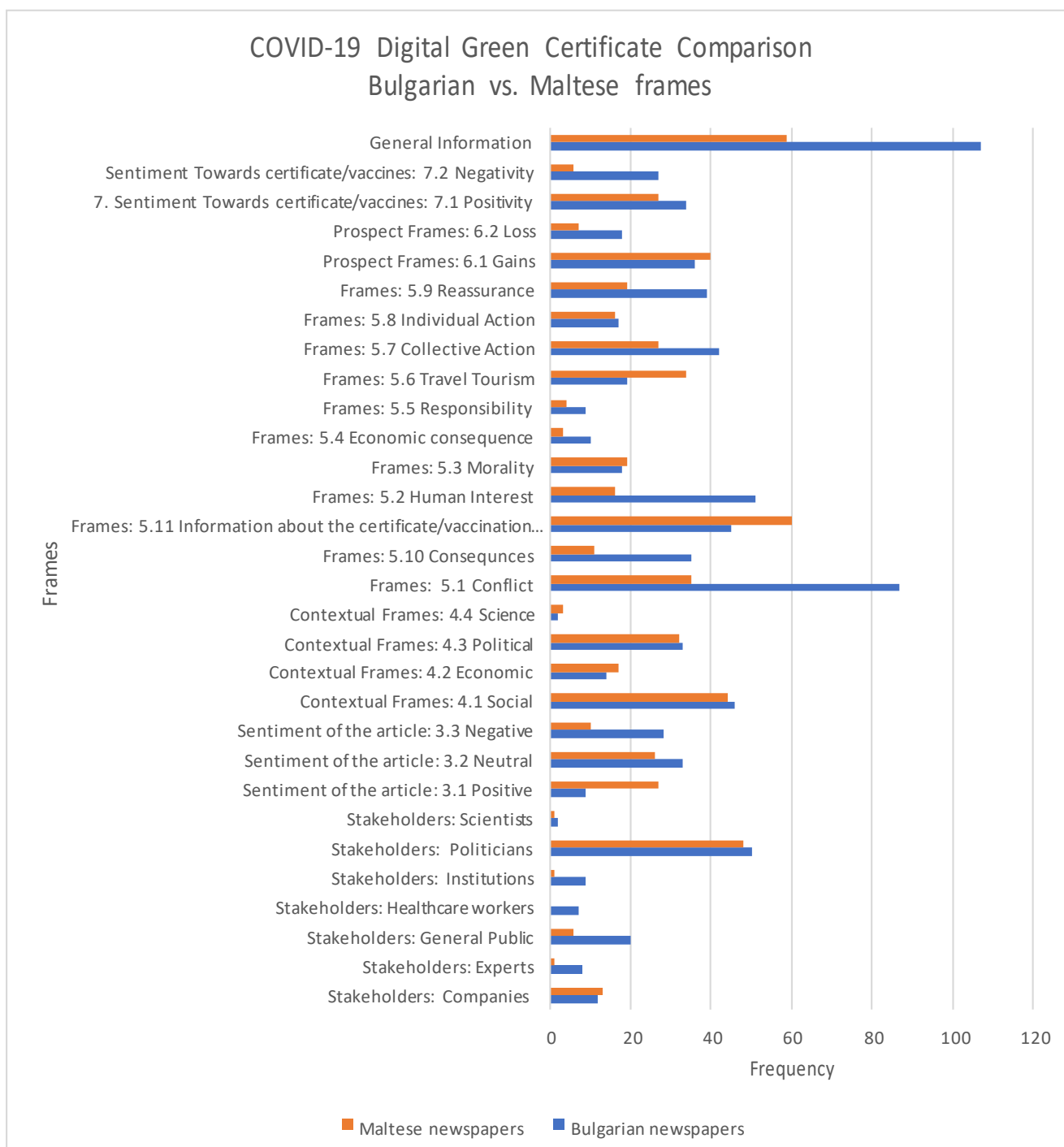


Figure 3 Comparison between Bulgarian and Maltese newspapers regarding COVID-19 Digital Green Certificate framing (obtained by ATLAS.ti)

General Information

Firstly, the results of the content analysis on Bulgarian newspapers will be discussed. The first thing that stands out by looking at **Figure 3** is that the General Information frame (n=108) is prevalent. For instance, an article written by *Kapital* states the following “After the introduction of the new measures, businesses try to organise themselves testing locations but it is not easy. In the middle of the weak Bulgaria woke up with new measures”. Another Bulgarian newspaper *24 Chasa* writes “In the last few days in front of the vaccinations centres in Termini, Rome. It is observed a significant increase of people who came to receive their first vaccine dose”.

The General Information (n=59) frame is observed quite frequently in Maltese news articles. For instance, *Malta Today* reports “Several speakers referred to delays in delivering Astra Zeneca vaccines and to today's discovery of almost 30 million doses in an Italian factory, with many speakers calling for legal action against the manufacturer. Others warned against an export ban due to the risk of retaliatory measures that could result in further delays [...]”.

Sentiment towards vaccines

The sentiment towards vaccines observed in the Bulgarian newspapers is almost equal, negative (n = 27) and positive (n = 34). Moreover, the negative sentiment (n=27) represents the attitudes of businesses and the general public. For instance, *Kapital* writes “The introduction of green certificates as a pass for many public places and indoor activities has aroused dissatisfaction among businesses and consumers”. Another example of negativity towards the certificate is found in another publication from *Kapital* by stating the following “The decision of the health department is rather controversial from a medical point of view and has a clear pre-election taste. It comes days before the upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections, and the vote of those who do not want to be vaccinated and follow anti-epidemic rules definitely carries weight”. However the positive sentiment (n=34) is slightly higher, which was mainly shared by politicians such as Ursula von der Leyen and other Bulgarian parties that are in favor of vaccinations and certificates. For example, *Kapital* writes “We had a lot of long discussions, a lot of expert discussions and conversations. We can already say that we have a decision to introduce such certificates, Health Minister Stoycho Katsarov told reporters today. The purpose of this new green certificate is to be in possession of people who are to be well protected from the virus and also from the next mutation”. Another example of positive sentiment is found in a publication from *24 Chasa* “Prof. Argirova also commented that the order for the introduction of green certificates in our country is wonderful, but it is very late. In the Maltese publications, the positive sentiment towards the certificate/vaccines (n=27) prevails over the Negative (n=6) one. In an article published by *Malta Today* a detailed information about the certificate is shared with the following text “The digital green certificate will be available free of charge in paper and digital form. It will work in three ways: - It will give proof that the person has been vaccinated or has had a positive result on a test where the COVID-19 has been cured and has antibodies - It will be a question of showing that this document is recognizable in all the member states - This certificate will help member states to guarantee the full freedom of movement of their citizens in a safe, responsible and reliable manner”. Also, here it can be seen that the advantages of having such certificate are described towards the end of the quotation. Another article from *Malta Today*, which expresses positive sentiment (n=27) states “The government will be announcing measures on Friday which will see people being admitted to certain events against a COVID-19 vaccine certificate,

Deputy Prime Minister Chris Fearne said on Thursday. Fearne said this will allow for social and cultural life to make a gradual return following the pandemic". The negative sentiment (n=6) is found within an article from *Malta Independent*, which covers the unfortunate story of a tourist by writing the following "Writing on Twitter, he said he was "so gutted" to discover that this would not be enough to allow him into the country. He said: I am fully vaccinated, had a negative PCR test yesterday but I had to cancel my trip. Malta eventually announced that it would be accepting the NHS digital certificate as proof of vaccination. However, it was too late for Holland as the news came just as his flight as landing without him on it". One more example of negative experience is found within *Times of Malta*, the article reflects on a personal story by writing "It is not even possible to access the e-ID. The result is error, error, error. Our last dose was nearly a month ago, so enough time has elapsed. 145 is of no help whatsoever. An absolute joke. It is extremely time-consuming and frustrating, especially since we need to travel".

Prospect Frames

During the analysis of Bulgarian newspapers it became evident that publications include both Prospect frames: Gains (n=36) and Loss (n=18). Moreover, the prospect frame, Gains, was applied twice as much as the Loss frame. For instance, *Kapital* says "After a few days of hesitation, the Ministry of Health decided to introduce a regime in which access to a number of sites and activities will have only people with the so-called. green certificate, i.e. vaccinated or ill". Another example of what people can gain by getting vaccinated is found in another article from *Kapital* by stating "With this "digital green certificate", citizens will be able to travel to member states without being quarantined upon arrival". However, the analysis also distinguished that newspapers write about what the general public can lose if they fail to take the necessary actions or what it has already been lost. For instance, *24 Chasa* reflects on a personal story of a person who is unable to receive the Digital Green Certificate with the following text "Todor is in the queue of dozens of patients who cannot receive a green certificate. He contracted COVID-19 in August and was admitted to hospital". The newspaper *Kapital* describes the loss with the following "Nevertheless, the new peak is received with great anxiety. On the one hand, because there are enough unvaccinated people locally to fill the hospitals, and this is already a fact in the regions of Austria, the Netherlands and Belgium". Also, *Kapital* writes in another article "The infection is particularly acute in children between the ages of 4 and 12 who have not been vaccinated. A similar trend is observed in Germany, which leads to questions whether to impose lockdown measures".

The Prospect frame Gain (n=40) has a high frequency within the Maltese newspapers. For example, *Malta Today* writes about the advantages of the COVID-19 certificate with the following text "The Digital Green Certificate proposed by the European Commission can help guarantee free movement within the European Union and support the much-needed recovery of the travel and tourism sector, a majority of the MEPs who took the floor said." Another example of what can be gained, is illustrated by *Times of Malta* by writing "Malta joins Greece in pushing for EU-wide COVID-19 vaccine certificate. PN MEP Roberta Metsola has also called for the issuing of vaccine certificates, commending Fearne's position on the matter. We've seen with the rollout of Passenger Locator Forms and different apps how difficult it can be to get states to agree to common forms, so it is imperative that we do this now in time for when a critical mass of Europeans have been vaccinated. "Proof of immunity will mean our economies can open up safely, quickly and in confidence - meaning we can offer

a lifeline to industries so many families depend on". First, this paragraph is characterized by a Collective Action (n=27) frame then the advantages of implementing the certificate are stated by the politician. However, during the analysis the Prospect frame Loss (n=7) occurred relatively low compared to Bulgaria, which applied the loss frame (n=18) more than double. For example, The Malta Independent reports the following "The Malta Tourism Authority warned Wednesday that anyone arriving in Malta without proof of having received a European-approved vaccine would be forced to quarantine in a hotel and pay a minimum accommodation fee of 1,400 euros (\$1,656) per room". This is a clear representation of what are the consequences when people fail to meet the requirements and take the necessary steps imposed by the government to enter the country. Another similar example but this time what does the Maltese airport loses writes *Malta Independent* "Malta International Airport is being placed at a significant disadvantage when compared to other European airports, which to date are all accepting the vaccination certificate validity period as stipulated by the European Commission," an MIA spokesperson said. Given that Malta is the only Member State which has shortened the validity period of COVID-19 vaccination certificates, the Superintendent of Public Health has imposed an unnecessary hurdle for Maltese residents to travel, together with undermining consumer confidence for the tourism industry during this already very challenging winter period". This piece of text is also marked with conflict (n=35) between the Maltese government and the airport, which results in negative consequences for the tourism industry.

Reassurance

During the analysis of the Bulgarian newspaper, another widely used frame was Reassurance (n=39), which was mostly done in the presence of Politicians (n=48). In comparison, Malta applied the Reassurance frame (n=19) two times less than Bulgaria. For instance, the Bulgarian publication *Kapital* writes "We continue the change: From November, first-line medics will receive BGN 1,200 each. This assistance should be continued, but applied in an effective manner. GERB: With the return of the old methodology for the bonuses on the first line. Another important point is that all medical institutions directly involved in the battle with COVID-19 should receive funding for the activity up to 100% of the forecast budget". Moreover, "We continue the change" is the current ruling party in Bulgaria, while GERB is opposition. However, it can be seen both political parties try to reassure the frontline healthcare workers that they are doing their best to reward their hard work and dedication to save lives. Similar example of reassurance is found within a publication of *Malta Today* "In terms of funding for COVID-19 tests, the European Commission will mobilise at least €100 million under the Emergency Support Instrument for the purchase of tests for SARS-CoV-2 infection for the test certificates. This should particularly benefit persons who cross borders daily or frequently to go to work or school, visit close relatives, seek medical care, or to take care of loved ones. It was also agreed that, if necessary, additional funding over and above the original €100 million should be mobilized, subject to approval by the budgetary authorities." Another example of reassurance is again presented by the Bulgarian newspaper of *24 Chasa* by writing "In the light of recent scientific studies, the effectiveness of the AstraZeneca vaccine has been proven. Of course, to return to normal life and travel more quickly. This can only take effect when all aspiring European citizens have been vaccinated. So, with united efforts, all the Member States are currently working hard to get out of the pandemic". Instead of financial help, here the focus of reassurance is the effectiveness of the vaccines and that their advantages. In another article by *Malta Today*, the reassurance frame (n=19) appears again but the focus is towards the system compatibilities to recognize other certificates with the following "The health minister reassured that staff at the Malta

International Airport are equipped with the QR code scanners needed to verify vaccine certificates digitally. He said the problems concerning the UK COVID-19 certificate had been sorted. Parliamentary secretary Alex Muscat said the security system had been strengthened to align with EU requirements". One more example of Maltese reassurance is again within another article by Malta Today, which is related to the tourism negotiations necessary for the island country to re-open its tourism by writing "Bartolo confirmed that talks with other countries were still underway in a bid to reach bilateral agreements that would see both countries recognise each other's vaccination certificates. As a country, he warned, Malta could definitely not afford to lose control of the pandemic and risk having to reintroduce restrictions after working so diligently to roll out its vaccination programme. This is not a numbers game and we want to ensure that it never will be again, Bartolo said. It is obvious that as a country we need to rethink our tourism product and offering and we will be focusing on finding a sustainable balance between quality and quantity." Bartolo insisted quality should become Malta's new standard in the tourism sector." In another article from the Bulgarian newspaper *24Chasa*, the current Minister of Health, Asena Serbezova, reassures the general public by saying "The strategic goal of the campaign is to limit the number of deaths due to COVID-19, the number of hospitalizations, as well as to limit the long-term consequences for the health of citizens. The campaign is in implementation of the measures set out in the National Operational Plan for Tackling the Pandemic of COVID-19". Again the publication of *24 Chasa* reflects on reassurance of financial help from the government with the following framing of the text "The third recommendation of BRA is to pay benefits for employees who have been vaccinated and want to work, but are forced to stay at home because of their children's online education. The state has provided a monthly allowance for families with children up to 14 years of age who study remotely or do not go to school and kindergarten due to COVID-19 quarantine". With the reassurance frame the government institutions try to restore the trust by stating or re-stating the steps taken to prevent people from getting infected and to recover financially from the crisis.

Individual Action

In Bulgaria the analysis revealed that the calls for Individual Action (n=17) are relatively lower than the Collective Action (n=42). The newspaper *Kapital* writes about the call for individual action from the Minister of Health with the following citation "If the measures do not work, the national lock remains the only option, I want to call on people to get vaccinated and to comply with the measures. If, however, we do not comply, we cannot keep or reduce the cases, the only measure remains national to date, said Dr. Katsarov". Another example is from a publication from *24 Chasa* with the reflection on call from a political candidate party, which is against the COVID-19 certificates with the following text "And he calls on the citizens, following the example of the Vazrazhdane deputies, to boycott the document. No one has the right to stop them except the law enforcement agencies, he encouraged his followers and promised free lawyer assistance to anyone discriminated against". Also, the citation is accompanied with a negative sentiment towards the implementation of certificates (n=27). In Malta the individual action (n=16) is almost equally observed as in Bulgaria. An article by *Malta Today* frames the text in the following way "From 1 July Face Masks Anyone who has taken both doses of the vaccine, or received the single dose Johnson and Johnson vaccine, and has been fully vaccinated for 14 days, in possession of a vaccine certificate, will be able to stay without a mask in open public places in groups of 2". Another news coverage by Malta Today emphasizes on the urgency people to get vaccinated by writing "As Malta continues ahead with its reopening plan, Abela

appealed for the public to take the COVID-19 vaccine, the vaccination strategy has become all the more crucial as government plans on removing further measures. Abela added that without the vaccine, travel and public events will be off-limits. With the EU setting the foundations for a COVID-19 vaccination certificate, which would only be given to those who are vaccinated, it is likely that any overseas travel or certain mass events will be off-limit for those without the relevant certificate. The famous newspaper *Malta Independent* writes about individual action with the following “Medical authorities warn us to continue to be diligent by saying that, although an effective vaccine is the first big step toward ending the coronavirus pandemic, our days of wearing face masks aren't over yet. While both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are more than 90% effective at preventing symptomatic Covid-19, we still don't know whether they prevent you from spreading the virus to other people. That's why experts strongly advise that everyone should still wear a mask and that includes anyone who has received the vaccine.

Collective action

During the analysis of Bulgaria newspapers it became evident that the collective action (n=42) is expressed by calls from industries and the general public towards governments, corporations or institutions to take steps and measures. For example, Kapital writes “If universities want to conduct classes in person, they must also require a green certificate”, which was earlier said by the Minister of Health. Another example, is from Dnevnik “At the moment, one test costs 10 BGN for the clients, and the restaurant pays the same amount, Radulov commented. “The idea was to pay until the state intervened. After they provide the free tests, they can use the infrastructure we have already provided. In this way, we persuaded them to help us and there will be no complete closure”. In this case the restaurant industry calls on the government to work together. One more example of collective action is by Ursula von der Leyen cited by the newspaper 24 Chasa “Finally, the decision on what you can possibly do with such a vaccination certificate must be taken specifically by each country, said von der Leyen. In the end of January the member states came to a deal what data is necessary to issue the Digital Green Certificate”. In this frame it is restated what previous steps and actions have been taken by European countries.

Compared to Bulgaria, Malta has used the collective action (n=27) almost two times less. Usually the frame is used to illustrate the collective steps taken by EU Member States. For instance, Malta Today writes “The European Commission has proposed to create a Digital Green Certificate, to help facilitate free movement inside the EU during the COVID-19 pandemic. It will be available free of charge and in digital or paper format, with a QR code to ensure security and authenticity. Member States will have to decide which public health restrictions can be waived for travelers, but will have to apply waivers in the same way to travelers holding a Digital Green Certificate”. Another example of collective action (n=27) again by Malta Today and it relates to the acceptance of the certificate “The European Parliament has struck a deal with member states for a digital COVID certificate that will allow for travel throughout the EU by mid-June for people who have been vaccinated, tested negative or who have recovered from the infection. Negotiators for the European Parliament and Council have reached a provisional deal for the institution of an EU digital COVID certificate that will allow for travel within the bloc this summer and beyond”. Similarly to the previous example, Malta Today writes “Malta is still in talks with a number of countries on mutual recognition of national COVID vaccine certificates, Tourism Minister Clayton Bartolo told BusinessToday. Malta officially re-opened its doors to tourism on Tuesday, with plans to launch marketing campaigns to attract tourists over summer.” Last

but not least, Times of Malta writes about collective action (n=27) with the following text “Malta is pushing for EU-wide cooperation on the issuing of a vaccination certificate for those who get the COVID-19 jab, with Health Minister Chris Fearne urging European counterparts to decide on the matter soon. A similar call was also made by Greece on Tuesday as the country, which like Malta is heavily reliant on tourism, seeks to make travelling easier. The issue is expected to be on the agenda of the next meeting of the European Council. It is hoped that a vaccination certificate will avoid the need for travellers to be held in quarantine”.

Travel/Tourism

The content of Bulgarian newspaper was rarely related to Travel/Tourism (n=19). For example, the newspaper *Kapital* writes “Travel is still difficult Due to the growth of cases in the EU, border restrictions, which affect even people with a green certificate, have returned. In practice, its owners cannot enter Austria, Belgium, Latvia and Slovenia”. Moreover, the same publication but another article states “This week, Spain, Portugal and Malta tightened restrictions on British tourists, and earlier this month Italy introduced a quarantine requirement for those coming from the UK. However, given that revenues from foreign tourism fell by up to 80% last year, these countries want to make up for the losses. Their desire to attract tourists was evident in May, when Spain and Portugal lifted much of the testing and quarantine requirements for arrivals from countries such as the United Kingdom. Greece has done the same for vaccinated travelers from 53 countries, including Russia”. Mainly the information about Travel/Tourism (n=19) is related to other tourism countries and their entry requirements no communication about any plans to save the local tourism industry.

Compared to Bulgaria, Malta as a tourist destination has applied the Travel/Tourism (n=34) frame more frequently. *Malta Today* cites the Minister of Tourism “Malta is still in talks with a number of countries on mutual recognition of national COVID vaccine certificates, Tourism Minister Clayton Bartolo told BusinessToday. Malta officially re-opened its doors to tourism on Tuesday, with plans to launch marketing campaigns to attract tourists over summer”. Another article from the same publication states “Malta has started bilateral talks with the UK on a COVID-19 vaccine digital certificate that will allow seamless travel between both countries, the Tourism Minister said”. Here it is observed a positive sentiment towards the certificate due to its possibilities to restart economies. The goals to save the tourism are communicated by the Maltese Minister of Tourism, while Bulgarian articles focused on other countries. For instance, the same article says “Government has set 1 June as a target to restart the tourism industry in line with the robust vaccination drive that is expected to see all the population receive its first dose by the first week of June”. One more example of the frame Travel/Tourism (n=34) in combination with Positive sentiment towards the certificate is from another article by *Malta Today* “Bartolo said the country was on track to be one of the first to introduce a COVID-19 vaccination certificate system, possibly the Digital Green Pass being discussed on EU level. We will await the outcome of the EU discussion on the Green Pass, but we will definitely be one of the first countries to adopt a certification system. Hopefully this will come about before 1 June. The Gozo Tourism Association statement”. Last but not least, another example of how the certificate is framed with clear advantages by *Times of Malta* with the following text “Abela said the EU-wide system would help freedom of movement and lead countries such as Malta to continue to strengthen their economy through tourism. Malta is going through the necessary preparations to start recognizing this certificate”. As it can be seen most of these statements are communicated by Maltese politicians (n=48).

Responsibility

In Maltese news publications, the Responsibility (n=4) has a significantly low frequency. An example of the frame is found within an article by *Malta Today* "The EU is proposing lifting all quarantine obligations on those who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 from 1 July. Cutajar stressed that a strong European strategy is needed for the tourism sector. This strategy does involve not only the Member States but also other stakeholders, including partners in the international field". Moreover, the responsibility here is shared by everyone involved in the process of implementing new measure for fully vaccinated people. Another example of responsibility is expressed by a politician (n=48) "Despite the promising future that Bartolo outlines for the tourism sector, he nevertheless appeals to the Maltese and Gozitan citizens to be prudent and responsible for ourselves and those around us. The success of this plan does not only depend on the government, but it also depends on every single one of us", he said. "We will be at the forefront of coming out of this pandemic and we will be stronger than we ever were before"."

During the analysis of Bulgarian news articles the Responsibility (n=9) frame appeared slightly more frequently compared to Malta. The newspaper *Kapital* reflects on one of the speeches of the president "According to him, however, the decision on the validity of the certificates should be made not by the leaders of the states, but by the ministers of health. During the debate on this position, he was supported by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz". The president makes a collective call-to-action that ministers of health are the ones responsible for taking the important decision related to COVID-19 Digital Green Certificates. An article by *24 Chasa* writes about shared responsibility with the following "And the responsibility is to the health of others, the responsibility to the countries with which we face a cross-border public health problem, as well as to those citizens who want to continue to travel and live a more social life". The newspaper *Dnevnik* writes about responsibility failure "The plan aimed at predictability of the measures, but the author himself refused to comply with it - this violates the trust in the institution and its obligation to manage the crisis caused by COVID-19. Thus - predictably - there is no attitude in the society towards observance of any measures, and the responsible institutions choose the only possible approach - to transfer the responsibility for protection of the public health to the students' organization".

Economic Consequences

Economic Consequence (n=10) is also relatively low in terms of frequencies. For instance, an article from the Bulgarian newspaper *Kapital* states "The third point is purely financial - the hospitals are currently not receiving funds to prepare for the fight against covid without working, and the payment of the funds to the first line doctors is just beginning". Another example for the consequences of the pandemic for tourism countries is written by *Kapital* with the following text "Revenues from the tourism sector in Spain and Portugal are expected to be half of pre- pandemic levels this year". One more example related to economic consequences (n=10) is found in an article by *Kapital* "This week, Spain, Portugal and Malta tightened restrictions on British tourists, and earlier this month Italy introduced a requirement to quarantine those coming from the UK. However, given that revenues from foreign tourism fell by up to 80% last year, these countries want to make up for the losses. Their desire to attract tourists was evident back in May, when Spain and Portugal lifted much of the testing and quarantine requirements for those arriving from countries such as the UK". This piece of text is also framed with Travel/Tourism (n=19) because it contains information about foreign travel restrictions.

In contrast to Bulgaria, Maltese newspapers have applied the Economic Consequence (n=3) frame two times less. For example, *Malta Independent* reflects on the economic

hurdles from COVID-19 by writing “The move puts the Scandinavian nation at odds with most of Europe, but some experts say it could become the norm as costly testing yields fewer benefits with the easily transmissible but milder omicron variant and as governments begin to consider treating COVID-19 like they do other endemic illnesses. We have reached a point where the cost and relevance of the testing is no longer justifiable - Swedish Public Health Agency chief Karin Tegmark Wisell told the national broadcast SVT this week. If we were to have extensive testing adapted to everyone who has COVID-19, that would mean half a billion kronor a week (about \$55 million) and 2 billion a month (\$220 million)”. Another example is written by Malta Today “The resolution on an EU strategy for sustainable tourism, adopted by 577 votes to 31, and 80 abstentions on Thursday, notes that the COVID-19 outbreak has paralysed the EU's tourism sector, with 6 out of 27 million jobs at risk. MEPs highlight that the tourism and travel sectors account for around 10% of the EU's GDP. They therefore urge EU countries to include them in their recovery plans and to consider temporarily reducing VAT on these services”.

Morality – Bulgaria missing n=18

The frame Morality (n=19) was moderately used within the Maltese news coverage. For example, *The Malta Independent* report on concern towards discrimination with the following text “In a discussion in Brussels last week I was puzzled to hear a number of interventions finding objection to a Europe-wide vaccination passport due to this creating some sort of societal discrimination between those who are vaccinated and those not vaccinated. Some Belgian, German and French politicians believe that the corona- safe passports for some Europeans to travel to Malta would be too much of a discrimination between them”. Another example of morality is reflected by *Malta Today* “Chris Gruppetta, director of publishing at Merlin Publishers, has hit out at the 'double standards' of health authorities with the regulation of the Malta Book Festival against the lack of restrictions at the SiGMA summit. On Facebook, Gruppetta pointed out that many COVID-related restrictions were imposed on the book festival-goers by health authorities, only to see no restrictions in place at the same venue a week later”. Also, in this context it was found that there is conflict. Another moral issue was related to the sensitive information that the COVID-19 Digital Green Certificates. For instance, Times of Malta writes about this issue with the following text “In its statement, the Malta Chamber said that while it feels it would be unethical to request details about the health or vaccination status of household members of employees, employers should have the right to ask workers about their vaccination status”.

The Morality frame (n=18) has been applied almost equally as in Malta. The newspaper *24 Chasa* writes the following “Within the 45th and 46th National Assembly there was a decision for remote participation of deputies. Now the same will be taken as such. This may also apply to colleagues who do not wish to present a certificate or test. That will be the fairest way, Atanasova explained. It is not just time to show that in Bulgaria there is no double standard and the requirements apply to everyone”. Another example of morality occurs in again in article published from *24 Chasa* “And while we are suffering and disappearing, you went to the cinema! No masks! With all due respect to the cinema, do you want us to wage war with the state, with the institutions that are bent over to monitor compliance with the measures. We lead it, because there is nothing more to lose”. The newspaper *Kapital* write about morality with the following text “At the same time, one third of the respondents define the imposed measure as a form of restriction of the human rights of the citizens. For more than a fifth of companies, this is an obstacle in the work process, and more than a quarter of managers find the "green certificate" excessive”.

Human Interest

Another most frequently used frame in Bulgarian newspapers is the Human Interest (n=51). For instance, the newspaper *Kapital* reflects on one of the speeches of the president as they say "However, he acknowledged that Bulgaria remains the last in terms of vaccinations against COVID-19, which, according to him, is a reason to think deeply". Another example of the Human Interest frame used by the same newspaper quotes Ursula von der Leyen "3-4 years ago, I could not have imagined such a terrible pandemic and we have vaccines that save lives and that are not used adequately," said Von der Layen, who is a doctor by education". In this case the Human Interest is expressed through the lens of a political leader. Afterwards, both Prospect Frames: Loss (n=18) and Gain (n=40) are used to depict the vaccination landscape in Eastern and Western Europe with the following text "In Eastern Europe, vaccinations remain at a desperately low level and such a measure would hardly be approved" and "In Western Europe, the level of vaccinations in the age groups in which vaccines are approved varies from 70% to 90%, and public support for such an extreme measure would be more possible". However, the next piece of text is framed in a conflict way "However, the task will not be easy. Attempts at compulsory vaccination, even in certain groups, have led to protests. With the protests of several tens of thousands of people, the news of the mandatory vaccination for all in Austria on February 1 was welcomed". Another way the Bulgarian newspapers put an emotional angle of the story is through healthcare workers (n=7). For instance, the publication of *Kapital* writes "The people in the medical institutions are disillusioned with the fact that only we bear the full burden. I am very indignant that all the measures are related to how the hospitals deal with the situation, and there are no measures for the rest. We are at our limit - vaccination may not be mandatory to go to a restaurant, and for everything else. In the end it turns out that it has become more important to go to a pub than to keep the health of others and your own health". The Bulgarian newspaper *24 Chasa* also uses Human Interest (n=51) frames in their news coverage. For example, "Barbuta, 59, said she was not against vaccinations and was getting a flu shot every year. I didn't want to put this one against the coronavirus, because I wasn't sure how harmless it was. I was afraid. People talked about the side effects, and then all these protests came up. But all I have to do is work, and that's why I need a green pass, and I don't want to keep spending money on tests". Moreover, the newspaper gives an emotional perspective by giving a voice to the General Public (n=20). However, the speaker has a negative sentiment towards the certificate (n=35) due to uncertainties and fear. Last but not least, *24 Chasa* reflects on issues between students and the government by giving them the chance to speak up against the imposed regulations and the online education with the following text "The students are concerned that the online training has been going on for too long and are urging the authorities to take steps to return the physical education. For some of them, the requirement for a green certificate to enter schools is unfeasible. Daniel Parushev, chairman of the National Representation of Students, said that for almost two years now in most schools 80% of the education is online and only 20% is physical, which is disturbing". The school education of pupils was one of the most discussed and controversial topics during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many people were against the online education and that it is not going to bring the students sufficient preparation ahead of the national exams. Also, many concerns were expressed that the infrastructure for online education is underprepared and many schools could not react on time to provide their students with the necessary tools to study and have classes.

Compared to Bulgaria, Maltese newspapers apply the Human interest frame (n=16)

less frequently. Mostly the personal angle relates to unpleasant experiences rather than serious issues as in Bulgaria. For example, the newspaper *Times of Malta* reports on issues regarding the COVID-19 certificate. For instance, the Human interest (n=16) here is presented through a personal story with the following paragraph “I have been trying to download the certificate for two days but I keep getting an error. I phoned 145 several times but to no avail. They tell me there is nothing they can do. I checked my records on My Health and my second dose of the vaccine on May 14 is not listed. Who is responsible for this mess, why is the site not working, why are 145 operators unable to help, a person states”. Another example of people experiencing issues with the certificate, which results in dissatisfaction, writes *Times of Malta* by sharing the personal story of a traveller “others about his experience. Prior to his trip, Pace was faced with an “error” each time he tried to download his vaccine certificate, required to get back into Malta. When he called the 145 helpline he was told that “they were aware of the problem and were working on it. Meanwhile, he had to convince the port authorities at Pozzallo that he had no certificate to be able to board the vessel because the government system was not working as he demonstrated the technical issue on his phone. Once in Malta, tensions rose as he refused to be tested on payment as requested and an argument ensued”. Moreover, another traveller's story in the same article states “In the case of Bertus Zuijdgeest, who resides in Żebbuġ, he and his wife, fully vaccinated by April, had to cancel a trip to Italy booked for June 10. But it was not so much the loss of a holiday that was “irritating” him... more the fact that the government is boasting that everything is fine when it is not”.

Information about the certificate/vaccination campaign

During the analysis of Maltese newspapers, the frame information about the certificate/vaccination campaign (n=60) has relatively high frequency. In an article published by *Malta Today* a detailed information about the certificate is shared with the following text “The digital green certificate will be available free of charge in paper and digital form. It will work in three ways: - It will give proof that the person has been vaccinated or has had a positive result on a test where the COVID-19 has been cured and has antibodies - It will be a question of showing that this document is recognizable in all the member states - This certificate will help member states to guarantee the full freedom of movement of their citizens in a safe, responsible and reliable manner”. Also, here it can be seen that the advantages of having such certificate are described towards the end of the quotation. Sometimes it happens that the information shared is purely general to inform the public about what the certificate would entail, how to obtain it, where people can download it and how many vaccine doses are required. However, the information about the certificate (n=60) can also be presented with a Travel/Tourism (n=34) and a Loss frame (n=7). For example, *Malta Today's* writes the following update “Travellers to Malta from tomorrow will be denied boarding unless they can produce a negative COVID-19 PCR test or a vaccination certificate. The rules came into force over the past couple of days and will be applicable from 1 June. They also apply to Maltese and residents of Malta returning to the island. Children under five years of age are exempt from the requirements. Any person travelling to Malta, whether by air or by sea, will have to present upon arrival in Malta a passenger locator form, a negative PCR COVID-19 test taken not later than 72 hours prior to entering Malta, or a valid inoculation certificate showing that the person has taken all vaccine doses. The rules also make it clear that passengers will be denied boarding if they fail to produce either a negative test result or the vaccine certificate”. The text clearly shows what people can lose if they fail to take the necessary action/steps to meet the country entry requirements. Another article

published by *Malta Today* shares information about the vaccine with the following text “The vaccination dates are important because the certificate will be valid after a lapse of 10 days from the second dose,” Bartolo said, adding talks with the UK were progressing well. The Malta Information Technology Agency is working on this digital certificate that would allow travellers to produce it as proof of vaccination against COVID-19”. Mostly the information is communicated by Maltese politicians (n=48)

The Bulgarian articles share less information about the vaccine/campaign (n=40) compared to Malta. The newspaper *Kapital* shares the following information “At least in theory, the digital document in question should restore the normal movement of euro area territory, ensuring that its holder is not infected or at least that the risk to the health of others is negligible. The main lobbyists for the adoption of the certificates are the tourist countries in the EU, led by Greece, as this group also includes Bulgaria. In a more detailed reading of the draft normative act, it can be seen that the question of the presence of antibodies in the patients and their detection by quantitative tests is completely absent”. Another article written again by *Kapital* states “After a few days of hesitation, the Ministry of Health still decided to introduce a regime in which access to a number of sites and activities will have only people with the so-called. green certificate, i.e. vaccinated or ill. \xD0e separate certificates for a negative test are also valid - 72 hours, if it is a PCR test, and 48 hours for antigenic texts. Citizens will be able to take almost free antigen tests in state-licensed laboratories on the territory of each municipality. With a certificate will be available cinemas, theaters, circuses, malls, shops over 300 square meters, fitness centers, swimming pools, restaurants, hotels. The document is also mandatory for those working in these sites, otherwise they will have to close”. One more example of information is shared by *Kapital* “Pre-election "green certificate" in Bulgaria will now be given with a test for antibodies -19. This will be done even if their recovery is not formalized by an initial PCR or antigen test. For this purpose, people will be able to perform a laboratory test for antibodies”.

Consequences

The Consequences frame (n=35) is quite often found in Bulgarian newspaper. Usually this frame is used to inform the general public by saying the number of hospitalized patients, casualties, recovered, urgency to start vaccination or get vaccinated due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the new variants. For example, *Dnevnik* writes about the COVID-19 scenario in Bulgaria with the following “A new black record for victims of COVID-19 in Bulgaria. Tuesday brought a new record for victims of COVID-19 in Bulgaria - 334 people. The highest number so far was reported last Tuesday (this weekend is usually reported and untimely registered victims of the weekend) and it was 310 dead. Unfortunately, the death rate is expected to remain high in the coming weeks, as the level of those infected remains high (over 5,200 on Tuesday). The data suggest that Bulgaria may have reached the peak of the new wave, but remains on a high plateau, and the health system continues to be overloaded with more than 8,500 hospitalized patients”. Another article from *Kapital* says “Amid the sharply accelerating fourth wave and 4979 new cases registered on Tuesday, the second highest level since the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020 in total (the record is 5176 new cases in the spring), the Minister of Health finally announced the steps that are going to be taken to prevent the collapse of the health system”.

In Malta, the frame Consequences (n=11) is observed considerable less than Bulgaria in Bulgaria. For example, *Malta Today* reports the new measures due to increase in the COVID-19 cases by saying “Non-vaccinated travel ban could be discriminatory, EU warns.

The measures were announced following a sudden surge in COVID-19 cases, having gone from 28 active cases to over 600 in just two weeks". Another example of reporting consequences from the pandemic is presented by the publication of *The Malta Independent* by stating the following "The number of daily Covid cases is far lower at the moment than it had been in December and early January. On Sunday, four people died while positive for Covid-19, the health authorities said. Two of the latest victims were women aged 77 and 83 and the other two were men aged 65 and 66. The total number of deaths now stands at 589. 116 new cases were registered on Sunday, while 207 people recovered from the virus. The number of active cases has dropped to 1,680. 57 patients at Mater Dei Hospital are Covid positive, four of whom are in the ITU. 1,230,442 vaccine doses have thus far been administered, 337,749 of which are booster shots".

Conflict

The second most used frame within the Bulgarian newspapers is Conflict (n=87). For example, the newspaper *Dnevnik Bulgaria* states "GERB" ruling party had their good moments but the overall impression is that they created a big crisis. There was no governing, institutions were blocked, and private business could not work according to the rules and laws, Iotova explained". The statement was made by the current Vice President of Bulgaria. Another article from the same newspaper writes the following "The political partners "There is such a people" again announced their withdrawal of the decision (Slavi Trifonov's party has repeatedly stated that it is against the certificates for COVID-19)". Moreover, the conflict here is characterized by political differences and attitudes towards the implementation of COVID-19 Digital Green Certificate as an entry requirement. One of the newspaper *24 Chasa* reflects on conflicts between individuals and malls. For instance it says "Others were surprised to be returned and cursed angrily. "If they don't want to take my money, I won't go in, said a middle-aged man who was returned by the security guard at the entrance. However, he is categorical that he would not be immunized.". The statements is also framed with a negative sentiment towards the certificate (n=27). Another reflection on the conflict between healthcare workers (n=7) is depicted by *Dnevnik Bulgaria* with the following text "She was also critical of the representatives of the Medical Guild, which used the attitudes of the society to become popular. Physicians, politicians and the media are responsible for public health, and when certain doctors or politicians openly threaten public health, their media coverage must be censored". Moreover, here the conflict is accompanied by one more frame Responsibility (n=7), which is recognized in the second part of the quotation of the healthcare worker ""Physicians, politicians and the media are responsible for public health [...]". For another conflict between politicians and shifting responsibilities writes *Dnevnik Bulgaria* with the following text "The chairmen of the parliamentary groups did not agree whether the access to the National Assembly should be only with a COVID-19 certificate. They postponed the decision, but it is unknown at this time when new talks will take place. A week before the start of the new parliament, Health Minister Stoycho Katsarov shifted responsibility for the decision to lawmakers." The Bulgarian approach and way of handling the COVID-19 pandemic received heavy criticism by the Helsinki committee. Moreover, *Dnevnik Bulgaria* writes about the conflict between the two institutions with the following text "Restrictions imposed by order of the Minister of Health to control the spread of COVID-19 are overdue and disproportionate, and the price for this will again be paid by children". The newspaper *Kapital* writes about people who experience issues in obtaining the COVID-19 Digital Green

Certificate due to policies. For instance, the article says “Millions of Europeans who got COVID-19 “on their feet” without officially seeking medical help may find themselves without the possibility of automatically receiving the so-called digital green certificates. In practice, however, it turns out that the disease can be formalized only if the person has an initial positive test for infection with SARS-CoV-2 - PCR or possibly antigenic, according to Art. 7 para. 1 of the draft regulation. Otherwise, he will not be able to certify that he has contracted the coronavirus and will be able to obtain a green certificate only after vaccination or by taking a new negative PCR test before traveling”. Last but not least there was also a sufficient number of conflicts between the hospitality industry and the ruling government. For instance, the newspaper *Kapital* writes “It is a bit strange and as if on the principle “as we will suffer, let everyone suffer” the Association of Restaurants in Bulgaria and the Bulgarian Association of Restaurants demanded the imposition of a “two-week total lockdown”. After the chairman of the restaurateurs' association Richard Alibegov explained to Borisov (ex-Prime Minister of Bulgaria) on Saturday how a new closure would kill them, today he changed his position and the industry said ultimately: “Either you open all businesses without restrictions or close everything”. Also, the disparity between the industry and the government was framed with Human Interest (n=51) with the following text that can be also found in the quotation above “as we will suffer, let everyone suffer” and “new closure would kill them”.

The frame Conflict (n=35) is evidently less emphasized within Maltese publications. Compared to Bulgaria, the majority of problems are between Malta and the European Union due to heavy criticism towards the entry policies and requirements of the tourist country. For instance, *Times of Malta* write “The government should “waste no more time” in updating travel rules tied to the vaccine certificate, which go against EU rules, Malta International Airport (MIA) said”. Another article reflects on the criticism towards Malta with the following piece of text “Non-vaccinated travel ban could be discriminatory, EU warns. The European Commission has raised concerns over Malta's ban on non-vaccinated travellers, warning that it could be discriminatory. We have concerns that the measures could discriminate against people who are not fully vaccinated, European Commissioner spokesperson Christian Wigand said on Monday”. However, these are not the only conflicts. For instance, there were tensions between the companies (n=13) from the hospitality industry and the government. An article published by *Malta Today* reports about the issue with the following coverage “They argue that Malta's rules, which maintain one of the strictest COVID-19 travel restriction regimes in Europe, are excessive, unreasonable, disproportionate and discriminatory. The subsidiary legislation implementing the Page 2 of 2 Hotelier accuses State of creating 'illusion' of pandemic crisis, files damages claim measures had been introduced arbitrarily, without sufficient scientific justification, and based on “ulterior motives,” the lawyers said. Un-boosted individuals were suffering unjust discrimination without a valid scientific basis, said the lawyers, arguing that the measures were also invalid. Zammit Tabona called upon the court to declare the legislation and measures it implements as violating fundamental rights and therefore null and void. He also asks the court to award damages”. Also, within this piece of text the frames Morality (n=19), Loss (n=7) and Negative sentiment towards the certificate (n=6) are used to draw the conflict. One more example of Conflict (n=35) and Morality (n=19) used together to frame the Digital Green Certificate is this text published by *Malta Today* “The European Parliament fast-tracks approval for Digital Green Certificate. However, some voiced concerns that those who have not been vaccinated may face discrimination, and highlighted the need to ensure highest standards of data protection. It's important that digital inclusion leaves no one

behind. Ana Paula Zacarias, the Secretary of State for European Affairs of Portugal, told MEPs". In this case the conflict is a little bit more subtle but it relates to the "voiced concerns that those[...]".

Contextual frames

During the analysis of Bulgarian newspapers it became evident the context in which articles are framed. The Social frame (n=46) has the highest frequency followed by the Political (n=33) context. Relatively low is the frequency of the Economic frame (n=14). More surprisingly, is that Bulgarian newspaper were rarely framing the articles with a scientific context (n=2), which is almost the same as Malta that has rarely used the science framing (n=3). The Social (n=44) and Political frame (32) are often observed in Maltese newspaper articles, which is similarly to Bulgaria in terms of frequencies. Lastly, the Economic frame (n=17) has a moderate frequency compared to the other contextual frame and also it is slightly more observed than in Bulgaria publications.

Sentiment of the articles

The sentiment of the Maltese news coverage is almost equally observed with the Neutral sentiment (n=26) and the Positive (n=27) being close to each other in terms of frequencies. Moreover, the Negative sentiment (n=10) has a relatively low frequency.

The sentiment of the Bulgarian newspaper are mostly Neutral (n=26) and Negative (n=28). Moreover, the positive sentiment (n=9) is shockingly low.

Stakeholders

The different stakeholders that were analyzed within the Maltese newspapers are Scientist (n=1), Politicians (n=48) were dominating the news, Institutions (n=1), and surprisingly the Healthcare workers (n=0) were not present at all, General Public (n=6), Experts (n=1) were significantly low, and Companies (n=13).

The overall presence of Healthcare Workers (n=7) and Experts (n=8) in the Bulgarian news coverage is relatively low. Even smaller is the presence of scientist (n=1). Remarkably high is the appearance of politician (n=50). The other stakeholders that were recognized throughout the analysis were Companies (n=12), Institutions (n=9) and the General Public (n=20).

5 Discussion

5.1 Findings of framing within Bulgarian and Maltese news articles

The aim of this research was to find out how Bulgarian and Maltese newspapers frame the COVID-19 Digital Green Certificate and what the differences are. First, a discussion about the framing of Bulgarian and Maltese newspapers.

The data results showed the conflict frame is the most frequently applied within articles. Mostly there were accusations among political leaders in regards to the handling of the COVID-19 crisis. Many businesses and sectors, especially the hospitality industry, were dissatisfied with the constantly changing regulations. Also, schools and universities felt discriminated against due to being forced to study online while other institutions were operating. Therefore, Educational institutions demanded changes in COVID-19 regulations and the return of full-time physical education. However, the government could not meet their expectations. The industry had many demands such as financial help, partial re-opening of the terraces, and equal treatment for everyone regarding working conditions and requirements related to COVID-19. For example, one of the things that upset the general public the most was that politicians were imposing mandatory COVID-19 certificates for people to gain entry access to various places. However, when the politicians had to go to the Parliament and work, they were exempted from this access requirement. The controversial moment fueled the public dissatisfaction, which led to votes between parliament groups to impose mandatory access to the National Assembly based on a COVID-19 certificate. However, the vote was unsuccessful as political parties failed to reach an agreement. There were other conflicts between institutions, such as the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, that expressed criticism towards the handling of the pandemic. In addition, healthcare workers accused members of the Medical Guild of taking advantage of the COVID-19 situation, the political landscape, and public attitudes to gain media popularity. Thus, resulting in the neglect of public health. From the content analysis, it becomes clear that the news reports emphasize heavy criticism from industries, political parties, and the general public regarding the COVID-19 Digital Green Certificates. Similarly to the findings from the research of Milutinović (2021), the Bulgarian newspapers prefer breaking news and emphasizes on conflicts, which influences negatively the public perception. Also, as in Serbia, Bulgaria was marked by protest and political distrust, which did not make the task of the ruling government easy.

The frame travel/tourism was expected to occur more frequently within the Bulgarian news coverage because the seaside resorts located on the Black Seas coastline rely heavily on foreign tourists from countries like the United Kingdom, Germany, Russia, and Poland. However, the news articles focused on reporting about the regulations of other tourist countries instead of reflecting on what is necessary as steps to save the Bulgarian tourism sector. Therefore, the data revealed little to no focus was given to preventing further negative consequences for the summer and winter tourist season.

The analysis shows the human interest frame has a high frequency in Bulgarian news publications. Usually, news media gave voice to industries and the general public. However, the human interest frame was often present in a negative context. People had an opportunity to share their dissatisfaction with the implementation of COVID-19 certificates. Mostly, the Bulgarian publications were related to people having their access denied and personal stories from restaurant owners who struggled to cope with the COVID-19 crisis. Owners share to newspapers that despite vaccines and COVID-19 certificates, the number of visiting customer remain significantly low. Also, the analysis showed another way of applying

an emotional perspective to the news. The newspapers tell the stories of healthcare workers who struggle to cope with the work due to a significant surge in hospitalizations due to low vaccination rates. This is a try to evoke a compassionate feeling within the reader and make him think about the situation and reconsider his attitude/behavior.

Interesting is that the prospect frame gains have a higher frequency than the loss. Most of the time, Bulgarian politicians were the ones elaborating on the advantages of taking a specific action than experts, which could be a reason for the people to doubt what they are being told. Therefore, the implementation and acceptance of the COVID-19 Digital Green Certificate can be perceived negatively. The losses expressed by the general public are related to difficulties in obtaining the certificate, which results in missing out on the advantages. Moreover, the newspapers reported losses, such as complete closing and partial release of staff for the businesses due to COVID-19 restrictions. The inconsistent closing and re-opening of workplaces led people to doubt the government's abilities to handle the crisis. Possibly the consistent reporting of conflict and vivid public dissatisfaction have contributed to the negative portrayal of the COVID-19 Digital Green Certificate.

The data analysis revealed the majority of stakeholders within Bulgarian news articles as politicians. Shockingly, experts and healthcare workers have a significantly low frequency. Moreover, the expectations were that the presence of expert stakeholders to be higher as they are supposed to inform the public about the disadvantages and advantages.

The content analysis shows that the sentiment of the Bulgarian news articles is predominantly neutral or negative. Surprisingly, only a number of several publications have had a positive sentiment. The same can be said for the sentiment towards the certificate/vaccine. The results indicated that the negativity prevails over positivity significantly. The negativity comes from conflict between political leaders, parties, and industries such as the hospitality. Also, a significant amount of dissatisfaction comes from the general public towards the ruling parties because of the regulations and mandatory certificates to get access to work, school or malls.

The data shows that the Maltese newspapers reported less about conflicts compared to Bulgaria. For example, some of the conflicts were related to criticism from the European Union about a discriminatory decision to forbid the entrance of unvaccinated people into the country, which was quickly solved. Moreover, other reports about issues were between the hospitality industry and the government.

Malta is a preferred holiday destination by many foreigners. Therefore, it is heavily dependent on its tourism industry. The analysis revealed that Maltese publications use the travel/tourism frame frequently. Moreover, the news articles usually contained information about the new upcoming season and the steps the Minister of Tourism has taken to save the industry. Also, the Maltese publications communicated changes in restrictions on restaurants, hotels, and bars since they are an integral part of the tourism sector and generate a lot of income for the country. Based on the data analysis, it is evident that the government tries everything in its power to reignite the economy, and the news media reports on the efforts. When the Maltese newspapers applied the travel/tourism frame, different stakeholders publicly supported and expressed the advantages of the COVID-19 Digital Green Certificate and how it would contribute to saving the business.

The content analysis revealed that the human interest frame was applied relatively low by newspapers. On the rare occasions when an emotional angle was given to the story, most of the time, it was about foreign travelers experiencing difficulties arriving in Malta due to policy complications or defected systems that are supposed to scan the COVID-19

Digital Green Certificate. Sometimes, the people would express a negative sentiment towards the document due to the difficulties it creates regarding traveling.

Throughout the analysis, several stakeholders were identified. The most prominent ones are politicians, followed by companies. Moreover, Political leaders such as the Superintendent of Malta, the Prime Minister, and the Minister of Tourism were at the forefront of continuously updating the general public about new travel and local regulations. Surprisingly, the presence of healthcare workers was completely missing. Also, contradictory to expectations only one expert stakeholder was identified in the news articles.

The data revealed the sentiment of the news articles. Moreover, the observed attitudes of reporting by Maltese newspapers are frequently either positive or neutral. The negativity was identified when the hospitality industry expressed concerns regarding the regulations or when travelers shared their stories. Therefore, it resulted in a pessimistic way of representing the news to the general public.

The gains of taking specific steps dominated the losses. Most often, the communicated advantages of implementing COVID-19 Digital Green Certificate related to free movement, resume of tourism, and the ability to restart the economy. The loss frames were mainly related to future tourists. For instance, if they fail to prove a negative COVID-19 result, they will be subjected to a mandatory quarantine for which they would have to pay themselves. With all said and the data analysis results, it became clear that the sentiment towards the certificate within Maltese newspapers is relatively higher than the negative.

Based on the results, an answer on how Malta and Bulgaria framed the COVID-19 Digital Green Certificate and what the differences are will be provided. The Bulgarian articles were predominantly focusing on reporting the conflicts between various stakeholders. Moreover, the general public dissatisfaction with the ruling government was further fueled by the constant media report about the problems. Compared to Malta, they also reported about conflicts, but they did not put such emphasis on them. This contrast can be attributed to the summer protests in 2020 against the Bulgarian government, the demand for change, and low trust in political leaders. Similarly to the framing of Serbian newspapers, Bulgaria was in a state of extensive political campaigns, which has evidently influenced the framing. Also, the situation in Bulgaria was used by political leaders to gain more support from the general public. Therefore, it confirms the findings of Milutinović (2021), that by emphasizing controversial attitudes and conflicts, especially in times of public dissatisfaction with the political landscape, the public perception can be negatively influenced. Therefore, adopting behaviors becomes harder. Since the media sets the public agenda and where the focus needs to be, the Bulgarian newspapers have decided to put more attention on reporting the differences between the political parties and the issues created from the different points of view towards the COVID-19 certificate. These findings can be explained by the agenda-setting theory developed by McCombs and Shaw (1972), since the media in Bulgaria made a clear choice on what the main focus is when communicating about the COVID-19 Digital Green Certificates. Therefore, people have perceived the conflicts as more pressing than others. Compared to Malta, there was also dissatisfaction from industries regarding imposed regulations, but not at such a high degree. Also, the Maltese government was focused on preserving the general public health and restoring the tourism sector. From the results it appears that Malta, has a clear plan and focus. Also, they look to communicate consistently and unambiguously about the advantages of the certificate and how it would enable the country to resume its economy. The results are in line with previous researches that when the communication in times of crisis is consistent, unambiguous and transparent it can positively assist people when they form opinions and adopt behaviors (Covello et al., 1986; Miles &

Mores 2007). For this purpose, the Minister of Tourism was working hard and communicating with the people of Malta. Therefore, newspapers were reflecting more on the tourism industry and tried to depict the advantages of implementing the COVID-19 Digital Green Certificate. Similarly to the findings from a recent research by Bhatti et al. (2022), in which the advantages of adopting specific behavior were prevalent and yield the expectations. While in Bulgaria, news reports about tourism were very often related to foreign countries instead of focusing on its own sector to communicate the advantages of implementing the COVID-19 certificate. Despite the high frequency of gains in having a COVID-19 certificate, it seems Bulgarians are reluctant to get vaccinated and obtain the document. This phenomenon can be attributed to the dissatisfaction of people with the political landscape and the vivid presence of conflict news. The results support the claims of Covello et al. (1986), that the communication with the general public can fail when there is distrust towards the sender. Also, the data showed that the sentiment of Bulgarian newspapers was predominantly negative and neutral, which does not help the cause to implement the certificates. Compared to Malta, which reported in a more positive than negative way. As previously mentioned by Pribble et al. 2010, the expert agents are expected to be more visible to the public to sufficiently inform. The lack of experts in both countries was surprising to find out. It might have been possible to have a different effect on society and how the document was framed if experts were more present in the discussions about the COVID-19 Digital Green Certificate in Bulgaria. The Bulgarian newspapers have included almost equally positive and negative sentiments regarding the document. Moreover, the positive sentiment was regularly stated by the politicians who were in constant conflict. Therefore, the reporting can be characterized as inconsistent, which makes it harder for the general public to support the implementation of the certificate. The findings align with the study of Ogbodo et al. (2020) that news media channels prefer to report inconsistently and to emphasize matters that are easy to overexaggerate. In contrast, the Maltese publications had more positive attitudes toward the certificate than negative. In general, the newspaper Kapital, 24Chasa, and Dnevnik have tried to communicate the advantages of implementing the COVID-19 Digital Green Certificate. However, the efforts were overshadowed by the high news media coverage of conflicts. Compared to Bulgaria, Malta was successful in framing the certificate in a generally positive way and depict the benefits for the restart of the economy. Lastly, the analysis of Bulgarian newspapers align with findings that the news media channels prefer breaking news to attract more attention (Ogbodo et al., 2020; Milutinović 2021; Shih et al. 2008).

5.2 Limitations and Future research

Despite the findings regarding the framing of the COVID-19 Digital Green Certificate in Bulgaria and Malta, there are several limitations of the study. First, there were no other studies specifically aimed at analyzing how the document is framed to the general public. However, there was a significant amount of academic researchers studying the framing of the COVID-19 pandemic. For the purpose, the codebook was adapted from various papers with the combination of inductive approach. This could be a reason for limitations in the development of the codebook since the studies focused on the framing of COVID-19 pandemic and not the certificate. Also, this paper does not study any other factors that could have influenced the framing of the Digital Green Certificate. For example, political landscape, trust in government, attitudes of the general public towards the vaccine, or willingness to get vaccinated. Moreover, these could provide insights about the influence on media framing during the pandemic. Another limitation of the study was that there were only 3 to 4

Maltese newspapers reporting about the COVID-19 in English. In general the novelty of analyzing specifically the framing of COVID-19 Digital Green Certificate was a limitation by itself.

There are several suggestions for future researches on this topic. For instance, when replicating this research, it is recommended to increase the number of newspapers. Moreover, this could allow for higher saturation of the data. Also, it might be beneficial to include other types of communication medium. Another suggestion is to combine the framing of the COVID-19 certificate with another method such as a survey or focus group. The purpose, is to find other underlying factors that could be influencing the news media channels framing. Last but not least, the framing of the COVID-19 pandemic and the vaccines might be necessary to be taken into account when analyzing the framing of the certificate because the document is obtained based on vaccination. However, if the media has framed the pandemic and the vaccines in a negative way, this could also influence the framing of the COVID-19 Digital Green Certificate.

5.3 Practical Implications

From this research can be derived several practical implications. First, there was a significant differences between the two countries in terms of handling the situation, the focus of the news media channels, external factors such as protest, dissatisfaction and demands for early elections in Bulgaria, which can influence the attitudes of people. Therefore, when the general public looks to inform themselves about the developments, advantages and disadvantages of the COVID-19 certificate, they should try to find multiple sources. A suggestion is to look at how other countries and media writes about the document. Moreover, gaining knowledge from diverse sources can avoid opinion biases.

The other implications is related to the news media channels. In times of pandemic, the communication with the general public should be consistent, transparent and unambiguous. It is understandable that the news want to reflect on the public dissatisfaction with the political leaders and the conflicts between the parties. However, the journalist should not put such great emphasis on the disputes since this can affect the framing and thus, the attitudes of people. Therefore, journalist should stay neutral and try to sufficiently inform the public through expert interviews about the disadvantages and advantages of implementing such documents. Also, clear and consistent communication is essential for the successful adoption of new implementations related to COVID-19. It is necessary the public to trust the speakers and sources.

5.4 Conclusion

At the end of the content analysis several differences related to the framing of the COVID-19 Digital Green Certificate were identified. The framing within Bulgarian newspaper differed significantly. For instance, the Bulgarian handling of the COVID-19 crisis received tremendous amount of criticism from the general public. Also, for the time when the pandemic happened, the people of Bulgaria were protesting against the ruling government and demanded changes, which has influenced the way news media channels have reported. Moreover, based on the analysis, the news articles were predominantly focusing on news coverages related to conflicts about the COVID-19 Digital Green. Also, the study showed that the overall way of reporting was either negative or neutral, very little publications had a positive sentiment of writing. Contradictory to expectations, the news had almost no focus on the local tourism sector rather the focus was on foreign tourist destinations and the imposed regulations by the relevant local authorities. Despite the many advantages of the COVID-19

certificate expressed by politicians, the attitudes of the general public might have been influenced due to the significant coverage of conflicts and the negative way of reporting about the situation. In contrast, Malta had its focus on how to save the tourist sector and what could be done. Also, the Maltese newspapers reported in a more positive way by trying to depict the advantages to the general public. Important to note that Malta was not marked by any major political disputes, protest or demands for earlier parliament elections. It is safe to conclude based on the number of vaccinated Maltese people, which is approximately 90%, the campaign of implementing COVID-19 Digital Green Certificate as a mean to restart their economy was successful. Also, Malta was at the forefront to adapt the certificate from 1st of July, 2021, because since then it became mandatory to have the certificate if a person wanted to travel or engage in social activities. From this research, it became evident that news media framing is a force to reckon with and can affect the perceptions of society, especially in times of crisis.

6 Reference

Al Jazeera. (2020, June 3). *Coronavirus: Travel restrictions, border shutdowns by country*. Tourism News | Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/6/3/coronavirus-travel-restrictions-border-shutdowns-by-country>

Arena, J. (2021, August 22). *Staffing crisis forces restaurants to partially shut down*. Times of Malta. <https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/restaurants-are-closed-some-days-a-week-due-to-a-lack-of-staff.894877>

Atanasova, M. (2020, May 17). *Eto nemontiranoto intervju na benatova s mutafchiiski ot koeto generalat si tragna video*. Fakti.bg. <https://fakti.bg/bulgaria/475173-eto-nemontiranoto-intervju-na-benatova-s-mutafchiiski-ot-koeto-generalat-si-tragna-video>

Brodie, M., Weltzien, E., Altman, D., Blendon, R. J., & Benson, J. M. (2006). Experiences of Hurricane Katrina Evacuees in Houston Shelters: Implications for Future Planning. *American Journal of Public Health, 96*(8), 1402–1408. <https://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.2005.084475>

Bai, J., Shi, F., Cao, J., Wen, H., Wang, F., Mubarik, S., Liu, X., Yu, Y., Ding, J., & Yu, C. (2020). The epidemiological characteristics of deaths with COVID-19 in the early stage of epidemic in Wuhan, China. *Global Health Research and Policy, 5*(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41256-020-00183-y>

Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-Efficacy in Changing Societies*. Cambridge University Press.

BBC News. (2020, February 16). *Coronavirus: First death confirmed in Europe*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-51514837>

Boeije, H. R. (2009). *Analysis in Qualitative Research* (1st ed.). SAGE Publications Ltd

Borg, J. (2020, May 31). *Watch: Bars, gyms to reopen Friday, airport, ports in July - Robert Abela*. Times of Malta. <https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/bars-gyms-to-re-open-friday-airport-ports-in-july-robert-abela.795559>

Bhatti, S., Billinson, P., Cornell, L., Das, A., Gammon, C., Kelly, L., Yang, J., & Kristiansen, S. (2022). A Country Comparative Analysis of International Print Media's Framing of the COVID-19 Pandemic. *International Journal Of Communication, 16*, 27. Retrieved from <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/17990>

Bulgaria. (2022, March 10). RSF. <https://rsf.org/en/country/Bulgaria>

Carabott, S. (2021, July 17). *Vaccination made mandatory for thousands of non-EU workers*. Times of Malta. <https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/vaccination-made-mandatory-for-thousands-of-non-eu-workers.887212>

- Chen, L. H., Freedman, D. O., & Visser, L. G. (2020). COVID-19 Immunity Passport to Ease Travel Restrictions? *Journal of Travel Medicine*, 27(5). <https://doi.org/10.1093/jtm/taaa085>
- Coleman, R., McCombs, M., Shaw, D., & Weaver, D. (2008). *Handbook of Journalism Studies* [E-book]. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203877685-20>
- Covello, V. T., Von Winterfeldt, D., & Slovic, P. (1986). Risk communication: A review of the literature. *Risk Abstr.*, 3, 171-182.
https://researchgate.net/publication/285817518_Risk_communication_A_review_of_the_literature
- COVID pass certificate. (2022, May 10). *EU COVID Certificate: the global vaccine passport*. Covidpasscertificate.Com. <https://www.covidpasscertificate.com/europe-digital-green-pass/>
- Cuschieri, S., Balzan, M., Gauci, C., Aguis, S., & Grech, V. (2020). Mass Events Trigger Malta's Second Peak After Initial Successful Pandemic Suppression. *Journal of Community Health*, 46(3), 618–625. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10900-020-00925-6>
- Development and importance of tourism for Bulgaria*. (2021, January 1). Worlddata.Info. <https://www.worlddata.info/europe/bulgaria/tourism.php>
- Džakula, A., Banadinović, M., Lovrenčić, I. L., Vajagić, M., Dimova, A., Rohova, M., Minev, M., Scintee, S. G., Vladescu, C., Farcasanu, D., Robinson, S., Spranger, A., Sagan, A., & Rechel, B. (2022). A comparison of health system responses to COVID-19 in Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania in 2020. *Health Policy*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthpol.2022.02.003>
- Evensen, D. T., & Clarke, C. E. (2011). Efficacy Information in Media Coverage of Infectious Disease Risks. *Science Communication*, 34(3), 392–418.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1075547011421020>
- EUR-Lex - 32021R0953 - EN - EUR-Lex*. (2021, June 14). EUR-Lex. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32021R0953>
- Farooq, A., Laato, S., & Islam, A. K. M. N. (2020). Impact of Online Information on Self-Isolation Intention During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Cross-Sectional Study. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 22(5), e19128. <https://doi.org/10.2196/19128>
- Farrugia, C. (2021, June 23). *Health briefings that made Charmaine Gauci a household name end*. Times of Malta. <https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/health-briefings-that-made-charmaine-gauci-a-household-name-end.796245>
- Farrugia, C. (2020, July 23). *Testing under way after new COVID-19 case attended 'hotel takeover' party*. Times of Malta. <https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/new-covid-19-case-attended-hotel-takeover-party.806931>
- Farrugia, C. (2020b, August 15). *Wave of cancellations hits tourism industry*. Times of Malta. <https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/wave-of-cancellations-hits-tourism-industry.811938>

- Fox, M. H., Averett, E., Hansen, G., & Neuberger, J. S. (2006). The Effect of Health Communications on a Statewide West Nile Virus Public Health Education Campaign. *American Journal of Health Behavior*, 30(5), 483–494. <https://doi.org/10.5993/ajhb.30.5.5>
- Ganado, P. L. (2021, June 23). *Times of Malta is the country's most popular news source. . . by far*. Times of Malta. <https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/times-of-malta-is-the-countrys-most-popular-news-source-by-far.707286>
- Glik, D. C. (2007). Risk Communication for Public Health Emergencies. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 28(1), 33–54. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.publhealth.28.021406.144123>
- GSTREIN, O. J. (2021). The EU Digital COVID Certificate: A Preliminary Data Protection Impact Assessment. *European Journal of Risk Regulation*, 12(2), 370–381. <https://doi.org/10.1017/err.2021.29>
- Hollingsworth, B. C. J. (2021, March 20). *China opens its borders to foreigners who take Chinese shots, as geopolitical vaccine silos emerge*. CNN. <https://edition.cnn.com/travel/article/covid-vaccine-travel-visa-rules-intl-hnk/index.html>
- Katz, E., Lazarsfeld, P., & Roper, E. (2005). *Personal Influence: The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications* (1st ed.). Routledge.
- Lundgren, R. E., & McMakin, A. H. (2004). *Risk Communication*. Amsterdam University Press.
- Leyden, J. (2021, December 7). *Italian police crack down on fake Covid-19 vaccination passes*. The Daily Swig | Cybersecurity News and Views. <https://portswigger.net/daily-swig/italian-police-crack-down-on-fake-covid-19-vaccination-passes>
- Macnamara, J. (2021). New insights into crisis communication from an “inside” emic perspective during COVID-19. *Public Relations Inquiry*, 10(2), 237–262. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2046147x21999972>
- Malta Independent. (2020). 20,000 passenger movements in first week since airport reopening—The Malta Independent. <https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2020-07-09/local-news/20-000-tourists-visit-Malta-in-frst-week-since-airport-reopening-6736225000>
- Malta Contribution of travel and tourism to GDP (% of GDP), 1995–2019* - *knoema.com*. (2019, June 4). Knoema. <https://knoema.com/atlas/Malta/topics/Tourism/Travel-and-Tourism-Total-Contribution-to-GDP/Contribution-of-travel-and-tourism-to-GDP-percent-of-GDP>
- McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36(2), 176. <https://doi.org/10.1086/267990>

Mesch, G. S., Schwirian, K. P., & Kolobov, T. (2012). Attention to the media and worry over becoming infected: the case of the Swine Flu (H1N1) Epidemic of 2009. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 35(2), 325–331. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9566.2012.01500.x>

Miles, B., & Morse, S. (2007). The role of news media in natural disaster risk and recovery. *Ecological Economics*, 63(2–3), 365–373. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2006.08.007>

Milutinović, I. (2021). Media framing of COVID-19 pandemic in the transitional regime of Serbia: Exploring discourses and strategies. *Media, Culture & Society*, 43(7), 1311–1327. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443720986003>

NICODEMUS, D. M. (2004). Mobilizing Information: Local News and the Formation of a Viable Political Community. *Political Communication*, 21(2), 161–176. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584600490443868>

Ogbodo, J. N., Onwe, E. C., Chukwu, J., Nwasum, C. J., Nwakpu, E. S., Nwankwo, S. U., Nwamini, S., Elem, S., & Iroabuchi Ogbaeja, N. (2020). Communicating health crisis: a content analysis of global media framing of COVID-19. *Health Promotion Perspectives*, 10(3), 257–269. <https://doi.org/10.34172/hpp.2020.40>

Ophir, Y., Walter, D., Arnon, D., Lokmanoglu, A., Tizzoni, M., Carota, J., D'Antiga, L., & Nicastro, E. (2021). The Framing of COVID-19 in Italian Media and Its Relationship with Community Mobility: A Mixed-Method Approach. *Journal of Health Communication*, 26(3), 161–173. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10810730.2021.1899344>

Pribble, J. M., Fowler, E. F., Kamat, S. V., Wilkerson, W. M., Goldstein, K. M., & Hargarten, S. W. (2010). Communicating Emerging Infectious Disease Outbreaks to the Public Through Local Television News: Public Health Officials as Potential Spokespeople. *Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness*, 4(3), 220–225. <https://doi.org/10.1001/dmp.2010.27>

Rangachev, A., Marinov, G. K., & Mladenov, M. (2022). The demographic and geographic impact of the COVID pandemic in Bulgaria and Eastern Europe in 2020. *Scientific Reports*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-022-09790-w>

Reuters. (2021, April 9). *COVID-battered Malta to pay tourists who visit this summer*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/covid-battered-malta-pay-tourists-who-visit-this-summer-2021-04-09/>

Ritchie, H. (2020a, March 5). *Coronavirus (COVID-19) Testing*. Our World in Data. <https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus-testing>

Ritchie, H. (2020b, March 5). *Coronavirus (COVID-19) Vaccinations*. Our World in Data. https://ourworldindata.org/covid-vaccinations?country=OWID_WRL

Sandman, P. M. (1989). Hazard versus Outrage in the Public Perception of Risk. *Effective Risk Communication*, 45–49. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4613-1569-8_6

Sharun, K., Tiwari, R., Dhama, K., Rabaan, A. A., & Alhumaid, S. (2021). COVID-19 vaccination passport: prospects, scientific feasibility, and ethical concerns. *Human Vaccines & Immunotherapeutics*, 17(11), 4108–4111. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21645515.2021.1953350>

Shih, T. J., Wijaya, R., & Brossard, D. (2008). Media Coverage of Public Health Epidemics: Linking Framing and Issue Attention Cycle Toward an Integrated Theory of Print News Coverage of Epidemics. *Mass Communication and Society*, 11(2), 141–160. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205430701668121>

Steffen, J., & Cheng, J. (2021). The influence of gain-loss framing and its interaction with political ideology on social distancing and mask wearing compliance during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Current Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-021-02148-x>

Todorov, S. (2020, March 11). *Bulgaria Confirms First Death From Coronavirus*. Balkan Insight. <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/03/11/bulgaria-confirms-first-death-from-coronavirus/>

Times of Malta. (2021, June 23). *Malta's first coronavirus cases are girl and parents*. <https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/first-coronavirus-case-reported-in-malta.776288>

Times of Malta. (2020, July 27). *Sta Venera band march attendees urged to get tested for COVID-19*. <https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/sta-venera-festa-attendees-urged-to-get-tested-for-covid-19.807792>

Times of Malta. (2021, June 23). *Doctors threaten clinic closures, appointment disruptions over mass events*. <https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/doctors-threaten-clinic-closures-appointment-disruptions-over-mass.808650>

Urpani, D. G. (2020, March 28). *'An Example To Follow': WHO Europe Regional Director Gives Shout-Out To Malta's COVID-19 Measures*. Lovin Malta. <https://lovinmalta.com/news/news-international/an-example-to-follow-who-europe-regional-director-gives-shout-out-to-maltas-covid-19-measures/>

Velinova, N. (2021). Social Challenges to Communication in Digital Environment. *Human Interaction, Emerging Technologies and Future Systems V*, 114–121. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-85540-6_15

Wang, C., Horby, P. W., Hayden, F. G., & Gao, G. F. (2020). A novel coronavirus outbreak of global health concern. *The Lancet*, 395(10223), 470–473. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736\(20\)30185-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736(20)30185-9)

West Nile virus. (2017, October 3). NO AUTHOR. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/west-nile-virus>

Whitaker, P. (2021, April 27). *EU Digital Green Certificate: Data Protection Considerations*. Lexology. <https://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx?g=8a853dd8-51b8-4efe-8c4d-4f9c9210b891>

Wikipedia contributors. (2022a, May 7). *COVID-19 pandemic in Bulgaria*. Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/COVID-19_pandemic_in_Bulgaria#Timeline

World Health Organization. (2020, March 12). *WHO announces COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic*. WHO. <https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/coronavirus-covid-19/news/news/2020/3/who-announces-covid-19-outbreak-a-pandemic>

Yankov, P. (2022, May 29). *Bansko pod blokada nikoy ne vliza I ne izliza ot grada*.
<https://www.chernomore.bg/a/12-bg-obshtestvo/199269-bansko-pod-palna-blokada-nikoy-ne-vliza-i-ne-izliza-ot-grada>

7 Appendix

Table 3

Codebook

Main code	Subcode	Description
1. Newspaper	Malta Today	
	Malta Independent	
	Times of Malta	
	Kapital	
	Dnevnik 24 Chasa	
2. Frames	Conflict	Conflict between individuals, groups or organizations
	Human interest	Emotional/personal angle to the presentation of an event
	Morality	Moral side
	Economic consequence	Financial consequences for individuals, groups, organizations or countries
	Responsibility	Someone who is held responsible for the cause or the solution to the problem
	Consequences	Number of people recovered/infected/administered in the hospitals, economic/social impact ,social/political issues or discussions stimulated from the COVID-19,
	Travel/Tourism	Travel bans, international/local restrictions, COVID-19 impact on tourism industry, lifting of restrictions related to tourism/travel both locally and internationally. Information related to travel regulations & restrictions.
	Collective Action	Call for action or steps taken by NGO, governments, corporations, scientists, institutions, universities etc.
	Individual action	Call for action such as 1,5 meter distance, face-mask, hand sanitizer, get vaccinated, stay at home etc.
	Reassurance	Underlying the success and attempts of governments to gain their trust/confidence In how the COVID-19 pandemic is handled. Providing necessary help and support such as testing, hospital capacity, workforce, financial help etc. Sharing scientific information to further back up the implementation of policies.

	Information about the certificate	How to obtain it, required number of vaccine doses, validity when a person has recovered, validity, gained access to social places like malls, cinemas, theatres, workplaces and etc.
	General Information	Capacity of social places and hospitals, when schools reopen, opening of new testing locations information that is not directly related to the certificate, reports about new and upcoming regulations
3. Sentiment towards the certificate/vaccination		
	Positivity	
	Negativity	
4. Sentiment of the article		
	Positive	
	Neutral	
	Negative	
5. Contextual Frames		
	Social	
	Economic	
	Political	
	Science	
6. Stakeholders		
	Politicians	
	Healthcare workers	
	Celebrities	
	Companies	
	Institutions	
	Scientists	
7. Prospect gains		
	Gains	Positive outcome/positive action or what is gained by taking action
	Loss	Negative outcome/action or what is lost by failing to take action.
8. General Information		