

INFOTAINMENT JOURNALISM IN TIMES OF CRISIS: A CASE STUDY IN THE GREEK-CYPRIOT PRESS

IRENE PHOTIOU*
THEODORA MANIOU**
NIKLEIA ETEOKLEOUS***
ELENA KETTENI****

ABSTRACT

This study examines the characteristics of Infotainment Journalism in a society under crisis. Using the Greek-Cypriot press as a case study, we contrast news reporting during 2013 (after the onset of the banking crisis) to the preceding year. In the course of the study, both quantitative and qualitative analytical methods are employed; formal content analysis used to investigate the occurrence of various infotainment features in news stories, and framing analysis to explore how these are established. This study shows a significant rise of infotainment characteristics in the news during times of crisis, while in new items/reportages where infotainment characteristics are present, stories seem to be presented in predominantly humanitarian frames, indicating an effort to present hard and soft news in a socially relevant manner. Although a significant increase in its occurrence is observed after the onset of the banking crisis, infotainment does not become a dominant, or even a major, journalistic type.

Keywords: infotainment, journalism, press, Cyprus, crisis.

INTRODUCTION

As a form of journalism, infotainment has been introduced to refer to television programs which exhibit the trend of integrating in a single reportage/news story two seemingly contrasting concepts in mainstream journalism: information and entertainment (e.g., Bonner & McKay, 2003, p. 119; see also, Berrocal Gonzalo, Redondo García, Martín Jiménez, & Campos Domínguez, 2014). With its origins in the late 1980s, infotainment is not a modern trend, but the discussion around it has been ongoing since its conception and, in the last decade, it seems to be widely re-framed (see, for example, Bonner & McKay, 2003; Harrington, 2008). Its roots are in tabloid newspapers, so it has

* Special Teaching Staff, Department of Journalism, Frederick University, Cyprus. photiou.irene@gmail.com

** Lecturer, Department of Journalism, Frederick University, Cyprus. manioud@yahoo.gr

*** Assistant Professor, School of Education, Frederick University, Cyprus. mail@nikleia.net

**** Assistant Professor, Department of Business Administration, Frederick University, Cyprus. elenaketteni@gmail.com

been spurned and even condemned frequently in academic and 'serious' or 'quality' (hereafter, mainstream) journalistic circles (see, for example, Rowe, 2010, p. 351). Nevertheless, it has gradually become an accepted part of popular culture[†] in most western societies, despite (or perhaps because of?) the controversy surrounding its origin and function, and has been important in re-contextualizing the public sphere. This section will review the historical context that gave rise to infotainment journalism, including the arguments fueling this controversy, and characterize its basic features.

The aim of this study is to examine the forms of Infotainment Journalism in the 21st century, and specifically its characteristics in any society under crisis. To achieve this, the case study presented here focuses on the occurrence of infotainment in the Greek-Cypriot press during the banking crisis in 2013, and contrasts this to the publications spanning the year prior to the onset of this crisis.

INFOTAINMENT IN THE MEDIA

Traditionally, the public sphere has been considered as the arena in which citizens and the authorities of their communities engage in logical, analytical communication to contemplate and further their common interests (Habermas, 1991; Crețu, 2013, p.123). In the contemporary world, most citizens (of western societies) undeniably receive the information pertaining to the public sphere of their community and interact with authorities through the mass media. This practice has placed the media in the core of the processes that shape the public agenda, the proceedings of accepted social institutions (Crețu, 2013, p.123) and possibly even the opinions which are deemed with the highest regard in that community (e.g., Fairclough, 1992). Thus, the public sphere has become 'mediated' in most contemporary (western) societies (Crețu, 2013, p.123).

The quality of the sources of the news on any field and the style of reporting them in the media are, therefore, essential in capturing the interest and informing the opinion of the public. Any discussion on tabloidization and infotainment hinges on both these issues, and, in particular, on which stories constitute hard and which soft news. These terms are best discerned by their contrast. A rigorous definition, which is adopted here, considers three aspects of a news story: topic, focus and style (Reinemann, Stanyer, Scherr & Legnante, 2011). First, hard and soft news may be discrepant in their topics. The topic of a report determines the political relevance of an event to the society, that is, the level at which it 'deals with norms, goals, interests and activities related to the preparation, assertion and implementation of authoritative, generally binding decisions about societal conflicts' (Reinemann et al., 2011, p. 233; see also Bruns & Marcinkowski, 1997). Secondly, hard news is defined as those tending to highlight the effects on and pertinence of an event to the society, rather than to a private individual or individuals, which tends to be the focus of softer news (Reinemann et al., 2011, p. 233). Finally, the style of soft and hard news differs: the former tries to evoke emotional responses by using specific visual and/or verbal elements and report the personal interpretations and impressions of the journalist, while the latter do not (ibid, p. 233). Therefore, a reportage, which attempts to be impartial, thorough and deliberate – features typically found in political and/or financial journalism – is canonically considered hard news, while

[†] We subscribe to the definition of the term *popular culture* proposed by Holt N. Parker (2011): 'popular culture comprises all those social goods (material and otherwise), which do not require considerable wealth, specialized interest and education [what Parker and others refer to as 'cultural capital'] to produce and to consume' (p. 162).

a story delving into the private life and affairs of (an) individual(s) in a spectacular or dramatic manner is considered soft (Esser, 1999, p. 293; Harrington, 2008, p. 268).

Marvin Kalb (1997) defines the term tabloidization as the depreciation of hard news and hard-hitting journalism in favour of sensational and dramatic reportages with emotional appeal to the public and high 'saleability' (see also, Esser, 1999, p. 292; Nice, 2007, p. 119). The report of softer news, such as sports and entertainment, is a fairly old practice in (even mainstream) newspapers, but the appeal of images and 'easy-to-swallow' passages eventually led to the establishment of a type of newspaper built around this type of journalism. Distinguished from their mainstream counterparts in style, focus and size, (supermarket) tabloid newspapers report events in small passages, catchy but stereotyped prose and large, graphical images, which favour the easier comprehension of their contents. They are also smaller, similar in size to (or slightly larger than) magazines, which makes them more practical to hold in public transportation (Esser, 1999, pp. 292; Rowe, 2010, p. 353; Jebiril et al., 2013, p. 106). Their proclivity to report stories in this emotionally appealing and easy-to-follow manner has led to the (recent) birth of the term tabloidization to refer to similar practices in all fields of the press (Esser, 1999, p. 292). Nevertheless, their ability to reach large and diverse audiences is thought to have been a deciding factor in the promotion of such commercialization of the news, at least by corporate news conglomerates and advertising firms (see, for example, Esser, 1999, p. 291).

In recent years, the need for profit has led to a blurring of the lines between hard and soft news in most areas of journalism, and some commercialization of even mainstream news is encountered (Jebiril et al., 2013, p. 105; Nice, 2007, p. 119). Specifically, the understanding that television was meant to educate and inform the public has collapsed since the 1980s and the necessity to entertain the audience in order to remain antagonistic has been recognized and embraced. To captivate their audiences, several television programs have been using similar techniques of sensationalism and personalization in their reportages, which has led researchers to talk about tabloidization in television. Hence, the term infotainment has been coined in tandem with tabloidization – both recognized as forms of so-called popular journalism (Deuze, 2005) – with the former employed in television and the latter for the written press (Bonner & McKay, 2003, pp. 119-120; see also Sparks, 2000).

Different western cultures and journalistic schools use the term infotainment to refer to somewhat different types of programming (Bonner & McKay, 2003, pp. 119-120), but, as discussed above, a few prevailing characteristics are common in all these programs. Therefore, we define infotainment as the journalistic practice that encompasses and employs these features: personalization, personal life, emotions, morbidity, sensationalism and scandal (Mellado, 2014). Personalization (Sheafer, 2001) occurs when the reportage centers on one or more individuals and their characteristics (e.g., intellectual, physical, emotional, social and basic attributes). Personal life is distinguished from personalization in our work (Van Zoonen, 1998): it is observed when the story focuses on the aspects of an individual's life which do not constitute areas that affect public interest or societal conflict and which people possibly prefer to keep in their private sphere. Emotion is invoked when a reaction of intensity is triggered due to any combination of a range of different feelings (Aust, 2003). Morbidity is the tendency to report unpleasant, cruel or prohibited aspects of stories (Mason & Monckton-Smith, 2008). Sensationalism is used to refer to the presence of visual or textual elements that

stimulate the senses of the audiences and trigger an emotional response or arousal by highlighting unusual, unexpected or spectacular aspects of a story (Grabe, Shuhua & Brooke, 2001). Although a scandal may also prompt intense emotion and elicit severe public response (Thompson, 2000, p. 13), here it is understood separately from sensationalism, as it always has a derogatory connotation. It is considered an illegitimate or, at least, immoral event, but one which is disassociated from a specific public role (i.e., political or economic scandals are not considered part of infotainment journalism).

Due to its dual foci on entertainment and information, infotainment is at the heart of a debate surrounding the quality of news items in the media, with serious scrutiny on its effects on the public sphere and (some say) on the practice of democracy itself (e.g., Rowe, 2010, p. 351). The critics of this form of journalism claim that the information provided is oversimplified causing a 'dumbing down' effect, which undermines in-depth, critical consideration of factual evidence. Furthermore, they argue that the graphic imagery frequently employed in infotainment will result in receiving 'image-bite' political news in the form of pictorials rather than discursive narratives with cohesive information (Crețu, 2013, p.124). Finally, the personalization of politics, and its negative effects on democratic processes, is a feared consequence of the focus on the personal lives of political representatives (Jebri et al., 2013, pp. 107-108; Crețu, 2013, p.124), and may discourage participation of the audiences in electoral processes (Jebri et al., 2013, p. 108).

On the other hand, proponents of infotainment journalism frequently associate several merits with it. Specifically, they contend that its appeal to a wide and varied audience may stimulate political interest in groups with otherwise little or no such concerns (Crețu, 2013, p.126). In addition, these scholars claim that it may result in encouraging citizens to contemplate politics, formulate their own ideas and speak up in political discussions, actually furthering the practice of democracy (Peters, 2015, pp. 604-605; Crețu, 2013, p.126). In fact, it is argued that infotainment segments frequently may go as far as to criticize social issues and instigate reflection of the texts and segments of other programming (Peters, 2015, p. 605; see also Gray, 2006). Finally, its propensity for personalization is identified as offering the opportunity to reduce the social chasm between politicians and their electorates (Crețu, 2013, p.126; see also Moy, Xenos & Hess, 2005, p. 125). Of course, these advantages clearly depend on the public of a particular culture, and their specific motifs of media consumption and cultural or socio-political interests (Crețu, 2013, p.126; see also Esser, 1999).

One distinction of this work from previous ones is our reference to infotainment journalism not within television programming but in the written press. Specifically, we focus our investigation to articles in (Cypriot) mainstream newspapers (see below). We are not the first to blur the lines between tabloidization and infotainment in reference to the media in which the phenomena are observed. For example, Frances Bonner & Susan McKay (2003, p. 120) employ the term tabloidization to refer to television programs of this type. The reason we do not adopt the term 'tabloidization' here is to avoid confusion between the newspapers in our sample and the type of tabloid newspaper in which the practices of infotainment are expected. The newspapers we study here are locally considered as featuring hard-hitting, mainstream journalism (see below). As aforementioned, in this research we are not looking for general characteristics of infotainment journalism in the press, but in particular, for its characteristics during a social crisis. Berrocal Gonzalo, Redondo García and Torres Chico (2015) conducted a similar investigation using the 2012 issues of various Spanish newspapers. Nevertheless,

as will be seen below, our two studies differ in their results: theirs find prevalent infotainment features (for example, 'spectacularization of the news'), while ours indicates only a minor influence of said characteristics.

CYPRUS: A PROFILE OF THE RECENT HISTORY AND ECONOMIC/BANKING CRISIS

An island nation in the east Mediterranean Sea, the Republic of Cyprus is a member in the UN since its independence in 1960, in the European Union since 2004 and in the Eurozone since 2008. The majority of its population is of Greek descent, with other large ethnic groups including Cypriots of Turkish, Armenian, Latin and other Christian Catholic origins[‡], as well as large communities of European and non-European citizens. The Greek-Cypriot community is frequently affected by the social, political and financial changes in Greece, due to their affiliation with the Greek language and their shared history and religion. The island was divided in 1974 following a coup against the then President, instigated by the Greek military, which led to its invasion by Turkish military forces, their occupation of the northern half of the island, and the splitting of the population with most Turkish-Cypriots in the north and the rest in the south (Maniou, 2017).

Since its independence in 1960, the Republic of Cyprus has repeatedly faced a number of crises, most of them linked to political issues and, after 1974, the country's main national problem: the Turkish military occupation of Northern Cyprus (Maniou & Photiou, 2017). Despite its political problems, during the last two decades of the twentieth century, Cyprus was considered a tax haven, attracting large sums of foreign direct investments, mostly, but not exclusively, from Russian capitals (Charalambous, 2014). In this time, the banking and financial sector grew exponentially and, by 2010, its volume in capital terms reached almost eight times the country's GDP (Stefanou, 2011).

This rapid and disproportional growth, among other factors linked to a problematic banking sector, led the Eurogroup to reach an unprecedented decision regarding the Cypriot economic crisis (as well as the Eurozone more broadly) in March 2013 (Maniou & Photiou, 2017). Although the initial proposal was designed to penalize small savers as well, the plan adopted in the end imposed a haircut on deposits above 100,000 Euro (Charalambous, 2014). In addition, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the Cypriot government and the Troica, reinforcing or supplementing a chain of austerity measures (initiated by the previous government) similar to those of Greece, Spain and Portugal. The final Cyprus Economic Adjustment Program included a number of conditions activated by the Troica's Memorandum of Understanding. These comprised the recapitalization of the entire financial/banking sector while accepting a closure of the Laiki bank, the implementation of anti-money laundering framework in the Cypriot financial institutions, fiscal consolidation to help decrease the Cypriot budget deficit, structural reforms to restore competitiveness and macroeconomic imbalances and a privatization programme targeting semi-governmental organizations (ibid). Various fiscal

[‡] Although statistics regarding the ethnicity of the population in Cyprus have been a bit sketchy since 1974, at that time it was estimated that 85% of the population were of Greek-Cypriot origin, 12% were Turkish-Cypriots, and the Armenian, Latin and other Catholic groups comprised the remaining 3% of the population (PIO, 2000: 50).

components of the programme (including recapitalization of the major banks, the haircut of savings accounts exceeding 100,000 Euro and the closure of Laiki Bank) were eventually endorsed by the House of Representatives on 30 April 2013, following negotiations between the Cyprus government and the European institutions during March and April 2013.

As expected, these financial measures resulted in several societal changes in every sector of everyday life in the country, while severe economic changes took place regarding the country's market and industry. Between them, the media environment suffered (and is still suffering) a series of changes, starting from the shrinkage of media companies and reaching factors like media content and management (Maniou, Photiou, Eteokleous & Seitanidis, 2017).

A BRIEF NOTE ON THE PRESS IN CYPRUS

Newspapers were introduced as a mass medium in Cyprus during the British rule, circa 1878 (Chrysanthou, 2008, p. 17). There are currently four Greek-language daily newspapers in print, although when this research was conducted there were six daily newspapers. Most of them have strong political links; specifically, there are a number of newspapers favouring the right wing, ranging from nationalist (MACHI, today a free-press edition) to neo-liberal orientations (ALITHIA and SIMERINI, which was a daily paper at the time this research took place), and one newspaper which is left-wing (CHARAVGI[§]) (PRIO group, 2010, Appendix I). In the Republic's short history, the communication of every major event through the press (e.g., elections, Cyprus accession into the EU, banking crisis and Memorandum of Understanding with the EU) has exhibited a wide partisan behaviour of the local newspapers (e.g., Pavlou, 1995; Chrysanthou, 2008; PRIO group, 2010, Appendix I). Only two newspapers are locally regarded as being politically mainstream, namely POLITIS and PHILELEFTHEROS (PRIO group, 2010, Appendix I).

Tabloid newspapers, with the characteristics of those described in the previous sections, have never been published on the island, despite the existence of various local and international (lifestyle) magazines since the 1980s (Panayiotou, 2000). In fact, only one tabloid newspaper ever made its appearance during the last decade (KORIOS) and even this ceased publication after some years, due to low circulation and financial problems.

AIM, RQS AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The aim of this study is to examine the specific characteristics of Infotainment Journalism in a society under crisis, employing the Greek-Cypriot press as a case-study, as well as the specific forms of infotainment journalism in the 21st century, which is considered to be one of the prominent expressions of popular culture. This aim is broken down to the following research questions:

1. What are the differences in infotainment characteristics during times of crisis versus less dire conditions?
2. Does the incidence of Infotainment Journalism and its specific characteristics change significantly during times of crisis?
3. How are the characteristics of Infotainment Journalism established?

[§] CHARAVGI is the formal medium of the left-wing party AKEL.

Due to the specific nature of the questions, the research follows a quantitative and a qualitative path. It is based on quantitative Formal Content Analysis and framing analysis of the news items (reportages), including assorted elements (photographs, figures, etc.), in which a systematic sample of texts is used. For the Content Analysis, classification systems were devised to identify different features of the texts, which were then counted with an emphasis on objectivity and reliability (Pawson, 1995). The data reported in this article derive from the Content Analysis of the national Greek-Cypriot press in the years 2012 and 2013, as part of a broader ongoing research project concerning journalistic role-models in Cyprus. The sample of newspapers was selected every month of 2012 and 2013 following a simple mathematical sequence, based on the days of the week. The unit of the analysis was the news item, defined as a single, continuous text comprising of lexical elements and accompanying non-verbal features (such as tables, images, etc.) in the same news item and concerning the same subject matter (Mellado & Lagos, 2014, p. 2095, see also Mellado et al., 2017). Specific criteria on the form and visual presentation of each reportage were not set a-priori, as the intention was to include as many units of analysis as possible in the research. For the analysis of the news items, a specific codebook was used including variables that refer to the specific characteristics of infotainment as earlier analyzed in the theoretical framework.

In this perspective, the research sample consists of units of analysis from the five newspapers with the highest circulation for 2012 and 2013; those are the following newspapers: PHILELEFTHEROS, POLITIS, SIMERINI, CHARAVGI and ALITHIA. Among the newspapers included in the sample, PHILELEFTHEROS and POLITIS are considered mainstream, ALITHIA and SIMERINI are considered neo-liberal, while CHARAGI is the formal medium of the left-wing party AKEL (PRIO group, 2010, Appendix I). The final sample comprises of 2012 reportages, as presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: *The total sample of the research*

Newspaper	2012	2013
ALITHIA	192	189
CHARAVGI	206	274
PHILELEFTHEROS	124	234
POLITIS	113	318
SIMERINI	196	166
Total	831	1181

In the course of the study, seven researchers were trained in the implementation process of the particular codebook used, while a pre-test and a post-test were conducted to ensure that the researchers comprehended in a similar manner the additional variables (Mellado & Lagos, 2014, pp. 2095-2096). The tests yielded overall inter-coder reliability 0.89 (pre-test) and 0.93 (post-test) employing the KRIPPENDORFF's ALPHA test. Therefore, we consider our results valid and proceed to their analysis and

discussion. With regards to the statistical test, the limit of p value < 0.05 was set, while a Mann-Whitney U test was initially considered imperative, in order to test significant statistical differences in certain variables.

In specific news items, where characteristics of infotainment were identified, framing analysis was used to investigate the focus of the article and the style in which these features were presented. Goffman (1974) highlights the importance of frames in the communication of social actions and/or events, particularly in enabling individuals to discuss them (Tuchman, 1978: IV). Although researchers do not agree upon a formal definition for frames (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000: 94), in this work, frame is designated as any conceptual tool or abstraction that enables media and their audiences to communicate, interpret and appraise information by choosing and/or highlighting some of their aspects and omitting others (Neuman, Just & Crigler, 1992: 60; Gitlin, 1980: 7; see also Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000: 93-94). Frames constitute an important, even essential, apparatus in reporting news, since they are particularly useful in condensing a multiplicity of complex information to suit the level of understanding of journalists and the audience, within the space or time of a written article or bulletin, respectively.

Nevertheless, their framing prevents raw news items from reaching audiences without the interference of several factors. During the process of framing a news item, first the source and then the communicator selects 'some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient', while phasing others out, or omitting them completely, which promotes 'a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation' (Entman, 1993: 52; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000: 94; see also Vliegthart & van Zoonen, 2011: 105). The choice and encoding of frames makes them a significant tool in advancing the political, social, financial and/or other interests and opinions of the source and/or communicator in a particular communication event.

Consequently, establishing and analyzing the frame(s) in a news story is essential in exploring which such interest(s) are promoted in it. Since the aim of this paper is to explore the occurrence and patterns of infotainment in Cyprus, and such journalism utilizes distinct frames in its reporting, we would be remiss not to investigate the frames of possible infotainment stories in local newspapers. We did not focus our investigation on discursive cultural frames, but primarily explored the following frames of the actual text (e.g., Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996): slogans and catchphrases in the titles, subtitles and keywords in the text; artefacts (such as images) presented together with the stories; and contrasts created by the text. We particularly looked within these for elements that generated or evoked the characteristics identified above as integral to infotainment journalism (personalization, focus on personal life, emotions, morbidity, sensationalism and scandal). Although the analysis below only includes a small number of specific (more paradigmatic) examples, we examined a total number of 524 articles appearing in all five newspapers, as presented in the following table.

Table 2: The total number of articles of the quantitative research.

<i>Newspaper</i>	<i>Number of news items</i>
ALITHEIA	99
FILELEFTHEROS	93
POLITIS	113
SIMERINI	94
CHARAVGI	125
Total	524

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Initially, the specific topics presented in the newspapers' journalistic content were identified. Table 3 summarizes the total coverage of topics in the entire sample of news items examined in all five newspapers. Initially, concerning the topics of the news items, statistically significant differences were not revealed ($p = 0.32$; $Z = -0.98$) in regard to variations between 2012 – 2013. Consequently, the sample was examined as a total for the two years and not separately, since initially there was no need for a comparative study. However, in the course of the study the sample had to be examined separately for the years 2012 and 2013 (see analysis in Tables 6 & 7). Moreover, despite significant differences in ideological inclinations, all five newspapers seem to exhibit similar emphasis on the topics they covered, thereby preventing a comparative study between them based on political affiliation.

Table 3: Topics of the reportages

Topic	%
Government / legislatures	13,4
Campaigns / elections / politics	10,3
Police and crime	7,9
Court	6,6
Defence / military / national security	6,8
Economy / business	19,7
Education	4,3
Energy / environment	4,5
Transportation	1,6
Housing / infrastructure	3,5
Accidents / natural disasters	1,5
Health	4,9
Religion / churches	0,4
Human rights	1,5
Demonstrations / protests	2
Social problems	3,6
Others	7,3
χ^2 test	$p=0,32$
Mann-Whitney U test	$Z=0,98$

The next step in this study was to examine the frequency of appearance of all key characteristics of infotainment journalism, namely personalization of the news, mention of private lives, sensationalism, scandals, display of emotions and morbidity, both in the texts and also in the non-verbal elements (see Mellado et al, 2017).

On the issue of personalization, Table 4 indicates that only 12,6% of the total reportages show evidence of stories being personalized through any of the characteristics outlined in section 2. Although the framing analysis of several hundred articles would be too long to include, our results indicate that stories in which this attribute of infotainment was observed addressed social, health, court, police, showbiz and other 'light' topics, and were personalized using intellectual, physical, emotional, social and even basic attributes of the individuals in their focus. For example, in a frame of racism, the 1 June 2012 issue of ALITHIA presents a court case in which the Romanian defendant was acquitted through a 'hollow testimony', indicating the basic/social attribute of the individual's descent (Michaelides, 2012, p.13). In another example, the 13 March 2012 issue of POLITIS presents the court proceedings against a prostitute trying to make enough money for her university tuition. The story is framed with a prejudice against the fact that the defendant was transsexual, thereby focusing on one of her physical/social attributes (Vasou, 2012, p.19). As a final example, the intellectual abilities of two businessmen, a father and his son, are highlighted in an article in ALITHIA (14 June 2013), which reported the court case trying the perceived murderers of the son, thereby attempting to frame the family as important figures in Cypriot society (Chatzidemetriou, 2013, p.4).

Table 4 also reveals that most (93,6%) reportages exhibited no (or limited) reference of the private life of public figures and individual members of society. The framing analysis indicated that the few hundred stories exhibiting this infotainment feature were usually framed with a humanitarian connotation around social, court, police, showbiz and health topics. For example, on 13 February 2012, ALITHIA reports the death of Whitney Houston. Using a lamenting hue and praising the singer's voice and personal achievements, the story simultaneously presents her addiction and personal problems in a tragic overtone, possibly in an attempt to caution against drug abuse (Anon, 2013, p.13). In another example, the personal drama of a family facing severe psychological issues, in which a brother is reported as having killed his sister, is presented in the 22 January 2012 issue of SIMERINI (Stylianou & Gregoriou, 2012, p. 2).

Only a negligible fraction of reportages (9,1%) utilized methods of sensationalism, as evinced in Table 4. In the framing analysis, these stories were found to be concerned again mostly with humane, police, health and social topics, and were frequently framed with humanitarian hues. For example, the aforementioned story of the family suffering from psychological issues is presented by SIMERINI with vivid language and 'loud' catch-phrases (e.g., 'unique case... shocks the Cypriot public: twenty-five-year-old murders his sister', 'tragic mother', 'atrocious crime', etc.), but focuses on the drama of the family and even attempts to highlight the personal problems of the seemingly guilty brother. In another example, on 5 August 2013, SIMERINI presents the 'dramatic appeal' of a mother for money to transfer her son abroad for a marrow transplant (Adamou, 2013b, p.3).

Table 4: Personalisation, Privacy and Sensationalism in the Press

	Personalisation	Mention of private life	Sensationalism
Yes	12,6%	6,4%	9,1%
No	87,4%	93,6%	90,9%
Total	100%	100%	100%
Correlation		,121 (.186)	

As Table 5 illustrates, a mere 9% of the reportages mention scandals regarding the topics examined above (as discussed in section 2, coverage of political scandals does not constitute infotainment). Most of the scandals identified once more focused on social, health, police and educational topics. In an example that combines most of these elements, a 6 November 2012 article in PHILELEFTHEROS reports on a number of elementary-school children who were able to log onto their school computers in order to view pornographic material. The framing of the story highlights both the social concern and rage of the journalist for the lack of control in the public educational system Kyriakidou, 2012 ,p. 1).

Among all the reportages our team examined, only 7.9% utilize morbidity in their text and a mere 2% do so in their images, as shown in Table 5. In fact, most of the articles in which this trait of infotainment is encountered mainly involve topics concerning police, crime and court, issues regarding national defence, and reports on accidents and natural disasters. For example, in the aforementioned case of the person suffering from psychological issues who allegedly killed his sister, the article in SIMERINI (22, January, 2012) presents the beating the victim received from her assailant with graphic description. It refrains, however, from publishing images (Stylianou & Gregoriou, 2012, p. 2). In fact, even in stories that use imagery, graphic morbidity is not often selected, but the newspapers usually limit themselves to distant photographs of victims (of crimes or natural disasters) being taken away in police or ambulance bags. Therefore, the use of morbidity is possibly a tool to capture public attention, perhaps in order to advocate social organization and aid for the victims, enhancing the typically humanitarian framing of such stories.

The only characteristic of infotainment which exhibited a relatively stronger presence in the five Cypriot newspapers was display of emotions. Specifically, the text in 26,1% of the news items referred to or elicited emotional responses on any of the topics examined and 13,2% of them presented photographs and images in an attempt to do this, as also displayed in Table 5. Although these are by far the highest numbers on the existence of any of the characteristics of infotainment, the actual presence of emotion-inducing text and non-verbal elements appeared to be extremely limited, thus they can be considered as the exceptions in the Cypriot press.

The framing analysis indicated this infotainment feature was found mainly in articles covering police, crime and court stories, accidents and natural disasters, health topics, human rights issues, demonstrations, protests and social problems. An example is illustrated in the issue of POLITIS on 14 June 2013, which presents the sentencing of

the perceived guilty party in the aforementioned murder of the businessman. Framed in an aura of justice being done, the story reports that at the announcement of the court's decision, the defendant broke down and cried, while her mother fainted. This description is accompanied by a photograph illustrating the heads of both women facing down with tear-streaked eyes (Nearchou, 2013, p. 5). Finally, a story presenting how some citizens in financial need were given food in a number of local markets is published in the 27 December 2012 issue of SIMERINI. Framed in a feel-good, charitable hue, possibly influenced by the period of the publication (i.e., during the celebration of the Greek Orthodox Christmas), the story describes lyrically the emotional gratitude offered by said people, but does not focus on the cause(s) of their financial difficulty (Adamou, 2012a, p. 15).

Table 5: Scandals, Morbidity and Emotion in the Press.

	Reference to scandals	Morbidity in texts	Morbidity in photographs	Emotion in texts	Emotion in non-verbal elements
Yes	9%	7,9%	2%	26,1%	13,2%
No	91%	92,1%	98%	73,9%	86,8%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Correlation			,121 (.186)		

As Tables 6 and 7 illustrate, there are statistical differences between the years 2012, when some features of the imminent economic crisis started to become evident in the Greek-Cypriot society, and 2013, when the banking crisis was suddenly manifest following the discussions of the Cypriot government and the European institutions. In fact, descriptive comparative analysis among the years 2012 and 2013 (see Table 6) indicates that there are differences in almost all infotainment characteristics. Specifically, the occurrence of all but one characteristic visibly increases between the two years, often close to becoming double; 'morbidity in text' constitutes the exception. The framing analysis has not revealed any significant changes in the frames used to present the news.

Table 6: Descriptive comparative analysis among 2012 and 2013 for all characteristics of Infotainment

<i>Characteristics of Infotainment</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Std. Error Mean</i>
Personalization	2012	.09	.287	.010
	2013	.15	.359	.010
Private life	2012	.04	.206	.007
	2013	.08	.268	.008
Sensationalism	2012	.03	.177	.006
	2013	.13	.339	.010
Scandal	2012	.06	.238	.008
	2013	.11	.314	.009
Emotions in texts	2012	.24	.426	.015
	2013	.28	.448	.013
Emotions in non-verbal elements	2012	.09	.285	.010
	2013	.16	.368	.011
Morbidity in texts	2012	.08	.278	.010
	2013	.07	.263	.008
Morbidity in non-verbal elements	2012	.01	.114	.004
	2013	.02	.155	.005

Since descriptive statistics indicate statistical differences among 2012 and 2013, it was deemed appropriate to perform a t-test and examine the data for the two years as independent samples. Table 7 clearly shows statistical differences among the two samples.

Table 7: Independent samples tests among 2012 and 2013 for all characteristics of Infotainment

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means	
		F	Sig.	t	Sig.
Personalization	Equal variances assumed	70.877	.000	-4.092	.000
	Equal variances not assumed			-4.252	.000
Private life	Equal variances assumed	37.467	.000	-3.014	.003
	Equal variances not assumed			-3.152	.002
Sensationalism	Equal variances assumed	282.415	.000	-7.760	.000
	Equal variances not assumed			-8.571	.000
Scandal	Equal variances assumed	64.940	.000	-3.931	.000
	Equal variances not assumed			-4.121	.000
Emotions in texts	Equal variances assumed	15.550	.000	-1.943	.052
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.960	.050
Emotions in non-verbal elements	Equal variances assumed	97.861	.000	-4.771	.000
	Equal variances not assumed			-4.984	.000
Morbidity in texts	Equal variances assumed	2.540	.111	.798	.425
	Equal variances not assumed			.790	.430
Morbidity in non-verbal elements	Equal variances assumed	12.969	.000	-1.791	.073
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.885	.060

DISCUSSION

This work addressed for the first time the presence and specific characteristics of infotainment journalism in the Greek-Cypriot press in times of crisis. The analysis illustrates a low presence of the features usually associated with infotainment journalism in the five newspapers examined. Importantly, the investigation has indicated that these figures seem not to exhibit significant differentiation between the five national

newspapers; i.e., all five seem to focus on the same topic areas and to employ similar journalistic methods in reporting their news stories; as indicated, infotainment is not one of the most often used.

The frame analysis has indicated that in the statistically fewer news articles in which infotainment methods are implemented, these employ most characteristics identified in the infotainment journalism of other (European and Western) countries, namely personalization, personal life, emotions, sensationalism and scandal (Mellado, 2014). Morbidity constitutes the only exception, as it seems to be underused or avoided in the Greek-Cypriot press. Once more, none of the five newspapers examined seems to distinguish itself in the characteristics it employs in stories in which infotainment is used.

We suspect that the rare appearance of infotainment methods may be because of specific aspects of the Cypriot society. Specifically, the paradigms of infotainment journalism observed in other (European and Western) countries would be hard to develop in Cyprus, due to the small size of its population, which leads to swift recognizability and, possibly consequently, a tendency for a more restrained social behaviour. A further possible effect of the small population is the fact that the model of journalism employed in Cyprus is subject to much slower change compared to other (European and Western) countries, since Greek-Cypriot reporters mostly tend to follow practices that had been established in earlier decades. In fact, the latter hypothesis may provide an insight into the striking similarities in the topic coverage and use of infotainment features displayed in all five newspapers despite their distinct political affiliations.

The scarcity of infotainment implies that Cypriots either are not used to including such topics in what they perceive as the serious portion of their daily routine, or they are not used to seeing them in the press considered serious or mainstream. This hypothesis does seem to be supported by the frame analysis as well. For example, the two most frequent infotainment characteristics include emotion-eliciting text/images and personalization, but in all the articles examined, both these features, as well as a slew of the others (such as morbidity, personal life and in certain cases even sensationalism and scandal), are used to gain sympathy in establishing an apparent humanitarian frame in the story. Therefore, we argue that even in articles where the techniques of infotainment are used, there is an attempt to legitimate, or 'mainstream,' them through the reportage, by using them to highlight some of the social and/or humanitarian aspects of the reported story.

We do observe, however, a significant increase in the occurrence of infotainment features after the onset of the banking crisis in 2013, despite the fact that we still do not consider prevalent or even significant the overall instance of infotainment in the Cypriot press.

CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH

This research has found a paucity of all characteristics of infotainment journalism in the Greek-Cypriot press (except, perhaps, the display or solicitation of emotional responses in texts). On the side of the consumers, this trend may be attributed to the small size of the population and its tendency to prefer to separate hard from 'soft' news. The latter would explain why, in news that exhibited the features of infotainment, the elements of infotainment were established through typically humanitarian frames, thereby (perhaps subconsciously) ensconcing even soft news with a more socially

relevant hue. On the other side, we have ascribed the rarity of infotainment elements to the proclivity of local professionals to adhere to previously established methods of journalism. This would explain the similar incidence of infotainment in all five newspapers, despite their considerably different political affiliations.

We did, however, notice a significant rise in most features of infotainment from 2012 (when the economic crisis was still backgrounded in the Cypriot society) to 2013 (after the banking crisis was manifest), although we claim that the rise was not enough to claim that infotainment had become an important journalistic method in the Greek-Cypriot press. However, this study indicates that in times of crisis infotainment characteristics increase in the news, although one would expect hard hitting journalism to become more prominent and not the other way around.

As is the case in most (European and Western) countries, the future of newspapers cannot be considered certain. A new era in the modes of communicating information seems to be dawning in Cyprus in recent years, with the advent of blogs, portals and multimedia journalism. Thus, the paradigm formed by the traditional press must now change for newspapers to survive, since the content produced and disseminated rapidly by the new media mainly employs infotainment methods in order to attract as large an audience as possible (Menelaou & Maniou, 2013, p.143). There is still a window of opportunity for the traditional press, however, since these new media do not (yet) enjoy the accreditation and trust of their users. The matter of new, online information modes, such as that of visual infotainment, of course merits close scrutiny and investigation in the years to come.

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