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Framing the Covid-19 pandemic in news media: A comparative analysis between Albania
and the United States.

Statement of own work

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Table of Contents

<i>Abstract</i>	2
<i>Introduction</i>	3
<i>Theoretical Framework</i>	3
2.1 Framing in News Media	3
2.1.1 Generic frames in media	4
2.2 Dimensions of culture	6
2.2.1 Cultural Dimensions in relation to news framing	7
2.3 Present Study - Albania vs The United States	8
2.4 Research question	10
<i>Method</i>	12
3.1 Materials	12
3.2 Procedure	12
3.3 Statistical treatment	13
<i>Results</i>	14
<i>Conclusion and Discussion</i>	16
5.1 Limitations	17
<i>References</i>	19
<i>Appendix</i>	24
Appendix 1. Codebook	24

Abstract

The Covid-19 outbreak began in December 2019 and was declared a global pandemic in March 2020. Different news outlets throughout the world have given a great deal of coverage. Because the general public relies on the media for information, the latter could influence opinions by utilizing multiple frames that portray the coronavirus differently. Furthermore, certain cultural values have been connected to how different cultures may respond to health crises. The present study provides a cross-cultural comparison (Albania vs. the USA), on how Hofstede's cultural dimensions, specifically collectivism, power-distance, and uncertainty avoidance, could potentially affect Covid-19 framings. Utilizing the framework of Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), it was found that morality frames were the most employed during the health crisis, as well as there was no difference between the two sources in terms of news diversity. However, Albania's Morality frames featured collectivistic values more often. These results failed to replicate findings of past health crises framing research. Nonetheless, this study contributes to the literature on the role and impact of cultural values in framing of health crises.

1. Introduction

In the last quarter of 2019, the world experienced a modern worldwide pandemic. The Covid-19 pandemic had its inception in December 2019 when the first human cases were confirmed to have been infected with SARS-CoV-2 (WHO, 2020). In March 2020, as the virus had spread worldwide at such a high speed, The World Health Organization declared a pandemic situation (WHO, 2020). Since its start, the virus has mutated multiple times producing variants such as Delta and Omicron. As of June 2022, the number of confirmed cases has tolled 532,201,219 (WHO, 2022) and there are still hundreds of thousands of new cases daily.

The Covid Pandemic was largely documented in the media. In terms of Covid news narratives, four Pandemic phases were distinguished which include: Pre-pandemic (Oct'19–Dec'19), Early (Jan–Feb'20), Peak Pandemic (Mar–May'20), and Recovery (Ng et al., 2021). From these phases, it was found that the Peak pandemic phases were the most convergent with news media coverage.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Framing in News Media

The general public tends to rely on the news media as a source of information, to the point that media has become a key institution in our societies. The media could have an impact

on public perception by framing events and issues in specific ways. Such framing involves a source that communicates an issue through presenting and defining the latter. Frames are components of political arguments, journalistic norms, and the rhetoric of social movements. They are different methods of identifying issues that are endogenous to the political and social reality (De Vreese, 2005).

One of the earliest depictions of framing was offered by Goffman's (1974) work, in which frames were defined as the personification of an experience, as influenced by our subjective involvement in them. Later, Iyengar (1991) refers to framing as "subtle alterations in the statement or presentation of judgment and *choice* problems" (p.11).

Entmann (1993) defines framing as a process of selection and salience, where the selected qualities of an experience are made more salient. Reese (2001) explains frames as "organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world" (p.11). Through these multiple definitions, this study would define a frame as the chosen account or narrative through which an individual, government, or institution chooses to portray a certain issue to the public by highlighting certain elements more.

Whereas news organizations may employ various types of frames when reporting an issue, for these frames to be studied past research has suggested two distinct categories for frames in regard to their nature. According to De Vreese (2005), the first category is that of issue-specific frames, in which certain frames are only relevant to specific themes or events. The second category is that of generic frames, which include certain types of frames that could transcend thematic boundaries and can be identified in relation to various topics, some even beyond time and cultural contexts. Since issue-specific frames are difficult to generalize and compare, due to their high degree of issue-sensitivity, they are not the best in terms of empirical research. Therefore, generic frames will be focused on in regards to this study.

2.1.1 Generic frames in media

This typology organizes previous framing research by concentrating on differences that help explain the use of the general phrase "framing." One subset of generic frame research focuses on political coverage, specifically election campaigns. On the other hand, a second group centers on generic news frames which are structural and inherent in journalism practices. This second collection of studies connects news frames to broader aspects of news coverage such as journalistic practices, norms, and values (De Vreese, 2005).

Various framework research (Luther & Zhou, 2005; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; Neuman et al., 1992; Price et al., 1997) have identified five main generic frames. These include human interest, responsibility, morality, economic consequences and conflict.

According to Valkenburg et al. (1999), a human-interest frame ‘brings an individual’s story or an emotional angle to the presentation of an event, issue, or problem’ (p.551). When constructing a responsibility frame, the way an issue is framed is that either the government or an individual or group bears responsibility for its cause or solution (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). With regard to the morality frame, journalists can frame issues through moral messages, thus proposing ‘specific social prescriptions about how to ’ (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p.96). The economic frame stresses the potential economic impact an issue or problem might have on societies (Luther & Zhou, 2005; Neuman et al., 1992; Valkenburg et al., 1999). On the other hand, a conflict frame emphasizes a conflict between individuals, groups, or institutions to capture audience interest (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000).

Studies on generic framing illustrate the importance of generic frames regarding the public’s sense-making process. Generic frames can be a significant tool for potential narratives which can influence beliefs and behavior patterns, as framing researchers have demonstrated that certain generic frames influence the public's opinion of political issues or institutions (Iyengar 1987; Semetko and Valkenburg 2000; Valkenburg, Semetko, and de Vreese 1999).

In terms of health crises, a study conducted on the framing of the H1N1 pandemic analyzed the most popular newspapers found in Malaysia. According to the results, the responsibility frame was most dominant across all sources, followed by the morality frame, human Interest frame, conflict frame, and lastly economic consequences frame (Chang et al., 2010). In summary, they noticed that each of the newspapers wanted the government to assume responsibility for resolving the pandemic's challenges.

Regarding the Covid-19 crisis, Ogbodo et al. (2020) analyzed the framing of the pandemic on a global scale. It was found that the human-interest frame was by far the most employed frame when reporting the novel coronavirus. This was followed by the economic consequences and attribution of responsibility frame. It was concluded that all of the global media which was analyzed in the study, employed keywords that accentuate fear and risk response to the virus.

In this study, generic news frames will be analyzed in the context of cultural dimensions established by Hofstede's fundamental work, in order to see how the cultural values of a society

may influence news framing. The basic notion is that certain cultural characteristics could influence the thought process and behavior of members of a particular society.

2.2 Dimensions of culture

Although culture can be defined in many ways, one definition to note is from Hofstede. Hofstede (1980) defines culture as the “collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another” (p.280). Through a range of work on cultural studies (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede, 1980) five cultural dimensions have been derived. These include collectivism, masculinity, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and long/short-term orientation.

First, the collectivism dimension is presented by Hofstede (1984) as a concept of the degree of interdependence among the individuals of a society. A highly collectivist society will have a more tightly knit society where members of the in-group depend on each other, whereas in contrast, an individual society will focus more on one’s independence. A good example of a collectivist society is that of the Japanese, whereas the other side of the spectrum would be found in the USA.

The next dimension is that of masculinity. Highly masculine societies focus on material success, heroism and assertiveness, whereas feminine societies tend to focus on care, relationships, and quality of life. An example of a masculine society would be once again Japan, whereas a feminine one would resemble the culture of Finland.

Third, power distance (PD) concerns the extent members of a society agree with unequal distribution of power. Large scores in PD are associated with more hierarchical societies. Such societies include those such as China and Russia. On the other hand, lower PD can be found in the Netherlands or USA.

Next, Hofstede (1984) defines uncertainty avoidance (UA) as the degree to which a society will feel comfortable with ambiguity. Highly uncertainty avoidant societies will tend to be more rigid and intolerant. A good example of a society with high UA scores is that of Russia, Italy and Mexico.

Finally, long-term orientation (LTO) is defined as ‘the fostering of virtues oriented towards future rewards, in particular, perseverance and thrift. Its opposite pole short-term orientation, stands for the fostering of virtues related to the past and present, in particular, respect for tradition, preservation of 'face,' and fulfilling social obligations’ (Hofstede, 2001, p. 359). A nation which is long-term orientated is that of China or Japan, and one which focuses on the short-term is that of the USA or Netherlands.

Hofstede's studies have their limitations and the categories should not be taken as absolute truths. However, they are a good window of reference of possible areas where cross-cultural differences might exist. For the present study, it is important to understand how these dimensions have been related to news framing.

2.2.1 Cultural Dimensions in relation to news framing

Cultural beliefs have been linked to higher death rates, social distancing, and mental strength. As a result, the cultural values of a society can have an impact on the incidence of cases, fatalities, and lockdowns (Ibanez & Sisodia, 2020; Huynh, 2020; Furlong & Finnie, 2020). Presumably, the media would follow suit and explore these developments, influencing the degree of variety in pandemic reporting. Furthermore, culture is inherently interwoven in mass media production and is defined as a mirror of a nation's cultural orientation (Kwon & Moon, 2009).

Starting with Hofstede (2001), who suggested that greater individuality should manifest in more media coverage, arguing that individualistic societies appreciate various ideas and the ability to convey such perspectives. This could be due to the better journalistic freedom associated with more individualistic societies. Consequently, this enhanced journalistic freedom found in individualist cultures may result in a larger diversity of news themes and content (Sandoval & Collins, 2016).

However, in a study conducted by Ng and Tan (2021) on the Diversity of COVID-19 News Media Coverage in 17 Countries and the Influence of Cultural Values, Government Stringency, and Pandemic Severity, Hofstede's (2001) claims regarding news diversity were refuted. The study uncovered a negative correlation between individualism and media framing of COVID-19 media coverage, which contradicted Hofstede's previous assumption. These findings suggest that cultures that give a broader choice of news topics do not necessarily promote diversity within the bounds of the pandemic. During a health crisis, news organizations ideologically align better with governments, potentially presenting a cohesive story to the public, resulting in more diverse media coverage (Ng & Tan, 2021).

Xiang (2008) conducted a cross-cultural examination of online newspaper framing of the "Internet in China", which featured articles discussing internet use in China. The material was collected from Singapore, Hong Kong, the USA, and the UK. The most prominent generic news frames as defined by Price et al. (1997), were identified cross-culturally. According to the article, high scores in UA were associated with the economical frame, whereas the morality

frame was most associated with lower UA. Conflict frames were found to be most prominent among individualistic societies.

When analyzing the framing of the 2003 SARS outbreak in China, Beaudoin (2007) found significant results between American (individualistic) and Chinese (collectivistic) news outlets. Overall, it was concluded that the human-interest frame was most prevalent in both media coverages of the epidemic, followed by economic consequences. This shows that in both cultures, which belong to opposite ends of the collectivism spectrum, journalists focus on presenting the issue through an emotional lens or on the potential economic losses.

Jung Oh et al. (2012) researched the US and South Korean newspapers' coverage of the H1N1 pandemic. It was found that US journalists (Individualistic) employed the attribution of responsibility frame more often than Koreans (collectivistic). Conversely, Korean journalists were found to employ the economic consequence frame more frequently than Americans. These findings are in accordance with those of Xiang (2008), who reported economic consequences frames to be most prominent in avoidant cultures (South Korea), whereas human interest frames were most prominent in short-term oriented cultures (USA).

For the present study, the dimensions of collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance will be studied in relation to generic framing used in public news outlets. Previous studies (Jung Oh et al., 2012; Xiang, 2008; Beaudoin, 2007; Hofstede, 2001) have been able to find that these dimensions could potentially play a role in framing. In addition, both countries which are studied in this paper have contrasting scores in these dimensions, which will be explained in the upcoming section. Based on these dimensions, predictions on cross-cultural differences will be made.

2.3 Present Study - Albania vs The United States

Albania is a small country located in the South-West of the Balkan Peninsula. As of March 2022, Albania has experienced multiple waves of the pandemic. The first case was reported on March 8th, 2020. On March 25th, 2020, the government declared a state of natural disaster which lasted until June of the same year. A series of measures to control the epidemic was taken and one of those was announcing a complete lockdown only two days after the first case had been reported. During this complete lockdown, all private and public transport was banned in most counties and public gatherings were strictly prohibited. Since Albania was still recuperating from the earthquake in late 2019, the pandemic had a large economic impact. Despite a severe downturn in the second quarter of 2020, economic activity resumed over the summer of 2020 when restrictions were lifted (OECD, 2021).

Albanian culture is highly characterized by placing large values on one's family and ethnic heritage. Throughout their history, an important notion has been that of "Besa", a traditional honor code with an emphasis on trust and hospitality. The notion prescribes obligations and relationships to one's family and their "guest" (miku), emphasizing internal solidarity, loyalty, and devotion in behavior, as well as confidentiality (Schwandner-Sievers, 1999). Throughout the socialist regime, values such as honor (nderi), manliness (burnija), and besa shaped society even further (Schwandner-Sievers, 2008).

Research conducted by Gjana (2020), aimed to explore changes that Albanian cultural dimensions' scores have undergone over time. Albania was found to be a collectivistic nation (IDV=20/100). Instead, high scores on PD (90/100), masculinity (80/100), LTO (61/100), and UA (70/100) were found to be prominent. Therefore, it can be said that, based on these results, the Albanian culture is one in which hierarchical order is respected amongst individuals, the latter of which display loyalty and foster in-group relationships. Rigid social structures are present in Albania, along with intolerance to nonconformist behaviors. By being rather masculine as a society, focus on competition and acts of heroism amongst peers is urged. Simultaneously, Albania can be viewed as a pragmatic society, in which saving behaviours and perseverance are important qualities. Such characteristics have been highly present in Albania throughout history, and could be attributed to the number of wars and the strict socialist regime which was prominent in the past.

On the other hand, the USA has always been seen by Albanians as the ideal of democracy. In the past, multiple presidents such as Woodrow Wilson and Bill Clinton have aided in ensuring the unitedness of Albanians (Times, 2007). Previously, not only has various research been conducted regarding the cultural dimensions of the USA, but on the news framing within US media as well, which would serve as an adequate point of reference for comparison to Albania.

Cultural values of the US include liberty, equality, informality, progress, materialism, etc. (University of Portland, 2017). According to the Hofstede insights website (2021), the USA was reported to be highly individualistic (90/100) and masculine (62/100), however low in PD (40/100), UA (46/100), and LTO (26/100). These scores are in accordance with the nation's values.

In regards to the Covid-19 Pandemic, the United States also experienced a series of waves. The country reported its first case on January 20th 2020, whereas the public health emergency state was declared on the 31st of January by the Trump Administration. In terms of

organizing the healthcare system, halting other travel, and testing, the United States' early response to the outbreak was rather slow (Lemire et al., 2020). Although some states emphasized quarantining, the US had the largest number of active cases in the world by the end of March 2020. Downplaying the danger, misinformation regarding the virus, and a decentralized response seem to be some factors that lead to poor handling of the pandemic in the latter's initial phases.

2.4 Research question

From previous research, it should be expected that the most popular frames employed during health crises similar to Covid-19 are those of human interest and economical-consequences. However, based on the findings by Xiang (2008), cultures with high UA like Albania are expected to focus even more on economic-consequences frames. Alternatively, countries with low UA scores, such as the US, should produce more human-interest and morality frames. In addition, as a highly individualistic country, the US should also display more conflict frames than Albania. Similarly, in previous epidemics, the USA has also been reported to frequently use responsibility frames.

However, there is also a lack of firm knowledge on how cultural values could potentially influence news framing and the portrayal of health crises. There is still much more to be explored in regards to researching generic frames used in health crises, especially that of the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, there exists a gap of cross-cultural research and news framing on Albania. This study aims in shrinking this gap by providing insights into the framing of Covid-19 news by comparing countries of Albania and the USA.

Building on the previous literature which was presented during the literature review, the current study aims to bridge the gap between health communication and cultural values by providing a cross-cultural comparison of news framing. In order to do so, a main research question is constructed, followed by several sub-questions.

RQ: How is the framing of Covid-19 in public news media outlets influenced by countries' cultural values?

RQa: How does the presence of the different types of frames vary between Albanian and American Covid-19 news?

RQb: How often are cultural values expressed in Albanian and American news outlets?

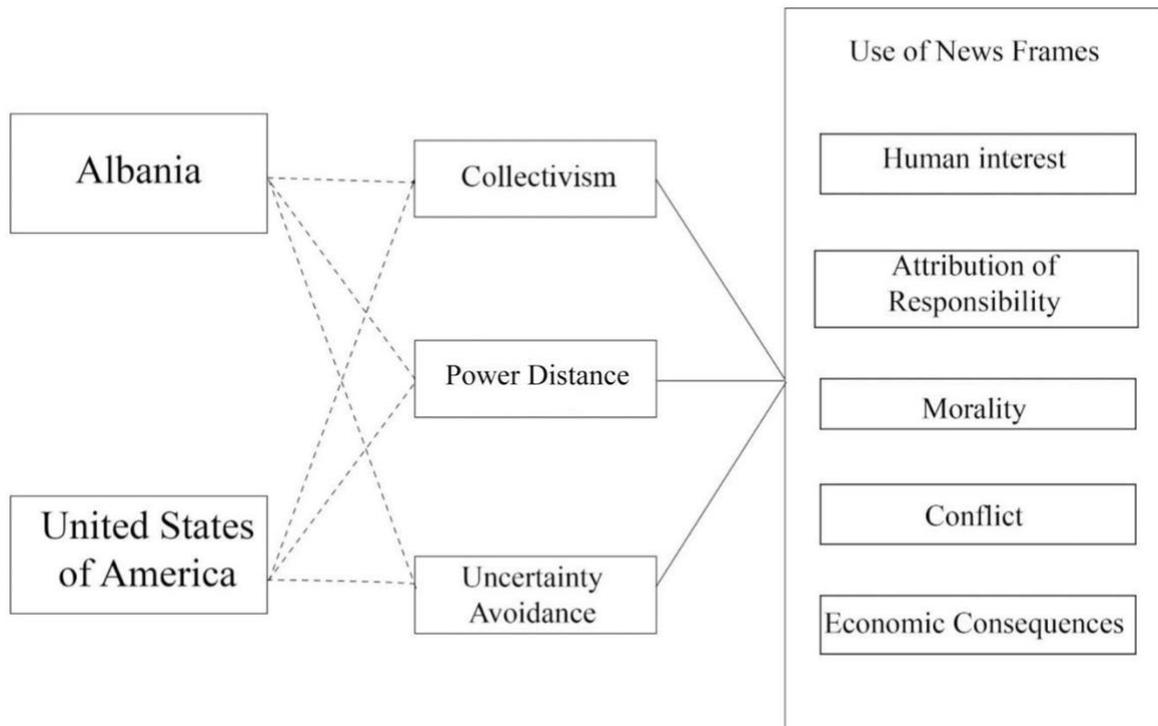


Figure 1. Conceptual model of the present study.

The given conceptual model depicts how certain cultural values that are found in Albania and the USA, in terms of the dimensions of collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance, could affect the usage of the five generic news frames in regard to Covid-19 framing.

3. Method

3.1 Materials

This study consisted of a quantitative analysis of the content in American and Albanian news articles related to Covid-19. For each country, one news outlet was chosen from which the material was collected. Fox News was used to collect American corpus, whereas Albanian corpus was retrieved from Report TV. Before the coding process, the Albanian news articles were translated into English through LingVanex and later checked by a sworn translator, to guarantee that meaning was not lost in translation.

All chosen articles were posted from March 1st 2020 until May 31st 2020, otherwise known as Peak. This decision was made according to the results of Ng et al. (2021), which implied that Covid-19 news predominated during this time frame.

Random sampling will be used. The unit of analysis for the current study is individual news articles. A coding book will be created based on the research interest presented earlier. To ensure intercoder reliability, two coders will code the same sample of the collected material.

3.2 Procedure

To conduct the content analysis, the material was assigned to bilingual students of Radboud University with English as a second language. Two students coded the material for this study, with each coding the same sample independently, to guarantee intercoder reliability. The intercoder reliability will be measured using Cohen's Kappa.

In order to study the differences in health communication, a coding questionnaire was constructed, based on the measurements devised by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000). Adapted to the present study, the questionnaire identified the frames and values of a series through a series of yes or no questions. Such questions include: "Is there a reference to the positive or negative economic consequences of pursuing action with regards to COVID-19?" (Economic consequences), "Does the article contain any moral message/social prescriptions about how to behave?" (morality), "Does the article reflect disagreement between two (or more) sides?" (conflict), "Does the article provide a human example or "human face" on the issue that might generate feelings of outrage, empathy, caring, sympathy, or compassion?" (Human interest), and "Does the article suggest that an individual/group of people/institution is responsible for the problem or solution" (Attribution of responsibility), etc. The full questionnaire can be found in Appendix 1.

After each question, the coder will code 1 if the frame or value is present in the text, or 0 if it is absent. After having identified the frames through the aid of the questionnaire, each

frame was represented through numerical code: 1=Human interest, 2=Attribution of Responsibility, 3=Morality, 4=Conflict, and 5=Economic consequences. After the first coder was finished, the second coded the same material independently following the same procedure.

The interrater reliability Cohen's kappa for the variable "Generic Frame" was good: $\kappa = .85, p < .001$. The interrater reliability for the variable "Uncertainty Avoidance" was good $\kappa = .82, p < .001$. The interrater reliability for "Power Distance" was very good: $\kappa = .90, p < .001$. The interrater reliability for the variable "Individualism/collectivism" was also good: $\kappa = .80, p < .001$.

3.3 Statistical treatment

Multiple statistical analyses will be conducted to answer the research questions that the study proposes. First, descriptive analyses will be conducted to form a broader picture of the coded material. Multiple Chi-square tests were used to find the most prevalent frames across news sources in each country, and the most prevalent values across news frames.

4. Results

The goal of this study was to study how the expression of cultural values affects the framing of Covid-19 news articles, through the usage of generic frames.

A total of 50 articles were coded, of which 25 were Albanian and 25 were from the USA. In total 2 articles were found not to employ the usage of any frame, 11 were found to be Economic consequences, 4 were Conflict frames, 14 employed the Morality frame, 11 employed Human interest frames and 8 fell under the Attribution of responsibility frame.

Table 1. Frequencies of generic news frames per each news source.

	Fox News		Report TV	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
No frame	2	8.0	0	0.0
Economic consequences	5	20.0	6	24.0
Conflict	3	12.0	1	4.0
Morality	7	28.0	7	28.0
Human interest	4	16.0	7	28.0
Attribution of Responsibility	4	16.0	4	16.0
Total	25	100.0	25	100.0

It seems that Fox News employed the morality frame most, followed by the economic consequences, human interest and attribution of Responsibility. Similarly, Report Tv produced more morality frames, followed by the human interest and economic consequences frames.

To answer the first RQ, a chi-square analysis was conducted to find the most prominent frames across each source. However, this chi-square test yielded an insignificant relationship between the news organization and the generic frames ($\chi^2(5) = 3.9, p = 0.56$). It seems that Fox News did not produce a certain type of frame more often than Report TV did, and vice versa.

The second goal of this study was to study if the expression of cultural values were present in the news frames themselves. For this purpose, three values were considered: collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and power distance.

Table 2. Observed counts and percentages of Collectivism for the presence of collectivism for Report TV morality and economic frame.

News Frame		Collectivism	
		Absent	Present
Economic Consequences	Count (n)	6	0
	%	50.0 %	0.0%
Morality	Count (n)	1	6
	%	4.0%	24.0%

To answer the second RQ proposed in this study, several chi-square tests were conducted. First, a Chi-square test showed an insignificant relationship between the news frame and collectivism ($\chi^2(5) = 12.40, p = 0.03$). This was only significant for Albania ($\chi^2(4) = 9.40, p = 0.05$). In Report TV, economic consequences framed occurred more often when collectivistic values were absent (50.0%) than present (4.0%). Additionally, morality frames occurred more often (24.0) when collectivistic values were present than absent (16.5%).

A Chi-square test showed an insignificant relationship between the news organization and Uncertainty avoidance ($\chi^2(1) = 2.00, p = 0.16$). It seems neither frame played a part in the expression of uncertainty avoidance.

A Chi-square test showed an insignificant relationship between the news organization and the dimension of power distance ($\chi^2(1) = 1.59, p = 0.21$). It seems neither of the frames played a part in the expression of power distance.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to investigate how a nation's cultural values affect the framing of Covid-19 articles through the use of generic frames. News articles related to the COVID-19 pandemic ranging from March 2020 to May 2020 were analyzed. Both news sources employed the morality frame the most, followed by human-interest frames and economic frames, whereas the conflict frame was utilized the least. This finding is partly inconsistent with both Ogbodo et al. (2020), who found that in health crises human-interest frames were the most used. However, there were no significant differences between the two sources in regards to how frequently one specific type of frame was used, a finding which is inconsistent with previous studies (Jung Oh et al., 2012; Xiang, 2008), in which distinctive differences among cultures were found. However, collectivistic values were expressed on Report TV more often than on Fox News. Lastly, these results indicate that there is no difference between Report TV and Fox News in terms of frame diversity, which is inconsistent with Hofstede's (2001) theories.

The morality frame was described by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) as a frame in which journalists could frame problems with moral overtones, thereby offering particular social prescriptions on how one is expected to behave. During the initial wave of the COVID-19 crisis, new norms such as the requirement for distance, face masks, quarantining, and tracing of infection chains evolved. Thus, this might explain the high occurrences of morality frame found in this study.

Furthermore, it was found that Albania was more prone to expressing collectivistic values when presenting this frame. This might be attributed to the fact that collectivistic cultures prioritize social harmony, respect, and communal needs over individual needs (Hofstede, 2001). As individualistic cultures prioritize personal benefits over collective benefits, this might have led to less collectivistic values expressed in Fox News morality frames. Morand and Walther (2018) found that cultures that score low in collectivism are more susceptible to infectious disease outbreaks and not as capable of controlling the spread of such outbreaks.

In his analysis of the 2003 SARS epidemic, Beaudoin (2007) found that human-interest frames and economic consequences were most used by cultures that belong on the opposite ends of the collectivism spectrum. He suggested that reporters could emphasize the emotional aspect of the issue or the potential economic implications. This might have been the case for Albania and the USA, in the current study, as both cultures had considerable amounts of both

these frames. Concurrently, Albania did not express any collectivistic when this frame was presented. This might have been as a result of there not being discussed any group benefits within these frames.

Hofstede (2001) suggested that more individualistic countries, such as the USA, tend to produce more diverse news. Although collectivistic and with high power distance, Albania exercises freedom of speech, and journalists can express opposing views as often as they wish, similarly to journalists in the USA. Ng and Tan (2021) argued that collectivistic societies might produce diverse media as well, as they are more prone to attaching conformist and collectivist views in society, which may be evident in how they handle media coverage of the pandemic. On the other hand, it should be noted that when comparing Fox News to other American networks, Johnson (2021) found that apart from not framing the issue as a crisis, Fox News coverage of the coronavirus was significantly less. This might have been another reason why there was no a significance between Report TV and News Fox in terms of news diversity.

This research contributes to the literature on the role and impact of cultural values in news framing during a health crisis, in a variety of ways. To begin, the findings of this study set the groundwork for comprehending the application of Hofstede's theory in news media framings of the COVID-19 pandemic. It could inform news organizations and government **agencies** about how cultural values may play a role in how COVID-19 is communicated to the public at large. Secondly, within the discourse of a pandemic, expressing cultural orientations could set culture-specific expectations, to harness collective attitudes to develop perseverance among the people during difficult times. Lastly, this research contributes to the body of cross-cultural research conducted on Albania, an area that remains underexplored.

5.1 Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. In the case of Albania, the public broadcaster RTSH had only archived articles from 2021, excluding those from 2020. As a result, Report TV, which frequently features uncensored official speeches, was used. Meanwhile, in the United States, Fox News is not considered public media, but PBS is. Similarly, because PBS did not archive its previous articles, Fox News had to be used because it provided a greater variety of articles to sample. It is one of the most popular media channels among American citizens. Unfortunately, unlike Report TV, Fox News does not broadcast unedited government messages; instead, they are truncated, which could be another limitation of this study.

Moreover, it should be noted that the small sample size used in this study could have contributed to additional limitations. Increasing the sample size could provide further accurate mean values, identify outliers that might skew data in a smaller sample, and have a lower margin of error. A different type of sample selection, instead of random selection might also be more ideal, such as a weekly ratified selection in which the material is collected during the days when the government issued public messages.

Likewise, the time period chosen for this study may not have been ideal. Although Ng et al. (2021) claim that the period of March 2020 – May 2020, also known as peak pandemic, had the highest level of convergence with news media, this is only true for the first wave of Covid-19. In actuality, the pandemic lasted more than two years and was divided into several waves.

5.2 Future suggestions

Building on the limitations of this study, suggestions for future studies are suggested in this section. First, future studies should consider other news organizations which might fit the public description better, or rather analyze speeches directly from the government. Secondly, studying another wave of Covid-19 could result in more significant cross-cultural differences, therefore this is recommended as well.

A third future suggestion would be the utilization of other cultural dimensions for similar studies. Past research (Ng & Tan, 2021; Xiang, 2008) has also indicated that the long-term orientation dimension also could play an effect in regards to news framing. Simultaneously, other dimensions outside of Hofstede could be also explored, such as those of Edward T. Hall. Lastly, the questionnaire used in this study compromised of only one question per subject (frame or value). However, future researchers should construct a questionnaire with more questions to better identify the presence of frames or values.

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7. Appendix

Appendix 1. Codebook

Codebook questions frames

Economic consequences frame (1):

Is there a reference to the positive or negative economic consequences of pursuing action with regards to COVID-19?

Conflict frame (2):

Does the article reflect disagreement between two (or more) sides?

Morality frame (3):

Does the article contain any moral message/social prescriptions about how to behave?

Human Interest frame (4):

Does the article provide a human example or “human face” on the issue that might generate feelings of outrage, empathy, caring, sympathy, or compassion?

Attribution of Responsibility frame (5):

Does the article suggest that an individual/group of people/institution is responsible for the problem or solution?

Table 1. Definition of each Generic frame

<i>Frame</i>	<i>Definition</i>
<i>Economic consequences (=1)</i>	Emphasis of the potential economic impacts on societies an issue can have.
<i>Morality (=2)</i>	Emphasis of presenting an issue through social prescriptions.
<i>Conflict (=3)</i>	Emphasis on conflict between individuals, groups, or institutions as a means of capturing audience interest.
<i>Human interest (=4)</i>	Emphasis on the emotional perspective of a given event.

<i>Attribution of responsibility (=5)</i>	Emphasis on attributing responsibility to the government regarding the issue's cause or solution.
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Cultural values

Power distance:

Does the article show prominence given to the government/institutions vs. citizens in terms of social rules that are expected of the public?

Individualism-collectivism:

Does the article articulate the maximization of individual benefits over collective benefits or the other way around?

Uncertainty avoidance:

Does the article impose rigid codes in an attempt to discourage actions to which the consequences are unknown?

Cultural Value	Definition
Individualism vs. collectivism	The importance of individual interests vs. collective interests
Power distance	The degree to which people with less power accept the unequal distribution of that power
Uncertainty Avoidance	The degree to which a society will feel comfortable with ambiguity