



THE ATHENS INSTITUTE FOR EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

Essays on COVID-19 Research

Edited by
Zoe Boutsoli, Victoria Bigelow &
Olga Gkounta

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Essays on COVID-19 Research

Edited by

Zoe Boutsoli

Vice President of Publications, Athens Institute for Education and Research
(ATINER)

Victoria Bigelow

Fulbright Scholar, Athens Institute for Education and Research (ATINER)

&

Olga Gkounta

Researcher, Athens Institute for Education and Research (ATINER)

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List of Contributors

Adejare, Bimbo Onaolapo

Doctoral Research Scholar, Department of Business Administration,
School of Economics and Management, University of Minho, Portugal

Adenigb, Oluwaseun Ademola

Research Fellow, Selinus University of Sciences and Literature, Italy

Akbaşlı, Sait

Professor, Department of Educational Administration, Hacettepe
University, Turkey

Ali, Mian Amjad

Professor, Orthopaedics & Traumatology Division, Lady Reading
Hospital Peshawar, Pakistan

Bäckman, Guy

Professor, Åbo Akademi University, Finland

Bilal, Muhammad

Post Graduate Resident, Orthopaedics & Traumatology Division, Lady
Reading Hospital Peshawar, Pakistan

Calleja Bitar, Daniela

Chief Operations Officer, Richmond Foundation, Malta

Caraglia, Anna

Public Health Officer, Ministry of Health, Italy

Comfort, Daphne

Former Research Student, Newcastle Business School, Northumbria
University, UK (deceased)

Crescentini, Noemi

PhD Student, University of Naples Federico II, Italy

De Falco, Ciro Clemente

Research Fellow, University of Naples Federico II, Italy

Dimech Sant, Stephania

Chief Executive Officer, Richmond Foundation, Malta

Doğan, Runida

Assistant Professor, Department of Surgical Nursing, Faculty of
Nursing, İnönü University, Turkey

- Fitzpatrick, Neill**
Assistant Professor, MacEwan University, Canada
- Galea, Michael**
Senior Lecturer, University of Malta, Malta
- Grech, Paulann**
Senior Lecturer, University of Malta, Malta
- Gukiina, Joshua**
Lecturer, Makerere University Business School, Jinja Campus, Uganda
- Gunay, Kemal**
PhD Researcher, Public Relations and Publicity Department, Faculty of Communication, Istanbul University, Turkey
- Güvercin, Derya**
English Teacher, National Ministry of Education, Turkey
- Iancu, Lavinia-Olivia**
Lecturer, Faculty of Economics, Tibiscus University of Timișoara, Romania
- Ibrahimi, El Houcine Ouazzani**
Laboratory of Discourse, Creativity, Society and Religions, Faculty of Letters and Humanities Sais, Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University, Morocco
- Ismaili, Jalal**
Assistant Professor, The Higher Institute of Technology, Moulay Ismail University, Morocco
- Jereb, Eva**
Professor, Department of Personnel and Education, Faculty of Organizational Sciences, University of Maribor, Slovenia
- Jerebic, Janja**
Assistant Professor, Department of Methodology, Faculty of Organizational Sciences, University of Maribor, Slovenia
- Jones, Peter**
Associate Professor, School of Business, University of Gloucestershire, UK
- Jurić, Tado**
Assistant Professor, Catholic University of Croatia, Croatia

- Kesici, Ayşe Elitok**
Associate Professor, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Faculty of Education, Aydın Adnan Menderes University, Turkey
- Lamunu, Elizabeth**
Lecturer, Makerere University Business School, Jinja Campus, Uganda
- Lust, Jan**
Professor, Ricardo Palma University, Peru
- Maraglino, Francesco**
Director, Office 5 DG Prevention, Ministry of Health, Italy
- Menekli, Tuğba**
Assistant Professor, Department of Internal Medicine Nursing, Faculty of Health, Malatya Turgut Özal University, Turkey
- Mengu, Murat**
Associate Professor, Head, New Media and Communication Department, Faculty of Communication, Istanbul Arel University, Turkey
- Mengu, Seda**
Professor, Head, Public Relations and Publicity Department, Faculty of Communication, Istanbul University, Turkey
- Naeemullah**
Assistant Professor, Orthopaedics & Traumatology Division, Lady Reading Hospital Peshawar, Pakistan
- Ofrim, Ionita Maria**
Judge, Zalau Court, Romania
- Okaka, Fredrick Okoth**
Lecturer, Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, Moi University, Kenya
- Olaore, Gbemi Oladipo**
Researcher/PhD Scholar, Department of Business Administration, Faculty of Business, Karabuk University, Turkey
- Omondi, Paul**
Associate Professor, Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, Moi University, Kenya
- Osisanwo, Ayo**
Lecturer, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

- Padricelli, Giuseppe Michele**
PhD Student, University of Naples Federico II, Italy
- Papanikos, Gregory T.**
President, ATINER, Greece
- Parodi, Patrizia**
Public Health Officer, Ministry of Health, Italy
- Patraus, Mihaela Elvira**
Associate Professor, Faculty of Law and Jurisprudence, School of Law,
University of Oradea, Oradea, Romania
- Polo Martín, Bárbara**
Lecturer, International University of Valencia, Spain
- Punziano, Gabriella**
Assistant Professor, University of Naples Federico II, Italy
- Reid, Jan L.**
President, Coast Economic Consulting, USA
- Sammut, Alexei**
Lecturer, University of Malta, Malta
- Scerri, Josianne**
Associate Professor, University of Malta, Malta
- Shah, Faaiz Ali**
Assistant Professor, Orthopaedics & Traumatology Division, Lady
Reading Hospital Peshawar, Pakistan
- Struwig, Miemie**
Professor, Nelson Mandela University, South Africa
- Trezza, Domenico**
Research Fellow, University of Naples Federico II, Italy
- Udofia, Ekpenyong Ekpenyong**
Doctoral Research Scholar, Department of Business Administration,
University of Lagos, Nigeria
- Udoayang, Joseph O.**
Professor, Department of Accounting, Faculty of Management
Sciences, University of Calabar, Nigeria

Uklala, Peter A.

Research Assistant, Department of Accounting, Faculty of Management Sciences, University of Calabar, Nigeria

Urh, Marco

Senior Lecturer, Department of Personnel and Education, Faculty of Organizational Sciences, University of Maribor, Slovenia

Uwah, Uwem E.

Lecturer, Department of Accounting, Faculty of Management Sciences, Akwa Ibom State University, Nigeria

Watson, Storm

Junior Lecturer, Nelson Mandela University, South Africa

Yıldız, Erman

Assistant Professor, Department of Psychiatric Nursing, Faculty of Nursing, İnönü University, Turkey

President's Prologue

Gregory T. Papanikos

The Athens Institute for Education and Research (ATINER) is a world association of academics and researchers based in Athens. Its mission is “to become a forum where Academics and Researchers from all over the world can convene in Athens in small groups like in ancient Athenian symposiums, exchange ideas on their research and discuss future developments in their disciplines, as well as engage with professionals from other fields” (<https://www.atiner.gr/mission>).

Since its establishment in 1995, ATINER has organized many such academic events with the participation of thousands of academics and researchers attending from almost 150 different countries. Responding to demands from many of our members and friends, ATINER endeavored into publishing proceedings based on papers presented at the various academic events organized by ATINER. More than 200 books have been published (<https://www.atiner.gr/books-all>) on various themes.

In 2015, ATINER launched a series of quarterly academic journals covering a number of disciplines. Currently (2022) the list includes 16 free-access academic journals without any fee charged either on authors or readers (<https://www.athensjournals.gr/>).

This year ATINER has decided on a new initiative in a more systematic way to publish books based on previously published papers in ATINER's journals and co-edited by academic friends and researchers affiliated with ATINER. The aim is to improve the communication of research to all academics based on common themes. All ATINER's journals are within the spectrum of a general discipline - non-thematic, e.g., *The Athens Journal of Social Sciences*. This makes it difficult for a scholar to follow publications in her/his own specific area of research.

Thus, this book entitled, *Essays on COVID-19 Research*, and edited by Zoe Boutsoli, Victoria Bigelow & Olga Gkounta, aims at filling this gap by presenting to all those who are doing research on COVID-19 to find in one handy and freely available in its electronic format book, selected papers related to this issue. On this occasion I would like to extend my thanks to ATINER's Vice President of Publications, Dr Zoe Boutsoli, and to the two ATINER's researchers, Victoria Bigelow and Olga Gkounta, for their efficient work in bringing this volume together.

Lastly but not least, I should mention a new type of publication which was also launched this year. ATINER different publications included a book of abstracts presented at a specific conference without any further elaboration. Starting with the first conference this year, the one on Humanities and Arts, its abstract book has been published in a different way and edited in a book format with an introductory chapter; see here: <https://bit.ly/3ME4FV3>. The

introductory chapter of all abstract books published this way henceforth will be published in one of the journals which sponsors the particular academic event.

I do hope that both these two initiatives will serve the mission of ATINER as mentioned above by making easier for the academics of the entire world to share their research findings and thoughts with their colleagues around the world. Since this process is ongoing, we do invite other academics to contribute to this scientific endeavor by submitting comments or book reviews which can be published in one of ATINER's journals or elsewhere.

Introduction

Zoe Boutsoli, Victoria Bigelow, & Olga Gkounta

This chapter is an introduction to this book publication “Essays on COVID-19 Research” and presents a survey of the thirty-one selected studies for this book that have been published in various ATINER academic journals since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. All of these studies have undergone a double-blind peer review process and have been accepted for publication. The aim of this chapter is to summarize the main research findings of these studies and highlight their major conclusions. These studies cover research related to COVID-19 from a variety of research fields that include Health; Mass Media and Communication; Sociology; Business and Economics; Tourism; Education; and Law.

Keywords: *COVID-19, pandemic, deaths, lockdowns, vaccinations, well-being, recovery plan, distance education*

Introduction

COVID-19 has entered its third year and the effects have been devastating. The obvious one is the loss of lives which by now account for millions of people worldwide. The world academic community reacted quickly, resulting in a mass of publications on the various aspects of the pandemic, including the most important aspect of which is the medical and health effects and the development of vaccines to fight the virus. Never before in human history has such a global mobilization of researchers produced such spectacular results in such a short period of time. Along with the research on medicine and health, numerous studies were published which deal with other aspects of the pandemic such as the economic and social repercussions both in the short-run and in the long-run.

The plethora of studies on COVID-19 makes a comprehensive survey almost impossible. Instead, this chapter provides a selective review of a sample of studies which research various aspects of COVID-19. The selection criterion is a very simple one: this chapter surveys only studies which have been published in the various journals published by the *Athens Institute for Education and Research* (ATINER). The cut-off date was the end of 2021. Thus, studies published or submitted and accepted for publication by the end of 2021 are included in this survey. In total, 31 studies are included which are organized into seven themes.

The following sections of the survey correspond to each of the separate themes. There is also a final section which provides the main conclusion of the chapter and speculates about the direction of future research on COVID-19.

The Health Aspect of COVID-19

This section consists of five studies—original surveys coming from four Mediterranean countries (Malta, Turkey, Greece, and Italy) and Pakistan, a country in Southeast Asia. All researchers examined the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on various health issues in different healthcare environments around the

world. In particular, Galea et al. (2022) focus on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the well-being of the elderly people (65+) in Malta. They collected anonymous data from 500 participants (18–85 years old) by the Richmond Foundation Malta over an eleven-month period (April 2020 – March 2021) and concentrated on the 65–85 age category. Their results revealed that the stress levels and worries (about their own and their families' well-being) of the elderly increased with the progression of the pandemic. Contact with family and/or friends through internet platforms declined in time, feelings of happiness and hopefulness steadily increased coupled by a decrease of fear and depression over time. However, the feeling of loneliness increased more with age. Galea et al. (2022) highlight the important role that religion played for the elderly in Malta and the comfort found in prayer during the pandemic time.

Following, Menekli et al. (2021) produced an observational study which analysed the relationship between the perceived stress and gastrointestinal (GI) symptoms during the COVID-19 outbreak in intensive care unit (ICU) nurses, who are on the frontlines in the fight against the pandemic. Menekli et al. (2021) tested the following three research questions: *What are the GI symptoms that ICU nurses experience during the COVID-19 pandemic? Is the perceived stress in ICU nurses associated with GI symptoms during the COVID-19 pandemic?* and *What are the factors associated with GI symptoms that occur in ICU nurses during the COVID-19 pandemic?*

They used a sample of 170 nurses working at the ICUs of the Malatya Research and Training Hospital in eastern Turkey. They collected data through the face-to-face interview method between October 2020 and January 2021. As far as the GI symptoms that ICU nurses experience during the COVID-19 pandemic, they mostly suffered from heartburn, diarrhoea/constipation, abdominal distention, postprandial bloating, dysphagia, abdominal pain and fewer than 3 weekly defecations, hard or lumpy defecation, early feeling of satiety, nausea, more than 3 defecations per day, a feeling of urgent need to defecate, profuse or watery defecation, vomiting, feeling of anal obstruction, and faecal incontinence problems often or very often. Concerning the 2nd research question, Menekli et al. (2021) found a statistically significant relationship between GI symptoms and perceived stress scores ($p > 0.05$). From the multiple linear regression analysis performed it was found that women nurses, those with bad perceived health status and a fast-food diet, nurses who had had a previous COVID-19 infection status, and those who work at a high-risk ICU in terms of COVID-19 were most likely to suffer from gastrointestinal symptoms during the COVID-19 outbreak. Researchers have concluded that the presence of the COVID-19 pandemic has deteriorated the perceived stress of ICU nurses and has increased the number of gastrointestinal symptoms due to exhausting shifts and stressful working conditions.

Papanikos (2021a) has considered the effects of lockdowns, vaccinations and weather temperatures on the number of deaths due to COVID-19. Regarding the first independent variable, and for the purposes of this study, the basic criterion to be considered a time period as “lockdown” is whether primary and secondary schools were open or not. Based on this assumption, during the period of the current pandemic, the Greek government had decided to close down the economy three times (from March 11, 2020 to May 31, 2020; from November 9, 2020 to

January 31, 2021; and from March 16, 2021 to May 17, 2021). The three lockdowns sum up to 229 days. The research question was whether these three lockdowns had any positive effect in decreasing the number of deaths. From his analysis, Papanikos (2021a) found that the first lockdown had a drastic effect of keeping the daily number of deaths very low indeed. After a summer period where the number of deaths continued to be low, even though the strict lockdown measures were lifted, during the fall 2020, the total number of daily deaths was starting to rise again, resulting in the second lockdown by the Greek government. The de-escalation of the total number of deaths only happened after the Christmas holidays, where the daily death toll of COVID-19 decreased, but had never returned to its earlier period of the first lockdown. The third lockdown, lasting from 16 of March 2021 to 17 May 2021 (63 days in total) mostly affected the total number of deaths due to COVID-19. Two basic differences are observed between the second and the last lockdown. Firstly, the average, the standard deviation and the maximum values of the number of deaths were higher in the third lockdown compared to the same numbers of the second lockdown, and secondly, it took a longer time for the effects of the third lockdown to show up. The second independent variable examined by Professor Papanikos (2021a) was the role of vaccination on the behavior of the total number of deaths due to COVID-19. Based on a well-organized vaccination program, the Greek government achieved to protect about 4.3 million people from Sars-CoV-2 through vaccine by June 14, 2021. The research question regarding the vaccination independent variable was whether the large number of vaccinated people has negatively affected the total number of deaths due to COVID-19. From his correlation analysis, Papanikos (2021a) found that a non-linear effect of vaccinations exists—a positive in the beginning and a strong negative thereafter— providing supportive evidence that vaccinations do work after a few weeks have passed. Thus, the second research hypothesis of negative correlation between vaccinations and daily deaths due to COVID-19 seems to not be refuted. Lastly, Papanikos (2021a) found that the daily number of deaths and the average daily weather temperatures have a negative relationship, which means that when temperatures increase, the number of deaths from COVID-19 decreases. At 28.5°C, the number of deaths was found to be equal to zero. Thus, one may conclude that weather temperatures did affect the daily number of deaths and an explanation is that warm weather allows for outdoor activities which reduce the spread of the disease.

Another health issue with social consequences during the pandemic period was examined by Parodi et al. (2021). They assessed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on immunization activities using a questionnaire to explore reasons for a decrease in vaccinations in Italy. The survey was conducted from 28 May to 9 July 2020 using a questionnaire to understand the impact of COVID-19 on immunization activities and measures implemented at local level, in order to identify best practices to share at national level. A total of 97 questionnaires were collected from Local Health Agencies (LHAs), belonging to 16 Regional Health Services (response rate 76.1%). Parodi et al. (2021) found that almost all LHAs (94/97=96.9%) reduced their immunization activities during the COVID-19 emergency, compared to the same period of the previous year. About one-fourth (28%) of immunization centres suspended their activities, while more than 33% of

health workers (i.e., physicians, nurses, and administrative staff) were shifted from the immunization centres to the COVID-19 health services. Lastly, almost 5.5% of staff working in the immunization centres was infected by SARS-CoV-2. As far as the most affected ages are concerned, children above one year of age until adolescence are the most affected by disruption of immunization services (n=64/94; 68%). Parodi et al. (2021) have found that at the national level, anti-HPV was mentioned as the most affected, followed by Herpes Zoster, DTPa and meningococcal B. The most important organizational and public health measures to normalize the existing situation according to the researchers were: immunization only under appointment, giving priority to some immunization/subjects and extension of the hours of work to avoid overcrowding, telephone calls to families, developing a list of children who have missed their vaccine doses, and preparing a targeted action plan to ensure rapid catch up of children who are not up-to-date with their vaccinations.

The last study surveyed in this part is a study which used data from Pakistan. Shah et al. (2022) determined the temporal variations and mechanism of injury of supracondylar humerus fractures presented to the Accident and Emergency Department (A&E) at Lady Reading Hospital in Peshawar, Pakistan during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Primary data were collected from 18th March 2020 (—Strict Lockdown) to 18th June 2020 when relaxation in the lockdown (—Smart Lockdown) was allowed and partial elective hospital services of the hospital were resumed. The sample size for the study was 160 children of both genders and aged up to 12 years with supracondylar fractures who visited the A&E department within 3 days after getting the fracture. There were 121 boys (75.6%) and 39 girls (24.3%), while the mean age was 5.3 ± 1.3 years (a range from 3 to 9 years). Most children (n=134; 83.7%) had a left supracondylar fracture. The majority of little patients (n=128; 80%) arrived in the hospital within 24 hours of sustaining the fracture. The main cause of fractures were indoor falls from height (n=121; 75.6%), including falls from furniture, stairs, trees or bicycles. From a days and time analysis of the fracture, data results show that the two days of the week that children sustained fractures more frequently than other weekdays were Mondays (n=38; 23.7%) and Fridays (n=31; 19.3%), mostly in evening times (n=105; 65.6%). For limitation of the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on paediatric supracondylar fractures, Shah et al. (2022) support that preventative strategies should focus more on adult supervision, prevention of falls from furniture and provision of softer landing surfaces, such as sand to lessen the impact of injury. From the hospital perspective, researchers suggest that the optimum care of these fractures should be accompanied by dedicated night operation theatres with trained medical and nursing staff.

The Mass Media and Communication Aspect of COVID-19

What differentiates the current pandemic from all previous ones is the tremendous effect of mass media and communication. This is also reflected in the number of research papers published on the issue. In this section, five studies are reviewed. Of great interest are the attempts by governments and other entities to

campaign the promotion of vaccinations. Two studies use Italy as a case study and another study looks at the role of social media in Turkey. The last two studies of this section emanate from researchers with different approaches to the pandemic problem; one study uses the Canadian context –an advanced country, and the other Nigeria, a lower-middle income economy.

Crescentini and Padricelli (2022), from Italy, aim to set an explorative investigation about the social communication practices during the first three months of the vaccine campaign addressed on social media by Italy's most established virologists. Their aim was to answer the research question about how Italian scientists communicate and approach the larger public on social media. In order to select the scientists who are involved in the exploration, the researchers referred to a recent study by Reputation Science, a research center specialized in crisis management consulting, particularly in the scientific context. They use Reputation Science methodology on scientist's classification concerning their visibility on mass and social media from February 1st to November 20th, 2020 and selected five virologists according to their social media presence. As context units, the researchers selected two specific social media platforms: Facebook and Twitter. For data collection, procedure on Twitter and Facebook and tools such as the scraping procedure via Python syntax and the CrowdTangle were used respectively. The collected data were divided into 4 main domains (General information, Cross information, Engagement and Audiovisual, and Text information) and then organized in a Cases-per-Variable matrix composed of 1,306 observations per 13 variables. The content has been classified according to the platform uploading (Twitter and Facebook), and so too its classification unit (audiovisual or textual) duly specified in the post-type variable by which come possible to recognize the original or repost content. According to the topic modelling analysis, the emerged topics are the following: virus mutation; effectiveness of vaccine; AstraZeneca case; relevance of data; preparation of vaccine campaign; scientific network; vaccine's supply; response capabilities; scientist reputation; and media presence. From the Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) results for the topics "the withdrawal of AstraZeneca batches" and "Vaccine effectiveness" Facebook appears as the most-used platform by the observed scientists, while for the quieter discussion the elected platform is Twitter. For topics "vaccine campaign preparation", "scientific network", "vaccine supplies", and "response capabilities" most scientists prefer a social media exposition on Twitter, compared to Facebook, which is preferred only by Antonella Viola, who is the only scientist open to controversial discussion. Her position on vaccine plans is clear by how she benefits from high reactivity from her followers instead of Ilaria Capua and Fabrizio Pregliasco, more oriented toward quieter exposition about the vaccine argumentation, whose posts are in fact characterized by low likes, comments and shares. Moreover, Roberto Burioni and Alberto Zangrillo's communication is characterized by a medium degree of reactivity from their followers. Lastly, from the Lexical Correspondence Analysis it becomes clear that there is a relevant mass media exposition of the selected scientists. They disseminate their statements via social media, originally conceived for mass media, finding on the web a new resonance chamber where the spread of the research outcomes is reluctant to react to Twitter's general public. Where the

controversial discussion crosses the timespan observed, a dialogic strategy is applied only by Antonella Viola on topics such as the vaccines and its effectiveness due to the virus mutation. In conclusion, the virologist Dr. Antonella Viola looks to be the only scientist truly in accordance with a pure disintermediating process featured by content thought specifically for the social media and the digital languages that promotes a direct contact between sender and receiver, making the figures outdated as intermediate in the communication processes.

De Falco et al. (2021) applied a mass media technique, the Content Analysis, to the recent COVID-19 outbreak and its development of the perception of the Italian population on a specific digital social platform, Twitter. Given the emergency generated by the spread of COVID-19, with this study, the researchers wanted to focus on social data in order to investigate the online perception of one of the populations most seriously affected by this catastrophe: the Italians. The data collection involved all the tweets about COVID-19 in Italian. It covered the period from March 5-15, when several important decisions relating to COVID-19 mitigation were made (DPCM 2020). Given the extension of the corpus and the limits relating to the API's Twitter (max 18,000 tweets per day), several daily extractions were carried out. The extraction keys were based on the following hashtags, i.e., #coronavirusitalia, #coronavirus, #iorestoacasa, #fermiamoloinsieme, #italiazonaprotetta. Although the final corpus consisted of about two million tweets (including retweets), De Falco et al. (2021), in order to facilitate mixed design, decided to work on a more limited sample of 10,000 tweets (without the retweets), randomly extracted respecting the hashtag proportions related to: Tweet daily number and Hashtag groups. The researchers have found that from the first day of extraction until March 11 there was a progressive increase in "COVID" tweets, with the most active days were those from March 8 to March 11. The high number of tweets is plausibly connected to the implementation of important lockdown orders in Italy—first in the North and then throughout the rest of the country. March 11 (after Italy's lockdown) was in fact the day with the most tweets extracted (just over 13% of the entire body). For reducing the space of mining contained in large sets of textual data as well as the dataset used for their analysis, De Falco et al. (2021) have implemented a combination of a Lexical Correspondence Analysis (LCA) and a Cluster Analysis (CA). The first result obtained with the application of the LCA is the delineation of two main synthetic dimensions of mining called factors. These factors were crossed and used to build a new space of mining generated by this crossing. On the factorial plane obtained, there was also the projection of the cluster that the researchers obtained through the application of a further statistical analysis on this dataset, the CA. The first factor is related to the opposition between the private and public sphere used as direction of the expressed perception in the analysed discourses, while the second dimension is related to the opposition among the focus of the constructed discourses among the tweets. From the analysis, five groups were extracted from the cluster and each one is characterized by a specific perception of the pandemic that derives from the collectively constructed narration by Twitter users in the first ten days of national lockdown. The first group is located near the centre of the plane and the name that can be attributed is that of

perception in tension between the most intimate and individual dimension and openness to collective experience. The second group is at the crossroads between a dimension tending to collective-public openness and a propensity towards emphasizing the discourse, focused on the health emergency and defined as holistic perception. The third group explicitly refers to the need for support to the healthcare system with words like *support, hospital, and medical staff*, resulting in a *rationalist and consciously alarmist perception*. The fourth group is the one in which a strongly self-centred perception prevails, and the researchers find tweets that lead back to the effects on the private sphere of the pandemic, such as *Netflix, aperitif, boring, new habits, new way of working from home*, etc., mostly tweeted in the evening and at night. The fifth cluster mainly focuses on more general medical emergency issues and technical medical issues, mostly tweeted in the morning, resulting in a *pro-active soothing perception in risk management*.

In the third study of this section, Mengu et al. (2021) analyse the messages sent by the Ministry of Health during the pandemic in Turkey via social media, particularly on Twitter, in order to find out to which extent these messages encompass the features of value-based communication. By applying both discourse analysis and a descriptive research model, Mengu et al. (2021) have used a total of 505 Tweets posted after January 25, 2020, and had a reference to Coronavirus. Specifically for the discourse analysis, 100 tweets that have received the most interaction, in terms of count of retweets and count of likes were used, but for the other descriptive analyses all 505 tweets were utilized in a cluster analysis. After the Value-Based Communication coding process was carried out, the researchers extracted 782 codings in total. These codings included three main categories of Value-Based Communication and their sub-categories, such as “trust”, “person-oriented health actions” and “governance”. The “trust” category has 7 sub-categories, “person-oriented health actions” has 10, and “governance” has 4 sub-categories. In the codings made according to the expressions on Twitter, it was determined that there were 266 codes in the “trust” category, 337 codes in the “person-oriented health actions” category, and 179 codes in the “governance” category. In this value-based coding, it has been determined that expressions about “person-oriented health actions” come to the fore with 43.1%, expressions about “trust” were at 34.0%, and finally the “governance” category at 22.9%. Based on both network diagram analysis and cluster analysis, Mengu et al. (2021) have found that communication activities performed during the pandemic were carried out in accordance with communicative leadership. They have concluded that messages provided by the Minister of Health via Twitter were in line with the main criteria and sub-criteria of value-based communication and constitutes collaboration.

Another major issue in the media industry is addressed by Fitzpatrick (2022) who researches the phenomenon of news avoidance in the epoch of the COVID-19 pandemic and tries to analyze whether it is something temporary or whether it came to stay, like the SARS-CoV-2 virus one could say. From his current research, it is obvious that people (news consumers) are exhausted by the plethora of news offered by the different media outlets: newspapers, television, radio, and social media; they feel overwhelmed by the massive variety of news coming to them, most of which are grim, leading, in many cases, to a deterioration of their

mental health status. Considering this, many consumers choose to avoid the news media. Adding to this avoidance, Fitzpatrick (2022) also mentions the growing distrust in mainstream media and skepticism surrounding journalism that became much more vivid during the pandemic years with the growth of anti-vaccination and conspiracy voices that question the validity and accuracy of the COVID-19 facts distributed by news entities. Now, it is high time for journalists who have proved their relevance and tried to bring back the consumer-avoiders by rewinning their trust by increasing the transparency of news coverage.

Finally, Osisanwo (2022) discusses on the context and representation of COVID-19 in four selected newspapers (*New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *China Daily* and *The Punch*) across the globe. He argues that these newspapers initially set the groundwork for the negative portrayal of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and the potential damage to all human activities, giving, in this way, a motive for all to act unanimously despite the silencing in the beginning of the epidemic.

The Sociological Aspect of COVID-19

This section includes social issues that emerged from COVID-19 which is particularly broad, not only as far as it concerns the areas that it stems from (from Data Analytics to Demographics, and the Building Environment), but in geographical coverage as well, examining realities in Croatia, Spain, and the European Union in general, Kenya, and Peru.

Diving into it, we find five papers. Firstly, Bäckman (2021) examines the COVID-19 pandemic particularly through the lens of social policies and economics and presents an overall picture of the pandemic reality with a focus on the strategies and goals to be adopted to combat the spread of the virus. Papanikos (2020b) concentrates also on the important positive role of social policy in the combat of COVID-19, and underlines that the European countries should act unanimously through a cooperated common policy in which a better outcome could be achieved. He further researches whether population sizes and economies have a relation to the observed variations in COVID-19 and the answer is yes; he proves that they do matter through simple stepwise descriptive statistical analyses. In which way? The higher the population of a European country, the higher the death rate, and the richer the country, the higher the deaths per capita. But, the higher the social spending as a share of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the lower the ratio of deaths to population.

Following this, Jurić's (2022) study adds to current research in the field as he developed a method for predicting new COVID-19 cases that can be also applied in scouting for mental health problems and domestic violence cases during the pandemic, as well as predicting future birth rates in Croatia. We know that an early monitoring of a rise of COVID-19 cases in a particular area is crucial. Specifically, he used Google Trends analytical tool to monitor the digital traces of particular language searches (such as "PCR + test", "coronavirus + testing", and more) and he found out that the increase in such search queries is correlated with the increase in the number of new cases (as it was cross-checked with official data).

Polo Martín (2021) addresses the COVID-19 issue in terms of urban space and cartography. She highlights that nowadays cities face a problem of congestion, much like they did during the 19th century, when industrialization brought large crowds to the cities, making them overpopulated and without proper safety and sanitation infrastructure that led to the spread of diseases. She points out that changes in urban structure of cities happen slowly and cartography helps as it depicts these changes: digital maps show the transformation of the Spanish cities during the pandemic where one can see the expansion of cycling lanes, the development of pedestrian and green spaces, and more. Polo Martín (2021) argues that experts should opt for the ideal model city in which an autonomous city is more relevant than a “smart” city. Creating autonomous entities within the city that can respond and act independently and could be the key to addressing the needs of a globalized and overpopulated world.

In the city of Nairobi, Kenya, Okaka and Omondi (2021) investigate the perceptions and knowledge about COVID-19 of the elderly (above 60) living in informal settlements. They conducted a cross-sectional survey of 150 people (60+) from two selected squatter settlements in August 2020. Looking into the results, it is seen that only about 60% were aware that they are at risk of contracting COVID-19. For the rest of the sample, the belief that they were not at risk prevailed, religiousness was the rationale. Okaka and Omondi (2021) point out that by raising awareness of COVID-19 and by adopting health education strategies in this vulnerable category of people would help in the decrease of the impacts of SARS-CoV 2 virus.

Last but not least in this section, Lust (2021) explores the spread of the SARS-CoV 2 virus in Peru. He considers the neoliberal development model responsible for the inability of the government to implement proper (relevant to the country’s social and economic structure) measures that might have led to the constraint of the virus. He further argues that the expansion of COVID-19 in Peru is mostly the result of the overall labor precariousness and informality.

The Business and Economics Aspect of COVID-19

The new virus and the pandemic inevitably affected the business sector and the economy in a negative way. This section presents five studies that deal with such issues in the European Union, the USA, South Africa, and Nigeria.

In the first study of this section, Papanikos (2021c) examines the July 2020 European Union’s recovery plan from COVID-19 with emphasis on two of its hypotheses: a) *the health situation is improving*, and b) *the pandemic increases economic divergence between member countries*, hypotheses that he then rejects through his research, reaching the conclusion that the economic impact cannot be entirely determined if the pandemic is not permanently over and as a consequence the enormous spending of 750 billion euro should not be based on stylized economic and epidemiological facts.

Then, Reid (forthcoming) analyses the economic effects of the COVID-19 lockdowns in the USA between 15 March 2020 and 8 May 2021, using a cost-benefit analysis framework; specifically, a) by a traditional cost-benefit analysis

that supposes that life value is constant regardless of the age, and b) by a preferred analysis that adjusts the number of deaths, and values the economic cost of the deaths based on the age of the deceased. Upon the completion of his research, he reached the conclusion that the economic benefits of the lockdowns fell behind the economic cost.

Moving to the continent of Africa, Uwah et al. (2022) investigate how prepared are the financial service providers in Nigeria's post-COVID reality using financial inclusion as a "new normal" for their clients' financial needs. The data were collected from 102 respondents of Nigerian accounting and financial companies. The results of the research showed a significant relationship between the socio-economic development structure and the acceptance of financial inclusion as a "new normal" in financial transactions. Uwah et al. (2022) suggest that in a struggling and developing Nigeria, financial companies and providers should move beyond the traditional services to a more financial technology-friendly environment that can act as a driver for financial inclusion. In a similar context and in the same country, Adejare et al. (forthcoming) draw further upon Nigeria's affected business sector and in particular the Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector by the COVID-19 pandemic. They found that there is a direct impact of the pandemic to businesses' survival, productivity, and technology adoption; unemployment; and customer retention.

Lastly, Struwig and Watson (forthcoming) in South Africa offer a critical analysis of the working capital management research during the worldwide economic crisis (2008); during the pandemic; during extreme change; post-pandemic; and during the new economic order. They point out that during the COVID-19 pandemic, and in general during all sort of crises, businesses need to have to the point working capital management practises more than ever so that they can survive. Struwig and Watson also provide proposals upon maximization of the working capital efficiency.

The Tourism Aspect of COVID-19

The tourism industry is one of the most hit industries by the COVID-19 crisis. What reigns in this industry during this period are the high levels of uncertainty and the many challenges that have popped up to be faced by the businesses and personnel.

Papanikos (2020a) researches the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Greek tourism with regard to international tourism receipts. He argues that not even the impact of the Greek economic recession was comparable to the huge negative impact of COVID-19 on the economy of Greece. Just in 2020 alone, Papanikos (2020a) expects tourism receipts reductions to have an impact between 9 and 14 percent of GDP. He further states that government intervention to help is only a temporary solution. Building on the government's actions to help the sector, Jones (2022) in his study about how to cope with and overcome the devastating effects of the pandemic on the UK's tourism industry, reviews the UK government's tourism recovery plan (published in June 2021) in detail, argues on

its proposed measures and finally provides some critical reflections and concluding thoughts.

What comes next is Jones and Comfort's (2020) study that explores the relationship between the tourism sector and the sustainable development in such a challenging time as the COVID-19 pandemic. Their study offers a compilation of arguments and opinions on a number of authorities on sustainability in the tourism industry, and then they further provide an analysis of them.

Finally concluding this section, Gukiina and Lamunu (2021) in Uganda examine what kind of relationship exists among employee optimism, status competitiveness, interpersonal adaptability and employee altruism during the pandemic. They used a sample of 303 managers and employees from 70 randomly selected hotels, and showed that there is a significant and positive relationship between: a) employee optimism, interpersonal adaptability and altruism, b) status competitiveness, interpersonal adaptability and employee altruism, c) status competitiveness, employee altruism and employee optimism, and d) interpersonal adaptability, employee optimism and status competitiveness.

The Education Aspect of COVID-19

The first study of this section written by Papanikos handles the COVID-19 pandemic from a historical perspective. Papanikos (2021b) analyses whether people learn from past mistakes, and specifically he explores if the writing of Thucydides' history with regard to how the ancient Athenians acted during the epidemic of 430 BCE, which brought wisdom in the way that the current world is handing the pandemic. He argues that apart from a few tiny differences and the evident progress seen across the years in technology, people and societies today react pretty much the same as in the past, with the main problems, as well as the socio-political issues remaining the same, vindicating Thucydides only in his view that human nature does not change.

Researching further on how COVID-19 influenced education, one can see that there was a rapid and forced shift from the traditional face-to-face class to the online one in all educational levels globally. Ismaili and Ibrahim (2021) provide a real-time, two level –learning and reaction– (proposed by Daniel Kirkpatrick) evaluation of the distance learning model of Moulay Ismail University in Morocco. They specifically explore the students' views regarding the pros and cons of distance education based on: a) accessibility, b) autonomy, c) retention, and d) psychological impact. They found out that a platform with simple to understand content; proper equipment and a good internet connection; and better communication and contact with professors are required in order for the distance learning model to be considered successful.

In this direction as well, Jereb et al. (forthcoming) explore and compare the studying habits of students before and after the pandemic using a sample of 272 students from the University of Maribor in Slovenia. Their results reveal that there is a decrease in motivation to study coupled with lowering learning goals, and students find it more difficult to focus on learning. Study spaces and times also differentiated. In addition, Jereb et al.'s study found out that distance learning has

taken a toll on students' well-being, as they miss getting together and mingling with classmates and the on-site interaction with their teachers. But, they also underline the finding that distance learning was perceived by some students as something that they wish to keep because of the great level of flexibility it provides.

In the fourth and final study of this section, Güvercin et al. (forthcoming) investigate through a qualitative research study how teacher-parents view the distant education process in Turkey. They highlight that distance education is regarded as a supportive means rather than a replacement for face-to-face education and is perceived as something valuable in order for students to retain contact with the educational process. However, phenomena such as internet connection problems; low attendance and unavailability to attend online classes due to the lack of sufficient internet packages or technical problems related to the applications; and the decrease in motivation to participate over time, hinder the d-learning process.

The Law Aspect of COVID-19

The section of Law contains two studies in Romania — one on contractual unpredictability and the other on the insolvency of the natural person during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the first study, Patraus and Ofrim (2021) argue that, in a dynamic social and economic context, it is necessary to clear up the relationship between the binding force of contracts and the possibility of invoking unpredictability in situations where certain changes affecting the contractual balance occur in the performance of obligations. They explore whether this institution finds its applicability in the effects on contractual relations, generated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures taken by public authorities to mitigate the human health impacts of the pandemic.

In the second study, Iancu (2021) states that among the actions taken to alleviate the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic on citizens, one should consider the encouragement to access the natural person insolvency procedure, by means of which the debtors acting in good faith may be exonerated from part of their debts. However, her study shows that this procedure is not accessed by the over-indebted natural persons, as they are discouraged by the ambiguous legislation on the issue and the huge number of required documents.

Conclusions

COVID-19 brought a new global reality. It brought stress and fear to human minds, especially those of the elderly, made people reconsider human values and put governments in the place of rating priorities (public health, economy, etc.); someone cynical could say that many of them had to “put a value on human life” and proceed accordingly. However, most importantly, it gave the opportunity for the academic community to prove its worth now more than ever by trying to offer

solutions to this “multifaceted issue”/“burden”, namely COVID-19, and to provide its valuable help in mitigating its impacts.

It can be seen that the dimensions that this issue covers are so wide, as it affects many life aspects in several arenas. We hope the readers of this collection of studies that cover a wide range of themes will find it stimulating and find insightful reading, not only those of whom are interested in a particular theme addressed, but also to acquaint themselves with other current issues. Finally we wish that after reading this book, you will be inspired to research in your own fields.

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