H1N1 and TV News: Information or Panic?

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Abstract

Mass media, using their own criteria, create and reproduce, representations of the world, focusing mainly on issues of public interest, especially when those issues constitute "special occasions". Such a special occasion was the widespread of the H1N1 virus, or according to the name given by the media the "new flu". The current research compares scientific data concerning the virus- name, origin, transmissibility, symptoms/duration, mortality rate- to the presentation of the issue by the prime time Greek TV news bulletins. In this way, we seek to examine the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of the "invasion" of the "rationale of the medium" (e.g. dramatization) in the presentation of the evidence concerning the widespread of the virus and its implications on the population. Have the media been simple transmitters of the scientific information on the H1N1, or did they present it in ways which obey the rules of the "rationale of the medium"?

Key words: new flu, H1N1, news bulletins, rationale of the medium, coverage, dramatization

The Importance of health crises coverage

The journalistic coverage of health issues, especially health crises and more recently the H1N1 influenza, is important for at least three different reasons:

a) As happens with other issues too, Media can set the public agenda (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Dearing & Rogers: 2005) and make the public opinion consider if a health issue, or a certain aspect of it, is important or not (Philo et. al., 1994). Same thing stands for theH1N1 virus (Rubin et. al. 2009). Additionally, the Media through the promotion of a health issue, might influence the government or other state services' agenda as well, as it happened during the coverage of the H1N1 influenza (Hilton & Smith, 2010a).

b) Apart form that, Media can often form the people's attitude and decision on whether or not to support governments' or health agencies' policies. As Pierce & Gilpin (2001) argue, journalist coverage and people's

perception of health issues are closely connected.

c) Since the audience do not have any special knowledge on health issues, the Media can, to a great extent, influence personal and collective behaviors concerning either the prevention of the disease (e.g. vaccination or precaution measures)or its treatment through medication or any other way (Pierce & Gilpin, 1995;Pollayet. al., 1996; Pierceet. al. 1998; Biener & Siegel 2000; Hornik, 2002; Jones & Iverson, 2008).

The relationship between Media and health crises

Media demonstrate a rather high interest for the coverage of diseases, since their consequences reach both public interest and financial, political and social institutions (Allsop et al., 2004). Still, as Mechanic and Alpine (2001) mention, there is often a serious contradiction between the journalistic perception of a certain situation and the situation itself. The cultural Media studies (Hall, 1980) support that Media underline views on facts, but not the reality itself. The cultivation theory (Shanahan & Morgan, 2005), supports that Media promote the elites' views on reality and not reality itself and agenda setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972)focuses on the contradiction between the subject published by the Media and real world issues.

In one hand, health issues, as well as other phenomena taking place in the real world (e.g. earthquakes), form a reality faced by the human beings, and in most cases do not constitute products of direct human actions or interventions. Due to the fact that similar facts are usually one-sided (Meier, 1994; Tatalovich & Smith Alexander, 2003), there are many actors (especially politicians), paying great attention to them so as to create a consensus regarding the implementation of specific policies to face those issues.

On the other hand, the (trans) formation of medical issues, especially of the H1N1 flu, to Media issues, does not depend only on the characteristics of the phenomenon itself and the scientific knowledge, but also on the way the media function and cover reality. One can distinguish three different factors influencing the coverage of the H1N1 in the TV news bulletins: general ones, special ones and specific ones.

The general factors include the characteristics of the journalistic every issue of reality in a given society or age. This coverage depends more or less on a) the organization of the news collection (e.g. the role of news agencies, the close relation of journalists to public administration or health officials, the presence of specialists or specialized journalists in news bulletins etc.), b) the journalistic culture of the Medium, in other words, if we have to do with a hard or soft news medium, c) the ownership of the Media (state of private Media) and, d) their political- ideological orientation (Fiske& Hartley 1992, Edelman 1999,Pleios 2001, Hallin & Mancini 2004, Meyer & Hinchmann 2008,Pleios 2011).

Special factors are the ones which influence the coverage of medical and health issues by mass media, especially the audiovisual ones. Like in other cases, e.g. the economy (Goidel & Langley, 1995; Soroka, 2006), bad health news find a more extensive coverage. The appearance of a disease supposed to have negative and highly deadly results, usually provokes the intense interest of the Media. This interest is further increased when diseases have a massive and epidemic character, are transmitted through social contacts, without the social status and the origin of the people playing a significant role. Hence, Media interest is being increased, when the phenomenon transforms into crisis (NY Times, 2009), or when its characteristics can be used by the media so as to attribute to it the character of a medical or humanitarian crisis (NY Times, 2009). Media interest and intervention is being enhanced, when the factors influencing the expansion of a phenomenon become social (social habits, mentalities, practices of public administration and scientific organizations, etc.). The same thing can happen when the implications of a disease are severe, not only in terms of health, but also in financial and social terms, especially for sensitive population groups.

Within this framework the Media tend to transform one-sided issues, as in most cases health crises are, into bilateral or multi-lateral ones (Meier, 1994; Tatalovich & Smith Alexander, 2003). Hence, they tend to transform them into issues that concentrate disagreements of social, financial, political and other organizations, so as to make them more "commercial". This "commercialization" of health issues can be achieved through the focus of the Media on the action of political- administrative or scientific organizations that deal with the prevention or the control of the disease, through the underline of the social and economic consequences of the disease and/ or the interests of different financial, social, scientific groups dealing with the prevention or control of the disease(Moynihan & Sweet, 2000), or through the "connection" of the causes and/or consequences of the disease with a certain way of life, thought and behavior.

The specific factors that influence the coverage of the H1N1 influenza stem from the coverage of previous or relative diseases and the relevant "media panic"(Fatimah et al. 2009). Similar cases were the coverage of the "Spanish flu" (Taubenberger & Morens, 2006), the Creutzfeld-Jacob disease etc. There are specific parameters to the approach of a disease (Fatimah et al., 2002) that can be considered of utmost importance and can be presented in different ways by the media.

First is the name of the disease. According to a certain stream in social theory, the language and the terms used serve specific purposes. The terms deployed do not only describe a fact, but signify it according to specific mentalities, interests and practices (Edelman, 1999: 137). Galasińska and Galasiński (2003) stress out that language used to produce meaning is not neutral but ideologically charged. Van Dijk (1991:29-63) mentions that the first level to seek the relation between discourse and ideology is vocabulary.

As several researches have demonstrated, the Media use specific terms more intensely compared to others, in order to attract the interest of the public (Wilson

et al., 2004: Washer, 2009). The H1N1 flu was also called "pigs' flu", as it was initially found in pigs and was afterwards transmitted to humans. The use of this term, instead of its scientific name might be connected to the simplification of Media discourse (conversationalization of discourse) (Fairclough, 1994).

Since the word "pig" has secondary meanings as well, e.g. for the meat consumers, those that deal with pig feeding, the residents of rural areas, the use of the term might be connected to a specific framing of the news story, by not taking into consideration the scientific approach of the phenomenon. Therefore, through the name of a disease, the Media can interfere to its presentation, so as one might observe a certain grade of differentiation between the- commercial- Media and the scientists for the term used to name a disease.

Second the presentation of the scientific views on the disease (national and world health organizations, specialized scientists etc.) comes. Although during health crises scientists and scientific unions gain more visibility (Bucchi & Trench, 2008), the Media mainly aim at approaching the subject either from the audience's point of view, or from a specific angle regarding the socio-economic, cultural and political dimensions of the disease (Hones & Iverson, 2008). Media may influence the audience more, when they present different or contradictory scientific views, a fact that has been recorded for other events too, such as earthquakes and the capability to foresee them (Pleios, 2001) or the different views on political issues (Robinson, 1999).In any case, the presentation of the scientific views, depends on the practices of information collection by the Media, e.g. whether they have specialized journalists, if they maintain contacts with specialized scientific institutions etc.

Third is the origin of the disease. Media- as we argued before-tend to transform one-sided subjects to two-sided ones, so as to create a conflict between two or even more different sides. (Meier, 1994; Tatalovich & Smith Alexander, 2003). In this way, an extra interest is being created, turning these subjects into newsworthy items. Dearing and Rogers (2005: 21) consider that a news item is "anything around which a conflict is created". Under this scope, the Media can spread contradictory information concerning the virus's origin.

Fourth comes the infectiousness, hence the ways and the speed of the spreading of the disease, either in general, or for specific categories of patients, per region, social status and age groups (The Economist, 2009). The infectiousness of a disease can not only become a "two-sided issue", but is also closely connected to the creation of panic by the Media. Commercial media and soft news media may focus on scientific disagreements, so as to create a sense of uncertainty and enhance the dramatization of the news. At this point prejudices and conspiracy theories may play an important role too, having to do with specific developing countries, social strata, education levels etc (Clarke, 2010; Medeiros & Massarani, 2010; Taha, Matheson & Anisman, 2013).

Fifth are the symptoms and the duration of the disease. The answers to those questions rely heavily on the information by the specialized scientists and institutions, and much less by journalists, especially when they do not have the adequate knowledge (Rubin et al., 2009; Hilton & Smith, 2010b).Hence, the symptoms and duration of the disease are not "objects" of Media intervention and, furthermore, subjects for extensive presentation by the news bulletins, but only for specialized broadcasts of medical nature.

Sixth is the mortality rate and/ or other health consequences. Quite opposite to the symptoms and the duration, the number of deaths caused by the H1N1 virus constitutes an issue where the "constructive" power of the media is rather heavily applied (Hellenic Homeopathic Medical Society, 2010). The media might make use of the selective emphasis on the number of the deaths in certain periods, which can be quite different than the real percentage of deaths in the population (1: 100.000people for the H1N1 virus). This emphasis can be achieved with the reference of numbers which emphasize some aspects of the illness (gender, age, health progress of a patient, the effectiveness of health services etc.) and dramatize the story furthermore. Additionally, media may draw a curtain over comparative data regarding deaths, e.g. in comparison to other diseases, which might be even more lethal than the H1N1 virus (Pebody et al, 2010).In that sense, the intervention of media is not conducted through the manipulation of the number of deaths, but through the excessive focus on deaths.

A last factor is precaution measures (in what way, when, where etc.). In this case the Media intervention is rather moderate, as such information mainly comes from health services and specialized scientists (Hilton & Smith, 2010a; 2010b). Hence, this aspect too is not that fruitful for media intervention, unless there are different scientific views expressed on it. Nonetheless, the power of the medium to intervene cannot be underestimated, especially because of its capability to present the precaution measures in an audiovisual way, using- at the same time- dramatization techniques.

Among other precaution measures, vaccination is the most important one. This aspect is of utmost importance in the coverage of the H1N1 influenza, since scientific views on it differ through the expression of important disagreements. Many of those expressing their disagreement to the vaccine, stress out the deadly incidents of patients who got the vaccine, adopt conspiracy theories regarding the role of pharmaceutical companies etc. (Hellenic Homeopathic Medical Society, 2010).

In those "disagreement cases", the media intervene further more so as to stress out this lack of unanimity, dramatize the presentation of the disease and influence even more the public opinion. This intervention is being conducted through the presentation of information from various sources like doctors, researchers, health institutions' representatives etc.

In addition, according to the ownership status of the medium and the organization of news production (e.g. existence of journalists with specialized health knowledge)

or even the political orientation of the TV stations (e.g. for or against the government), the intervention can take several forms, as immediate and proof-less support of a certain scientific view, e.g. through the unilateral presentation of representatives of a certain side, through the dramatization of events, through the critique of state and health services, and the suppression of different views and events (Pleios, Papathanassopoulos, 2008a; Pleios, Papathanassopoulos, 2008b).

Main research questions and research hypotheses

Based on the abovementioned analysis, our main research question is in what extent the rationale of the Media can be traced into the presentation of the H1N1 influenza by the Greek TV news bulletins.

More specifically, the research hypotheses we sought to examine were the following:

1. The journalistic focus on the flu will be rather high, since Media demonstrate a rather high interest for the coverage of diseases, whose consequences reach both public interest and financial, political and social institutions in a negative way.

2. Given the tendency of the commercial Media to dramatize the news, we expect that the Media will make use not only of the scientific name of the H1N1 virus, but also the "pigs' flu" term, since this name can be connected with rural areas and specific aspects of agricultural financial life.

3. More or less the same thing may occur with the origin of the flu. Media, especially commercial ones, for reasons of dramatization and commercialization of the flu, may focus more on the origin of the flu from developing countries, or rural areas, trying to present it as a wider social problem.

4. Given the commercial character of the Media, their- in most cases- lack of journalists specialized on health issues and lack of direct access to national and international health organizations, we expect that they will try to present the scientific information regarding the flu through- live or not- connections with scientists, instead of just broadcasting the announcements of national or international health organizations.

5. Regarding mortality rates, we expect a rather important deviation between the Media representations and the real world rates. This deviation is expected to take place through intense dramatization, especially in private TV stations, and the selective presentation of evidence within which there is a lack of comparison to other similar diseases or previous years.

6. As far as the vaccination is concerned, under the pre-requisite that a certain debate will have been created regarding the need of population's vaccination, the Medias' intervention is expected to be significant through the rather big number of references and the presentation of different scientific views.

7. Since precaution measures constitute a subject of scientific discussion, we expect that the Media will predominantly present the precaution measures suggested by the immunologists and other scientific categories providing information on the flu in the news bulletins.

The identity of the research

The research was conducted in prime time TV news bulletins from 20th of April 2009 to 28th of February 2010, during which the first "wave" of the H1N1 influenza took place in Greece. The news bulletins chosen and analyzed are the ones of NET (former public TV station), MEGA, ANT1, ALPHA, ALTER and Skai.

The choice of the stations was based on their ownership status (private and public), as well as on the fact that the news bulletins of those stations gather more than 85% of the amount of the spectatorship of prime time TV news bulletins of all TV stations (AGB, 2011). A team of six researchers examined the amount of news bulletins of the TV stations (weekdays and weekends), and analyzed a total of 622 news items referring to the H1N1 flu.

The elaboration of the data and the results was done using the SPSS version 19, and the coders' reliability test was conducted based on the type of North, Holsti, Zaninovich and Zinnes (North et al. 1963)[1].

In some of the variables' cross-tabulations we conducted, we used the x^2 (chi-square) statistical test. The chi-square test is used to investigate the correlation between two categorical or ordinal variables. The test informs the researcher for the strength of the correlation between the variables, but does not reveal the direction of the correlation (Gnardellis 2003: 353-360, Siomkos & Vasilakopoulou 2005: 173-178).

Empirical findings and commentary

As it came up from the research, the presentation of the H1N1 influenza "conquers" the TV news bulletins. The mean row of the news items within the news bulletins concerning the flu is approximately the seventh (mean=7.22/ mode=7).

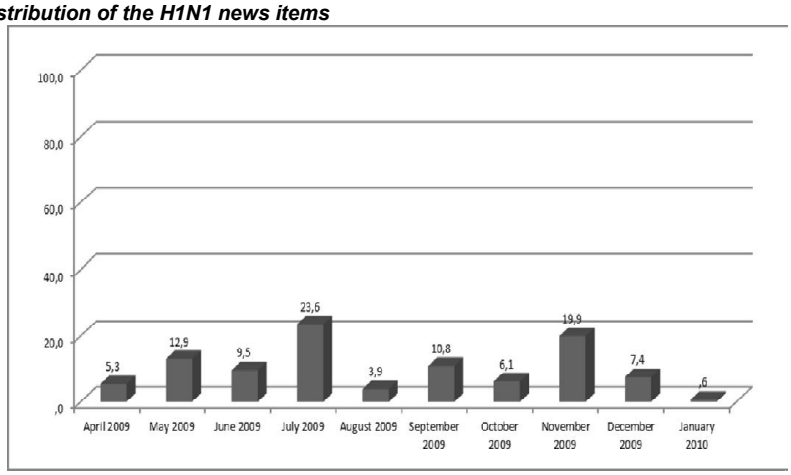
In a period during which there are important issues that seek coverage as general elections, fiscal crisis, Middle East wars, British general elections etc., the seventh place can be considered as relatively high. As a confirmation of our comment, comes the fact that the so called "national issues", which are of utmost importance for the journalists, are being presented in the ninth place within the news bulletins (mean= 8.79). Hence the H1N1 virus is

[1] R= 2(C1,C2)/C1+C2, with lowest level of credibility the 70%.

considered more important even than "national issues". A further verification of the importance of the virus for the news bulletins is the mean duration of the specific news items, which exceeds the 4 and a half minutes per news item (mean = 273.31 secs.), while the 24% of the items last more than 5 minutes (> 300 secs.).

Still, factors having to do with the rationale of the medium, had influenced in a significant way the presentation of the H1N1 news items. The biggest number of news items was found during the summer of 2009, when the H1N1 influenza appears in a worldwide range and during November 2009 (Figure 1), when the virus appears massively in Greece, even though the whole issue had been covered by international media several months earlier (Los Angeles Times, 2009).

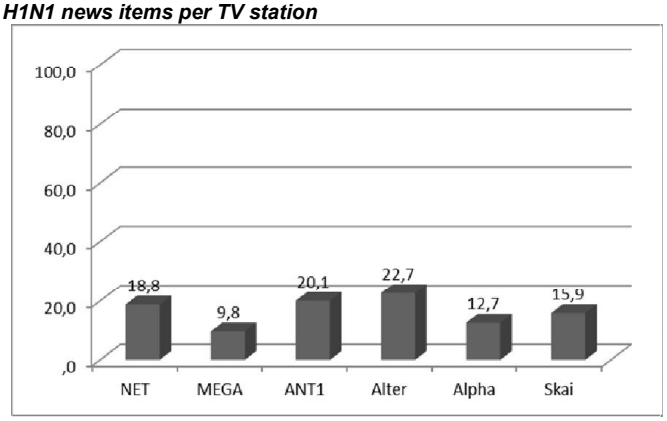
Figure 1 ***Temporal distribution of the H1N1 news items***



Still, the data concerning the summer of 2009 appear to be result of the Media's commercial character, through which there was an effort to attract the audience's attention to news bulletins, especially in a period, which, according to different researches, is a period of relatively poor news content and low TV viewing (Barwise & Ehrenberg, 1994; AGB Hellas, 2011).

Another important finding is that in two of the most commercial TV stations (ANT1, ALTER), as well as NET, which in other researches appears to be the most "commercial" public TV station (Pleios & Papathanasopoulos, 2008), the percentage of H1N1 news items is bigger than in the rest private stations (Figure 2).

Figure 2 ***Distribution of the H1N1 news items per TV station***

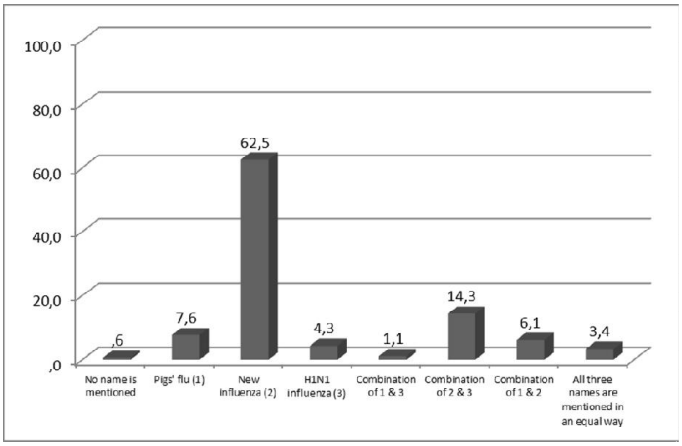


The rather high row with in the news bulletins and the rather extensive reportages for the H1N1 influenza, make us accept our first working hypothesis, for the relatively high journalistic focus on the specific issue. The H1N1 as a disease, setting public health in danger, accumulated the interest of the Media.

Our research findings showed that there is a significant difference between the scientific name of the flu and the terms used by the Media to describe it (Figure 3). Even though the scientific term is H1N1, the Media used it only in the 4.3% of the news items.

On the other hand, Media used either exclusively (7.6%) or in combination (20.4%) the term "pigs' flu". This evidence shows that, although journalists knew the scientific term for the virus, they chose different verbal strategies closer to the rationale of commercial media.

Figure 3 ***Name of the flu***

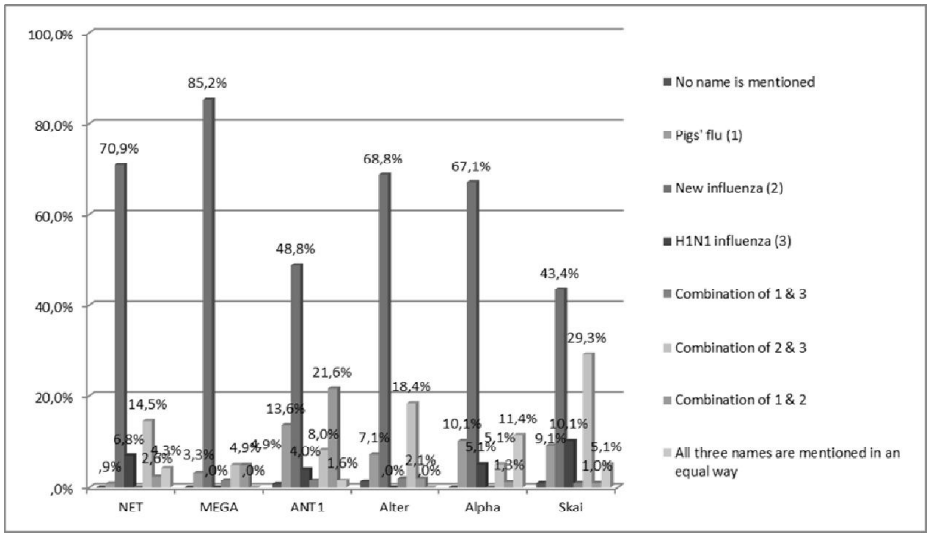


Finally, the term "new influenza", an intermediate between the "pigs' flu" and "H1N1 influenza", characterizing the flu as something new and different compared to other already existing influenzas, was used in the 62,5% of the news items. The vast majority of the news bulletins used terms, which more or less contributed to the formation of a panic environment, using the meaning context previously formed for "mad cows' flu" and "bird flu". Additionally, the use of these terms, and especially of the "pigs' flu", referring to poor rural areas, animal husbandry and the consumption of pork meat, is quite frequent.

Based on the abovementioned results we partly accept our second hypothesis, because the media in the majority of cases use neither the scientific term of the flu, nor the term "pigs' flu". The presentation of the flu is being conducted mainly through the "new influenza" term. This name has its own semantic importance, due to the fact that it refers to something new and possibly dangerous, if combined to the presentation of deaths related to the flu.

Of particular interest are the differences in the terms used among the TV stations of our research. All stations use the term "new influenza" (Figure 4), and particularly in Mega (90.2%), NET (73.5%), Alter (70.9 %) andANT1 (70.4%), hence in those stations, which make more intense use of dramatization in the news bulletins. Among them is one of the three former public TV stations (NET), which used to be the most "commercial" of all public TV stations. On the contrary, the scientific term H1N1 is referred mostly on Skai (39.4%), NET (21.4%) and Alter (18.4%).

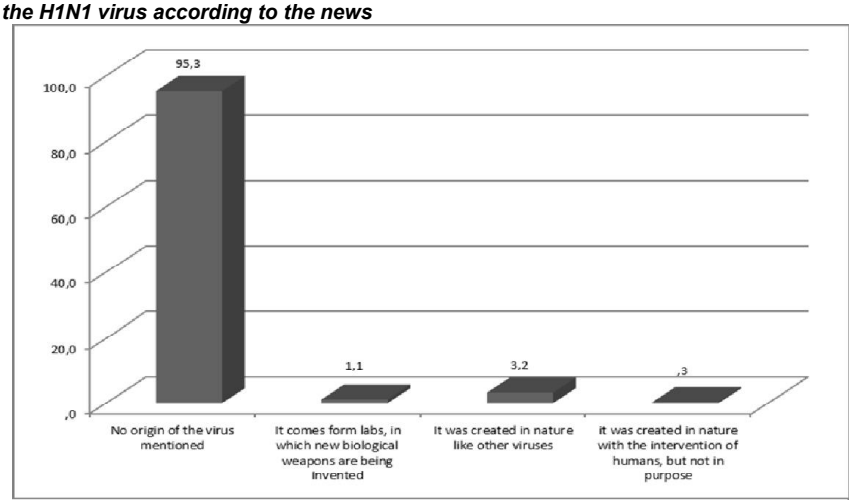
Figure 4 ***Name of the flu across different TV stations***



As far as the origin of the flu is concerned, the vast majority of the news items does not refer to it, or consider that it comes from nature (Figure 5). Hence the conspiracy theories we thought that would escort the news items cannot be confirmed. Therefore the disagreement between the journalistic and scientific term

used to name the virus is connected to cultural meanings for the generation of panic by the media and not to political or other "conspiracy rationale" explanations, as it has happened in previous years with other diseases like AIDS, at least during its initial stages of spreading all over the globe.

Figure 5 Origin *of the H1N1 virus according to the news*



Therefore, as far as the origin of the virus is concerned, we reject our third hypothesis, since it is not being mentioned in the vast majority of the news items we examined. Additionally, in the cases that it is being mentioned, it is not connected to developing countries and, in that sense, they do not encourage a "social" reading of the epidemic on behalf of the viewers.

On one hand, the broadcast of views of the relevant health institutions, either of Greece (Center for Control and Prevention of Diseases, CCPD),or worldwide ones (World Health Organization, WHO) appears to be limited. To be more specific, the view of CCPD members is absent from the 70.7% of the news items and of WHO from 74.1%. This phenomenon is imminent to almost all stations.

Exception to this tendency isMega, where the views of CCPD representatives are broadcast in the 60,7% of news items and the views of WHO in 47.5% of the news items (Figure 6 and Figure 7).Hence, only in Mega we can observe a wider presentation of the views of CCPD, and WHO.

Figure 6 *Reference of CCPD as source for H1N1 virus information*

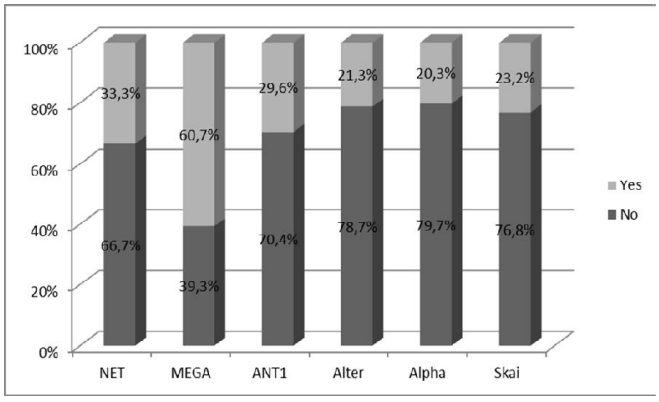
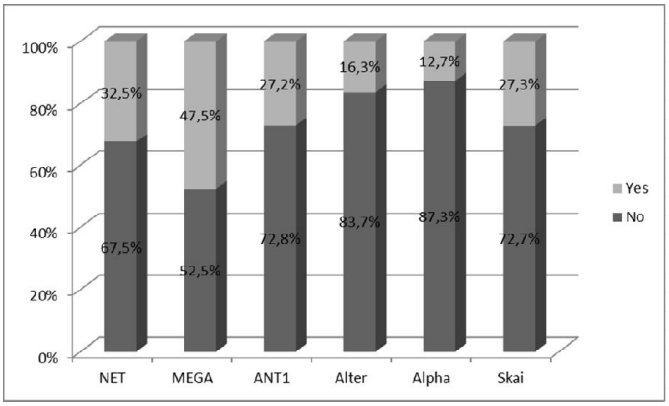
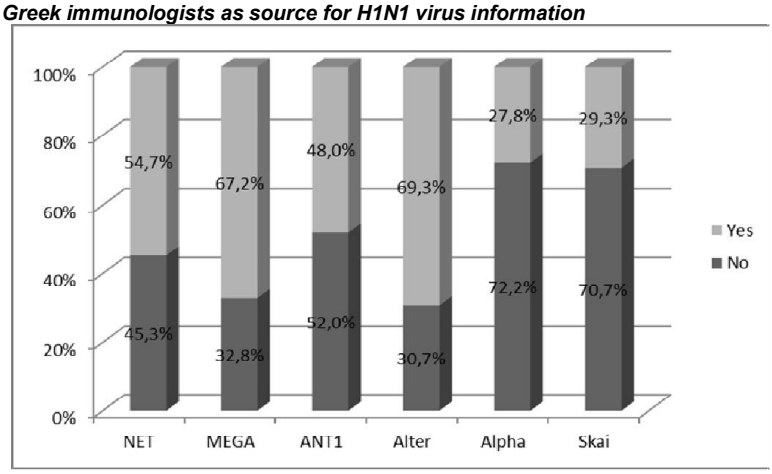


Figure 7 ***Reference of WHO as source for H1N1 virus information***



On the other hand, the views of Greek immunologists are being presented more frequently, since they appear in the 50.3% of the total news items we examined. These statements are mostly found in Alter and MEGA (Figure 8) and that is probably explained both by the significance the journalists give to this phenomenon as well as because of the news collection practices in these stations, with the lack of direct journalistic links to official health organizations. Thus most TV stations (4 out of 6) prefer the presentation of the scientific information concerning the virus, through the statements or the live presence of specialized immunologists.

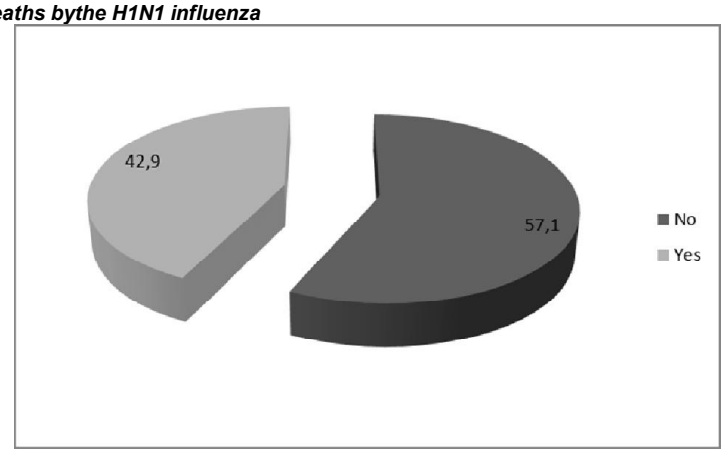
Figure 8 ***Reference of Greek immunologists as source for H1N1 virus information***



Therefore, we accept our fourth hypothesis since the majority of the Media we examined try to present the scientific information regarding the flu mostly through interviews with scientists. This method, apart from the culture and the structure of each station, adds some dramatization, in the case of live interviews, during the news bulletin. Noteworthy is that, MEGA - a hard news TV station - can be distinguished from all other stations as a rather special case, since it appears to use- in the majority of the news items concerning the H1N1 virus, a multiplicity of sources referring to the Greek CCPD, the WHO and to specialized scientists.

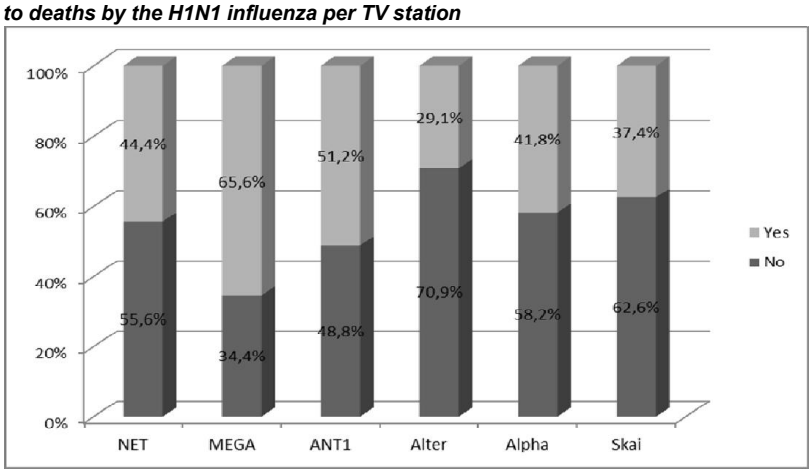
Our expectation on the dramatization rationale, through the reference to deaths by the flu,intending mainly to attract more audience, is being confirmed by the reference of the news items to the deaths caused by the H1N1 virus (Figure 9).Although the death percentage of the H1N1 does not differ from a common flu (1 in 100.000), the 43% of the examined news items makes reference to death incidents. Hence, “bad news”- the spreading of the virus- is closely connected to the Media focus on the event. Additionally, the reference to the deaths becomes a means to cause the Media panic about the flu.

Figure 9 ***Reference to deaths bythe H1N1 influenza***



Further analysis of the deaths' issue shows some interesting deviations between the different stations (Figure 10).The station focusing most on deaths is Mega, which makes reference to deaths in more than half of the news items (65.6%), as well as ANT1 (51.2%). These two commercial stations are the only ones to demonstrate that high percentages of references to deaths. In all other stations, death references do not exceed 50% of the news items, ene though they remain close to that percentage. The third higher percentage can be found in NET (44.4%) followed by Alpha (41.8%).

Figure 10 ***Reference to deaths by the H1N1 influenza per TV station***

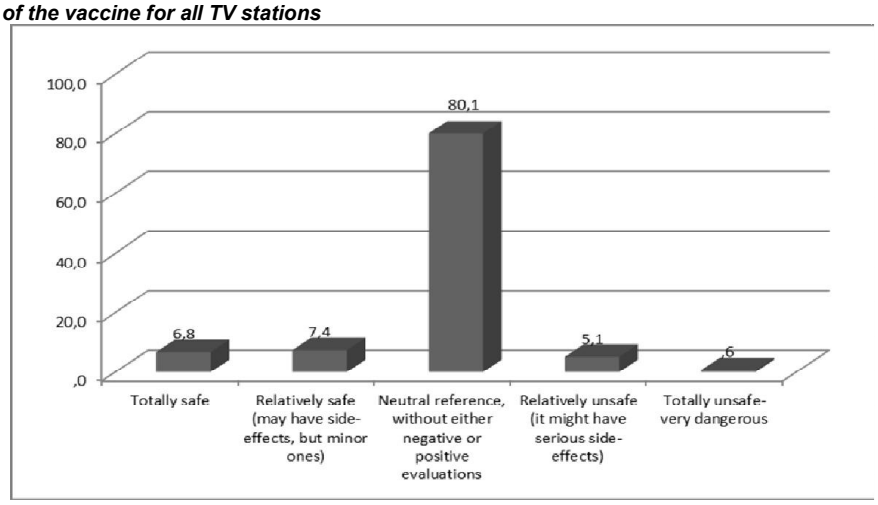


The frequent reference to deaths (especially in the case of Mega) reveals a certain journalistic culture, according to which the central journalistic value is not the multifaceted presentation and information about the flu, but the dramatization of the issue through the reference to deaths, with everything that this rationale involves. Thus we accept our fifth research hypothesis.

Regarding the vaccination, its is being presented in a neural way in the 80% of the news items, whereas it is referred as unsafe (either relatively, or totally) only in the 5.7% of the news items (Figure11).

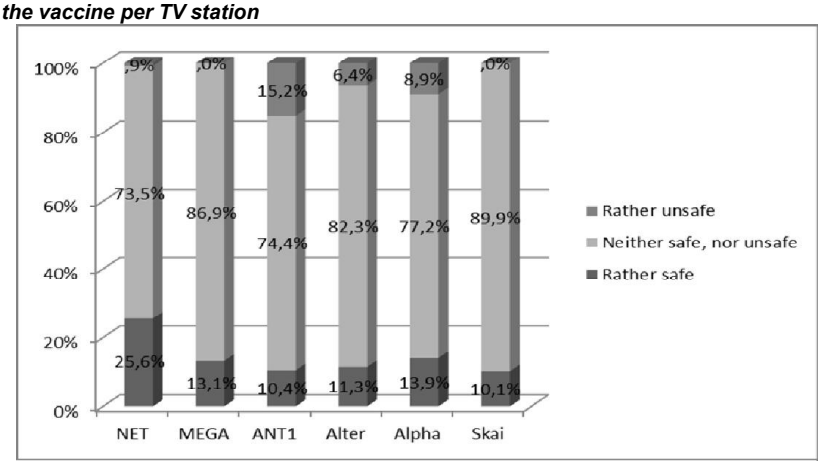
As it stems from other sources too, the vaccine was considered to be totally secure and quite necessary for specific high- risk population groups (Kathimerini, 2009).

Figure 11 ***Safety of the vaccine for all TV stations***



The same image is being formed, with small alterations, for each TV station (Figure 12). The official position of the relevant services, that the vaccine is totally safe, is being adopted mostly by NET (25.5%), Alpha (13.9%) andMega (13.6%). In general, between those who support the safety of the vaccine and those who support that it is unsafe, the first ones prevail.

Figure 12 ***Safety of the vaccine per TV station***



Vaccination is in general not referred in the news both for the high and low risk population groups (68.6% and 80.2% respectively). When a reference takes place, it is suggested that high risk population groups should be vaccined (22.7%).

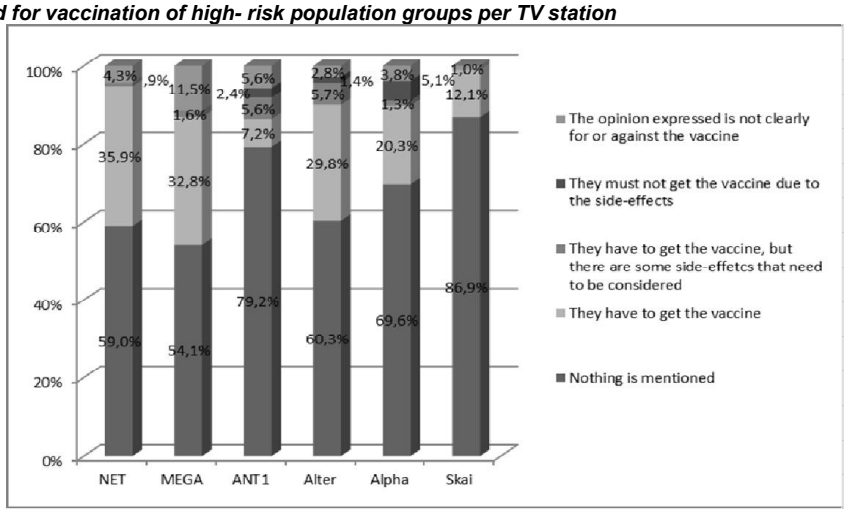
The opposite opinion, for the non-vaccination of population groups receives very low percentages.

Based on these data, we could argue that the “fight” that took place within the scientific community as regards the safety and necessity of the vaccine, is not being significantly presented in the news bulletins.

In the case that the population’s vaccination rates remained low in a country with high drugs consumption, one must seek the reasons in different areas, and not the media domain.

Still, one can observe some minor differences in the perecentages regarding the need for population vaccination (Figure 13). The need is mostly stressed out by NET (35.9%), Mega (26,2%) and Alter (29.8%).

Figure 13 ***The need for vaccination of high- risk population groups per TV station***



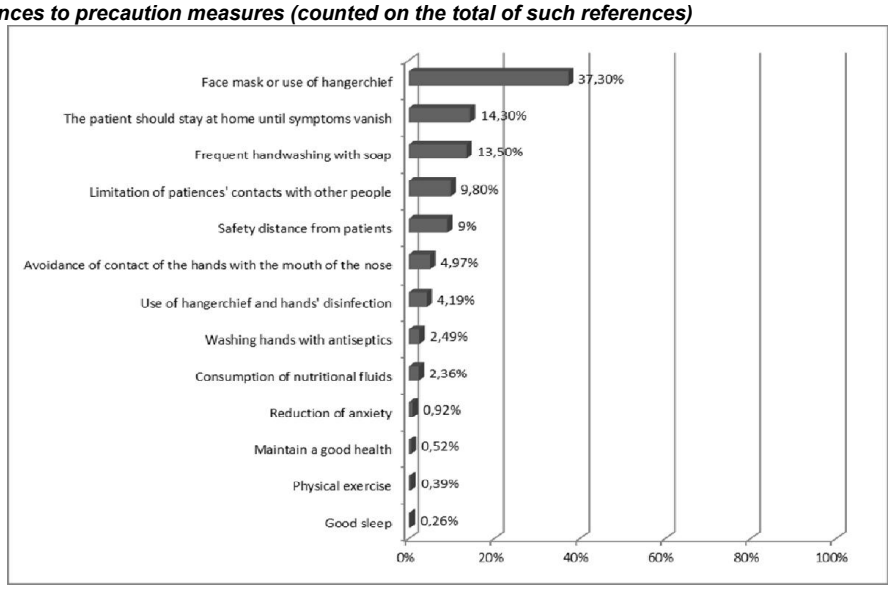
It is interesting to mention that some stations, especially Alter (34.2% of the news items) and Mega (29.5% of the news items), present doctors and nursing staff expressing the opinion that the population should get the vaccine. These opinions are significantly lower in other stations (Skai 9.1% and Alpha 10.1%).Therefore we reject our sixth hypothesis, since no serious debate about the need of vaccination took place during the news bulletins we examined.

As far as other precaution measures are concerned, in the majority of the news items we examined (60.5%), there is a reference to at least one precaution measure.As one can see in Figure 14, the face mask is the most commonly mentioned precaution measure (Martin, 2009) in the 37.3% of the references to precaution measures, though it has been reported that the mask does not constitute a fully effective measure (Los Angerles Times, 2009). The masks are followed by the avoidance to work for seven days (14.3%) and the frequent washing of hands (13,5%). The avoidance of contact with the patients is referred only few cases (9.8%), as well as the distance from the patients (9%).

Coming to our seventh hypothesis, we can see that in the majority of news bulletins (almost 60%) there is a reference to at least one precaution measure. At the same time, the most common measure is the use of face mask, though it is not considered to be the most effective one from a scientific point of view.

Still, in spite of the prevalence of the face mask, the Media present other general precaution measures suggested by the scientists, which help prevent the transmission of the virus. Therefore, we partially accept our hypothesis for the non-important intervention of the Media as far as the- beyond the vaccine - precaution measures are concerned.

Figure14 ***References to precaution measures (counted on the total of such references)***



Discussion

Our theoretical starting point for the aims of the current research was the ways in which the Media may broadcast the information related to health issues, and more specifically health crises. We distinguished seven different aspects of the Media presentation of an epidemic: its name, the scientific views on it, its origin, its infectiousness, the symptoms and the duration of the disease, its mortality rate and/ or other health consequences, the precaution measures that need to be taken in order to restrict its spread, and among these measures, first and foremost the vaccination. In several aspects, the Media, depending on the intensity of the scientific debate over a specific disease (the more intense the debate, the more possible the Media intervention), might "intervene" and input their culture in the presentation of the epidemic. The extent and characteristics of the intervention depend on the nature of the medium and its subsequent tendency towards commercialization and dramatization of the news. Under this rationale, our findings demonstrated that the TV stations we examined presented the influenza in a rather bilateral way.

On one hand, they approached it as a special kind of flu with significant, possible negative results on the population. This is pretty evident by the naming of the flu by the news bulletins, "new flu" instead of H1N1. The term "new flu" implies something totally new and perhaps even more dangerous than it really was the case of the H1N1. In addition, the frequent presentation of deaths imputed to the virus and the selective reference to general statistical data regarding the death rates of the H1N1, contributed to the creation of a context of a serious epidemic threatening the population.

Another intervention of the media rationale is the over-presentation of the face mask as precaution measure, instead of the advice given by immunologists, who suggested different measures against the spreading of the virus (e.g. staying of the patient at home, maintenance of the personal hygiene).

Another thing to point out here, having to do with the Media rationale of the presentation of the H1N1 flu, is the fact that in most news items there was presence of a specialized immunologist, since the majority Media preferred to present specialized scientists either live or through recorded statements.

On the other hand, concerning its origin and the vaccination procedure, the Media of our research presented the influenza in a pretty neutral way, without inputting dramatization or other commercialization characteristics. The news items either wouldn't refer to the origin of the virus, or they would mostly promote the scientific views about the need of vaccination of the population, by simply presenting the views of the specialized scientists on the necessity and safety of the vaccine against the flu.

The information offered by the news bulletins regarding the H1N1 influenza appeared to be credible. Still, the rationale of the medium prevailed in some cases, mainly through the excessive stress out of the negative (real or hypothetical) consequences of the flu, and in particular the related deaths, through the name of the flu they used to present it ("new influenza") and the presentation of the issue mainly during the summertime, when they lack other important news.

In other words, the rationale of the medium prevailed either with "television strategies", e.g. isolation or suppression of comparative data, or presentation of subjective estimations in the aspects where specialized knowledge is not a prerequisite. In terms of of "panic" concerning the influenza, the news bulletins can be more or less divided into two different categories: First, those which present the H1N1 flu as a common one at a pick period, adopting the official views of the relevant health organizations and avoid the creation of panic (NET, Alter, Skai and in some cases Alpha). Second, those which adopt mostly the rationale of the medium and tend to create a moral panic context (ANT1, Mega and usually Alpha).

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