

Local newspaper as a solution seeking actor in Northernmost Finland during the COVID-19 pandemic

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The aim of this media analysis is to investigate how the COVID-19 pandemic emerged in Finnish Lapland during its first years from the perspective of a local newspaper. The data consists of published articles during years 2020 – 2021 which concentrated on the COVID-19 pandemic, and it was collected from one local newspaper called “Inarilainen” by using paper versions of the newspaper. “Inarilainen” is published on a weekly basis, reaching out to people in the northernmost municipalities of Finland, including Sámi and non-Sámi, and being an important source of information for locals. Papers were reviewed, and news was initially included if it provided any information about the COVID-19 pandemic. Analysis continued to find answers to following questions: what kind of information related to COVID-19 was published, who provided the information and what kind of content and style the news used. During the analysis four journalistic styles were found: authority style, humane style, societal style, and realistic style. When identifying the main results, the reviewed articles were found to be solution seeking, empowering and empathetic, because humane and societal styles were emphasized in the communication.

Introduction

The first case of COVID-19 in Finland was identified at the end of January 2020 in Saariselkä tourist resort located in Northern Lapland, which generated a high level of interest from national and international media. It was the starting point for the Finnish health care system in the COVID-19 pandemic. During all types of crises, the responsibility of the media is emphasized. Processing the information, analysing it, and interpreting it are central tools for the media user to navigate the challenging circumstances.

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It is argued that during crises people use media much more than during the normal times (Zhang, 2022; Ghode, 2021; Perreault et al, 2022). Media control our understanding of the situation and provide answers about how to behave in unusual circumstances. The more media is used, the more important the communication style becomes because the role of media is accentuated in your life. Moreover, Perreault et al (2022) write that journalists operate, among other things, as storytellers when providing coverage of dangerous actors. One way to use storytelling is to write an article from the point of view of ordinary people. It is important to recognize that at these times journalistic style heavily influences how the message is received and the impact of the communication.

Media analysis

A total of 101 printed issues of the newspaper 'Inarilainen', during the years 2020 – 2021, were reviewed. "Inarilainen" is published on a weekly basis, reaching out to people in the northernmost municipalities of Finland, including Sámi and non-Sámi, and being an important source of information for locals. There were altogether 207 articles in the Finnish language that included information about COVID-19. These were collected and categorized according to their publishing date, page number, writer, title, theme, and other characteristic. Analysis continued to find answers to following questions: what kind of information related to COVID-19 was published, who provided the information and what kind of content and style the news used. During the analysis four journalistic styles were found: authority style, humane style, societal style, and realistic style. Thirteen articles were found in Sámi languages, but due to lack of language skill they were not included into the analysis.

Results

COVID-19 articles from the "Inarilainen" were initially categorized as shown in the Table 1. The largest group of articles were classified as bulletins, followed by analyses and reports.

About one third of the articles concerned being healthy or sick; there were articles about quarantine, lockdowns, testing and vaccination. Also, northern lifestyle and everyday life was highlighted. About one fifth of COVID-19 information described healthy ways of living, resources, hobbies, and relationships.

Table 1. Covid-19 articles in the Inarilainen during 2020 - 2021

Sort of Article	Amount	Percentage
Bulletins	63	30 %
Analyses and Reports	26	13 %
News	22	11 %
Columns and Comments	21	10 %
Editorials	16	8 %
Notifications	14	7 %
Profiles and Interviews	13	6 %
Surveys	7	3 %
Religious writings	7	3 %
Opinion pieces	7	3 %
Top stories	6	3 %

Poems and Songs	5	2 %
TOTAL	207	100 %

Almost one fifth of the articles focused on social issues. Among those there were articles about people who needed help, discrimination, the border of countries, international co-operation, and the treatment of nature. Themes of the COVID-19 communication found are listed in the Figure 1.

Four communication styles were used to classify the data: authority style, humane style, societal style, and realistic style. The biggest style group (34%) was the societal style. Articles using this style provided thoughtful perspectives and potential solutions, and offered comparisons. Societal style articles examined both the past and future. It relies on memories, literature, and culture.

The second most commonly used was the humane style (29%), where central attributes were, for example, enthusiasm, energy, hopefulness, humor, and wisdom. Articles using the authority style (21%) were informative, and provided instructions, responses, and explanations. Realistic style articles (15%) had practical, honest, and critical characteristics. It is interesting to note that realistic style articles had contradictory elements.

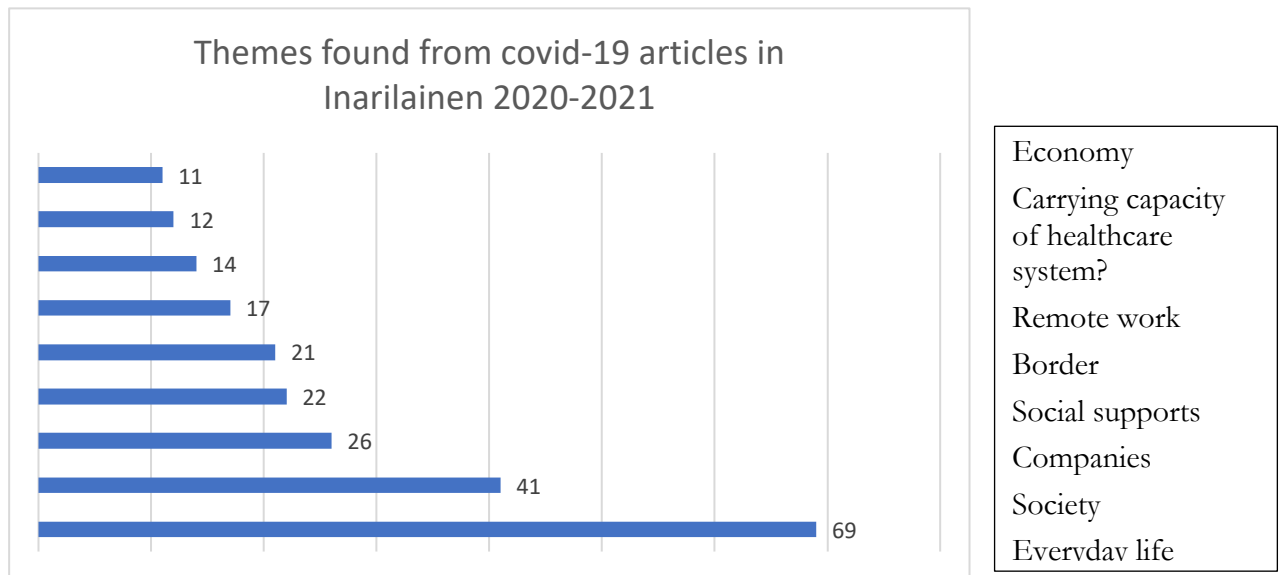


Figure 1. Categorized COVID-19 themes during the years 2020-2021

Discussion

This media analysis focuses on the writing style of articles and summarizes the information published in the “Inarilainen”, a local newspaper in Northernmost Finland, related to the COVID-19 pandemic between 2020 and 2021. Analysis was completed systematically, but some articles may have been missed in the data collection. It should also be recognized that interpretations and classification might be subjective. It is important to recognize this to avoid unreliability (Breakwell et al, 2006). Only a few articles had characteristics from only one writing style. A majority of articles contained elements of several styles. In this media analysis, it was not relevant to prioritize any style because every article has its own place and role. During the analysis, the same four styles were considered, throughout the process.

Content of the reviewed articles were based on the facts, but there were also local peoples’ stories which could enhance joyfulness in the region. Hong and Zhang (2020) refer to civil happiness as

subjective well-being and life satisfaction. This kind of experiences of life quality reflects to the society. Pandemics affect dramatically on social structures, media, and science (Jones, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic was not only a crisis for the public health sector. It also impacted social, economic, and political elements of peoples' and communities' lives (Tong, 2022), and a quick intervention was expected (Meadows et al, 2022). Based on this analysis, despite the sudden effects of COVID-19, the articles provided positive messages for readers through "ordinary people's thoughts." When readers viewpoints are represented widely, it is easier to empower everyone.

Jones (2021) asks, what aspects of the pandemic should media coverage highlight? In this media analysis ordinary people's voice was strongest. Who are this ordinary people? Examples from the articles include, a municipal citizen, a voter, and a public or private customer. Almost as many messages were told by politicians during the COVID-19 crises. In general, the different aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic were widely represented, reflecting democratic atmosphere.

This analysis serves the media and other information providers by pointing out the power as well as the responsibility of the communication sector at a societal and individual level. Concentrating on a printed paper made it possible to capture a specific Finnish region that includes Sámi and non-Sámi people. In addition, older people in particular may have been reached by this printed newspaper (Ghode, 2020). Most of the COVID-19 media depends on digital media use. It is important to evaluate the characteristics of the COVID-19 communication in national level, and in regional basis.

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