

Name of the student:	Federica Purpura
Title of the thesis:	Media attitudes towards the EU: An Analysis of Italian Newspapers during the Covid-19 Crisis
Reviewer:	Prof. Javier Arregui

1. KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTION TO THE FIELD

(relevance of the research question, research objective, literature review):

This thesis analyses through content analysis the way Italian media reported on EU during the COVID-19 pandemic. More specifically, it looks what kind of attitudes do Italian displayed towards the EU in COVID times. Thus, the thesis as it is specified, it is more descriptive than explanatory in nature. In other words, while the topic is relevant to understand how operate in MS the narratives about the EU in times of crisis, my perception is that it falls short in terms of academic ambition to understand a phenomenon as fascinating as the narratives that circulate in the different MS about the integration process.

The most interesting part of the RQ is to know in detail how the four most relevant Italian newspapers reacted to the actions and policies being formulated and implemented from Brussels. This is relevant insofar in times of crisis, mediators (between policy makers and citizens) such as important media players, may portray a crucial role in the policy-making process. Also, it is in these time crises when citizens are more sensitive to the delivery of quality public policies. Therefore, the selection of the RQ is justified. However, my perception is that you cannot really explain properly what is happening in a crisis time unless you have a counter-factual time period (i.e, before of after the crisis).

Furthermore, I also have some doubts about the case selection of four newspapers (even if those are the most relevant ones at the Italian national level). Before making this selection, I believe the author would have had to explain the main media cultures that do exist in Italy and to explain how relevant is the newspaper media culture within the Italian media ecosystem. A media culture is relevant insofar it shows the degree of influence of a particular media culture in order to provide information to citizens of a MS. My guess is that most of citizens in Italy get their information about the EU through TV or even through the radio (like in others MS). In any case, I missed a further development of this point in order to better contextualise the relevance of this research in substantive terms.

The aim of the research is ´to outline the patterns, topics and themes of Italian newspapers that reflect their attitudes towards the EU ` in the period of COVID. As said it is a good objective, but it would have been better and more balance by including a non-crisis period. In order to have a baseline period to be compared to. Also, in relation to this, I have missed a bit a further contextualization and explanation on why media narratives are relevant. For example, I would have expected a sort of minimalistic explanation on how media narratives configurate citizens´ attitudes towards the EU. Clearly here, media narratives compete with other determinants that influence the attitudes of citizens on EU. Thus, to identify these other determinants would have made a better contextualisation of the research question and therefore would have made this research more compelling.

The literature review has been made in a rather systematic way and it seems quite complete. I like it particularly the categorisation of the literature review according to some of the main lines that attitudes towards the EU. I recognise the effort made here by the author although I also believe that the tone of the literature review is more descriptive than critical. This means

that there was room in the presentation of the literature review not only to show what has been made so far in the topics under discussion but also to do it in a more critical way. This would have shown a more convincing direction of the intention of the literature review displayed.

2. ANALYSIS

(methodology, argument, theoretical backing, appropriate work with sources):

The theoretical framework (pag. 16-20) is rather descriptive. It focusses mainly on how the author will make a typology of quotes and/or opinions from positive/negative/mixed/ or factual information based on the articles analysed. This is fine, but my main concern here is that no substantive theory is actually developed. No hypotheses are formulated and given that the RQs are descriptive, the role that theory actually plays in this research is rather small. It is a pity, since this research would have been able to rely on some theory (for example, related on the impact of narratives on attitudes) and with a little bit of data to be able to test how these theories would have actually worked in the covid period. This also has implications for the findings and the conclusions.

The methodology used in this thesis is a qualitative methodology based on content analysis. In principle a methodology of content analysis is good enough for the aim of this research. My perception is that it has not been used any systematicity of the content information (in terms of using any software program in a systematic way) but just as the author recognised it has been interpreted in a subjective way (by the own author).

In relation to the research design, I have already mentioned that a more substantive justification and explanation for choosing the four most relevant newspapers, it would have created a more compelling design.

The findings are carefully presented and discussed for each newspaper analysed.

3. CONCLUSIONS

(persuasiveness, link between data and conclusions, achievement of research objectives):

The conclusions are rather short and mainly reproduce the ideas found previously in the analysis.

I have missed in the conclusions to develop the main implications of the findings and more specifically to explain the added value of this research to better understand the relationship between newspapers narratives and public opinion and/or attitudes on EU in Italy.

The paper would have also profited from using a more general framework by specifying to what extent Italy is similar or different to other MS when analysing those relationships.

The more interesting conclusion brought in the conclusions which is that "support for the EU is motivated more by frustration and dissatisfaction with national governance than by any real enthusiasm for the EU" (page 42) deserves clearly further development.

In general, the conclusions are poor.

4. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE

(appropriate language, adherence to academic standards, citation style, layout):

The thesis is nicely written and uses scholarly language.

In general terms, all is correct according to academic standards.

5. SUMMARY ASSESSMENT

(strong and weak point of the dissertation, other issues)

The thesis has strong points:

- Interesting research question (although it could have been framed in a rather more ambitious way)
- Systematic literature review
- Reasonable research design and data collection

Weaker points:

- The theory section is poor, and the thesis would have been greatly benefited from a more explanatory (rather than descriptive) research questions
- Following from the previous argument, the research would have profited from the formulation of hypotheses (provides more direction to the research as well as it would have helped to improve the existing theory)
- Poor contextualisation of the research (including the relevance of narrative theories about the EU or the relevance of media cultures within MS, particularly in Italy)
- Poor conclusions

Grade (A-F):	D (6,5)
Date: 27/06/2024	Signature:

classification scheme

Percentile	Prague		Krakow		Leiden		Barcelona	
	91-100 %	8,5%	5	6,7%	8,5-10	5,3%	9-10	5,5 %
A (91-100)	91-100 %	8,5%	5	6,7%	8,5-10	5,3%	9-10	5,5 %
B (81-90)	81-90 %	16,3%	4,5	11,7%	7,5-8,4	16,4%	8-8,9	11,0 %
C (71-80)	71-80 %	16,3%	4	20%	6,5-7,4	36,2%	7-7,9	18,4 %
D (61-70)	61-70 %	24%	3,5	28,3%			6-6,9	35,2 %
E (51-60)	51-60 %	34,9%	3	33,4 %	6-6,4	42,1 %	5-5,9	30,1 %

Assessment criteria:

Excellent (A): 'Outstanding performance with only minor errors';

Very good (B): 'Above the average standard but with some errors';

Good (C): 'Generally sound work but with a number of notable errors';

Satisfactory (D): 'Fair but with significant shortcomings';

Sufficient (E): 'Performance meets the minimum criteria';

Fail: 'Some/considerable more work required before the credit can be awarded'.