

Investigating the psychological effects of the Greek financial crisis

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Emotional atmosphere - emotional climate

Triggers of emotion

Non-Conscious

Conscious

- Evaluations, interpretations
- Remembering
- Imagination
- Empathy
- Discussions
- Indirect influences on "how to feel"
- Violation of norms

Emotion

Link 1

Motivation

Link 2

Action

- Extenuation of emotional reality through defences
- Shock / trauma (emotions "freeze")

- Resilience
- Hope / optimism
- Efficacy (availability of repertoire, costs and benefits of action)

Emotion from outcomes of action

Study I:

Effects of everyday life
images of crisis
on hope, political efficacy
and intention for action

Method

Design

Experimental mood induction with photographs featuring everyday life, during and before the crisis in two respective groups.

Material

150 images (75/condition), selected from a total of 206, screened for emotional impact on 20 viewers, with software that detects emotions from facial expressions.

Participants

160 undergraduate and graduate students equally distributed by gender and age group (18-22, 23-45).

Step 1

Experimental Group

**Images of
“crisis”**

Control Group

**Images of
“prosperity”**

Experienced emotions recorded with Noldus FaceReader©

Images of crisis



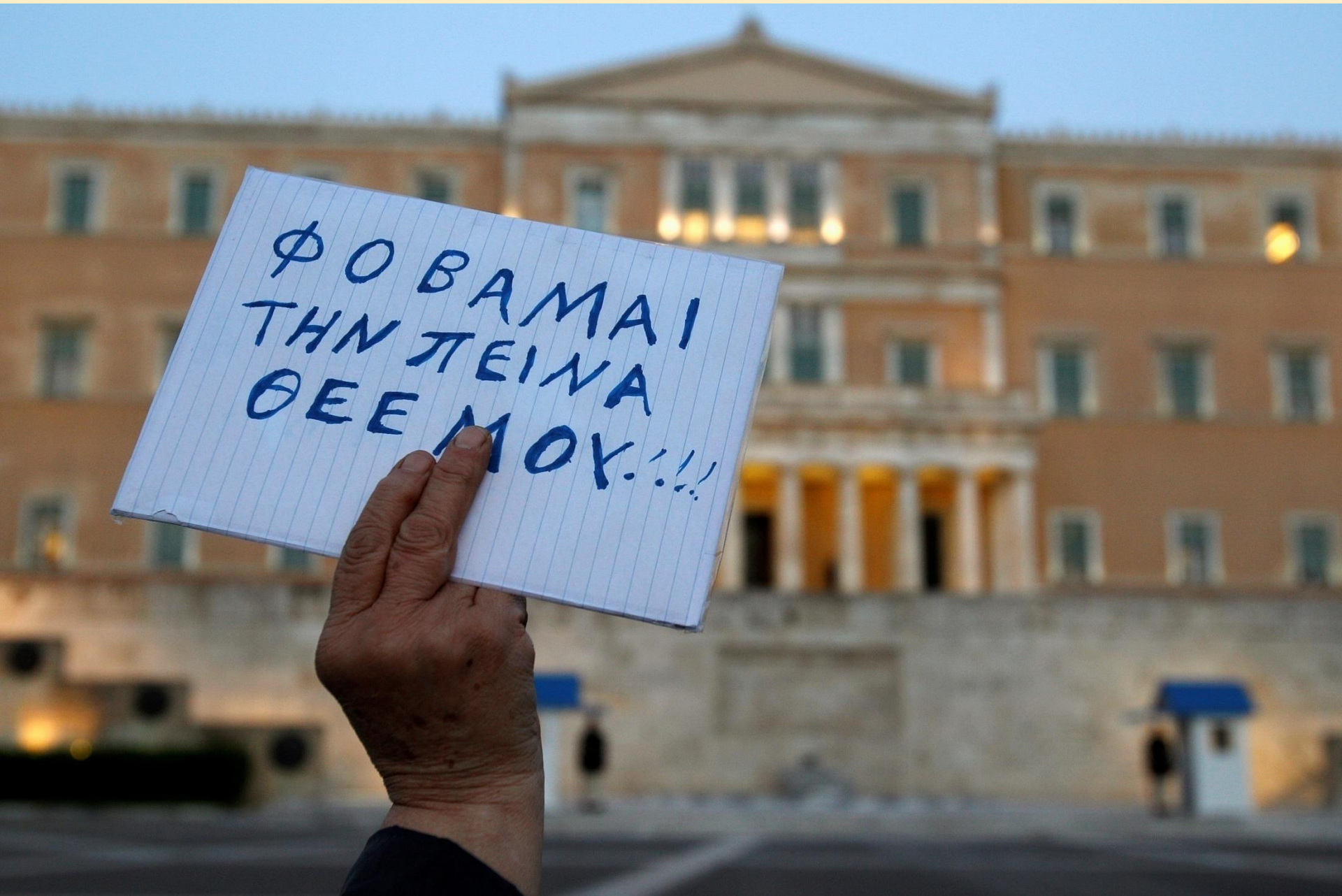
(GN)

MONO 5€





ΦΟΒΑΜΑΙ
ΤΗΝ ΠΕΙΝΑ
ΘΕΕ ΜΟΥ!!!





Images of prosperity











Step 2

Both Groups

- Beck Hopelessness Scale (Beck & Steer, 1993)
- Measure of internal political efficacy (Niemi's *et al.*, 1991)
- Answer to 4 vignettes about possible social problems in the neighbourhood:
 - (a) mobile antenna wiring
 - (b) conversion of a park into a car parking
 - (c) increase of violence
 - (d) increase of litter

Summary of findings

Effects of images of crisis

Hopelessness: increased in both age groups (more in men than in women and more in younger than in older participants).

Political efficacy: increased in older participants, but decreased in younger participants.

Intention for collective action for public interest matters: increased in both age groups (but more in younger participants and in men than in women).

Younger participants

In the crisis condition exhibit increased hopelessness, decreased political efficacy and increased intention for action. This combination may reflect distrust in traditional politics and a pursuit for alternative action repertoires; it may also explain abstention from the recent elections.

Study II:

Impact of news media on
emotional climate

Method

Quantitative content analysis

Research material

947 news items screened with indexes of humanistic crisis as key-words

(material hardship, poverty, inequality in education and social protection, inaccessibility to social welfare/medical care)

Drawn from 3 newspapers and 3 news web sites on the basis of readability and unique visitors (years 2009-2014):

Kathimerini, Eleftherotypia, Ethnos, zougla.gr, newsit.gr, news247.gr

Units of analysis

1662 units:

- 57% text
- 40,1% pictures
- 2,6% video
- 0,4% sound

Variables examined

- Content (themes, events)
- Dramatization (emotional wording)
- Focus (individual cases vs. institutions)
- Responsibility framing (episodic vs. thematic)
- Emotions (sadness, disgust, surprise, fear, rage/anger, joy) detected:
 - (i) in the writer's narrative, (ii) in announcements by politicians, specialists or citizens included in the publication

Summary of findings

Focus & Framing

- 71.8% of news items focused on individual cases of suffering without clear connections to the wider socio-economic environment.

Though some titles were framed thematically, accompanying text had episodic framing.

Example:

Title: “The crisis killed him”

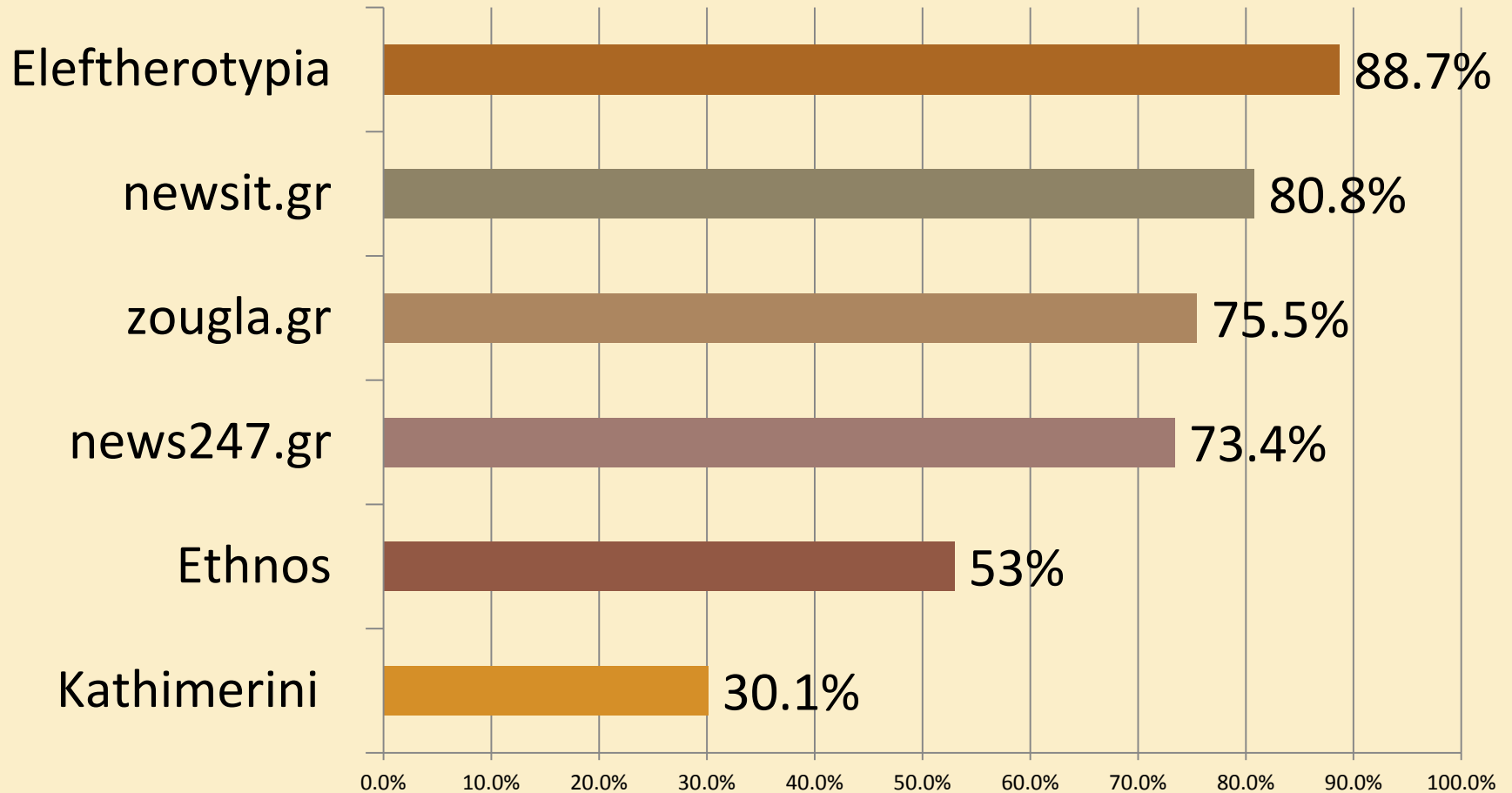
Text: Details about the person and the business that went bankrupt, without connection of bankruptcy to financial measures.

(zougla.gr: 85.4% Kathimerini: 57%)

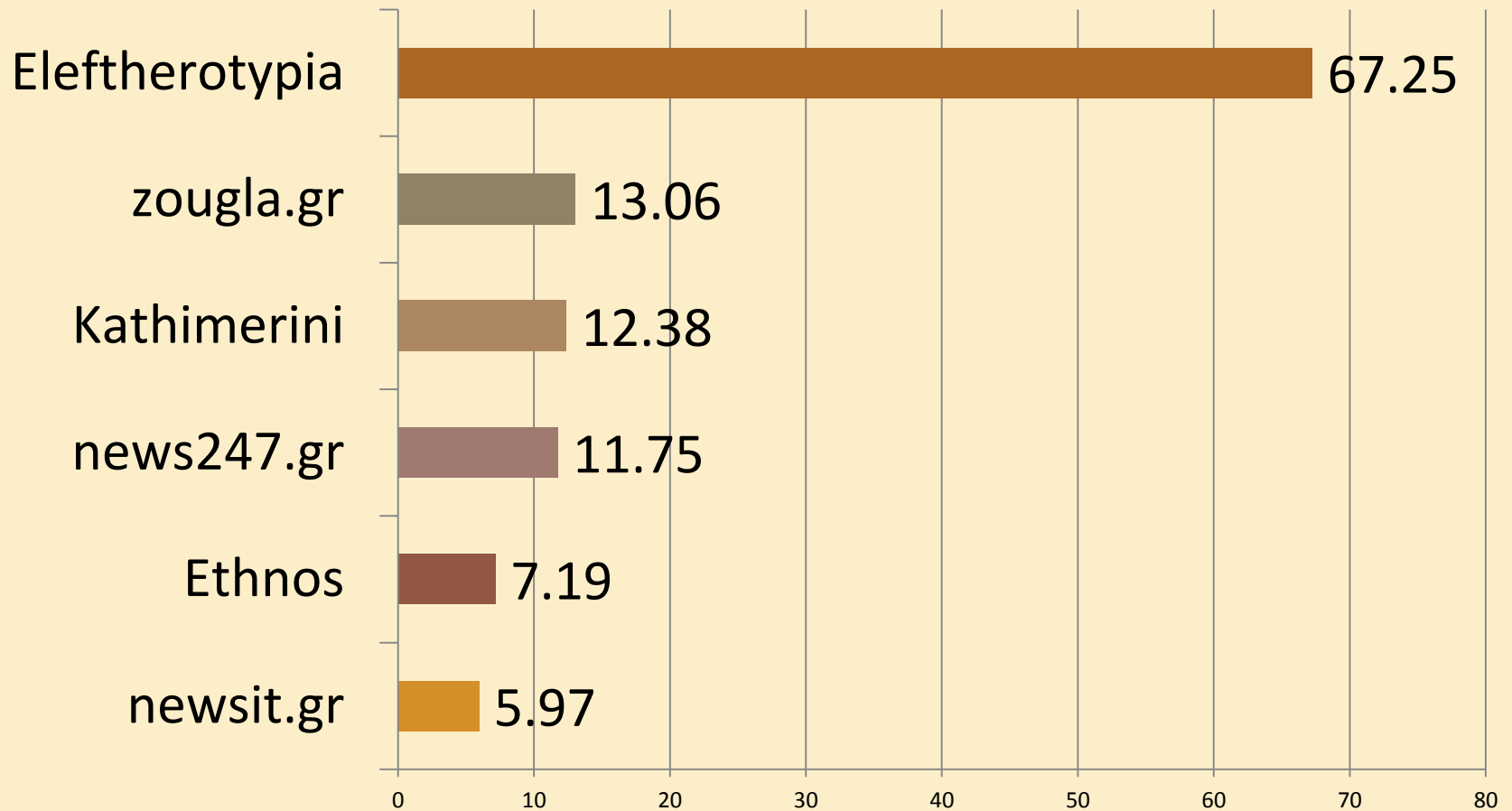


- Suicide was the most frequent event in episodic framing and health system degradation in thematic framing.
- 34.6% of the news items expressed a critical attitude towards political parties or political elite.
- 11.7% of the news items made reference to institutions or collectives formed to relieve pressure and pain (NGOs, church, neighbourhood, non formal groups etc.)
- 4.3% referred to ways of overcoming the crisis.

Dramatization in titles



Dramatization of content



Examples of dramatization

People are mowed down by strokes due to the crisis

The financial crisis murders Greeks

Unemployment and shut down shops strangle the city

Defeated by poverty: Uninsured mother withered in Mytilini

He died alone at 41 in the darkness of the crisis

The IMF kills Greek children

Supporting visual material

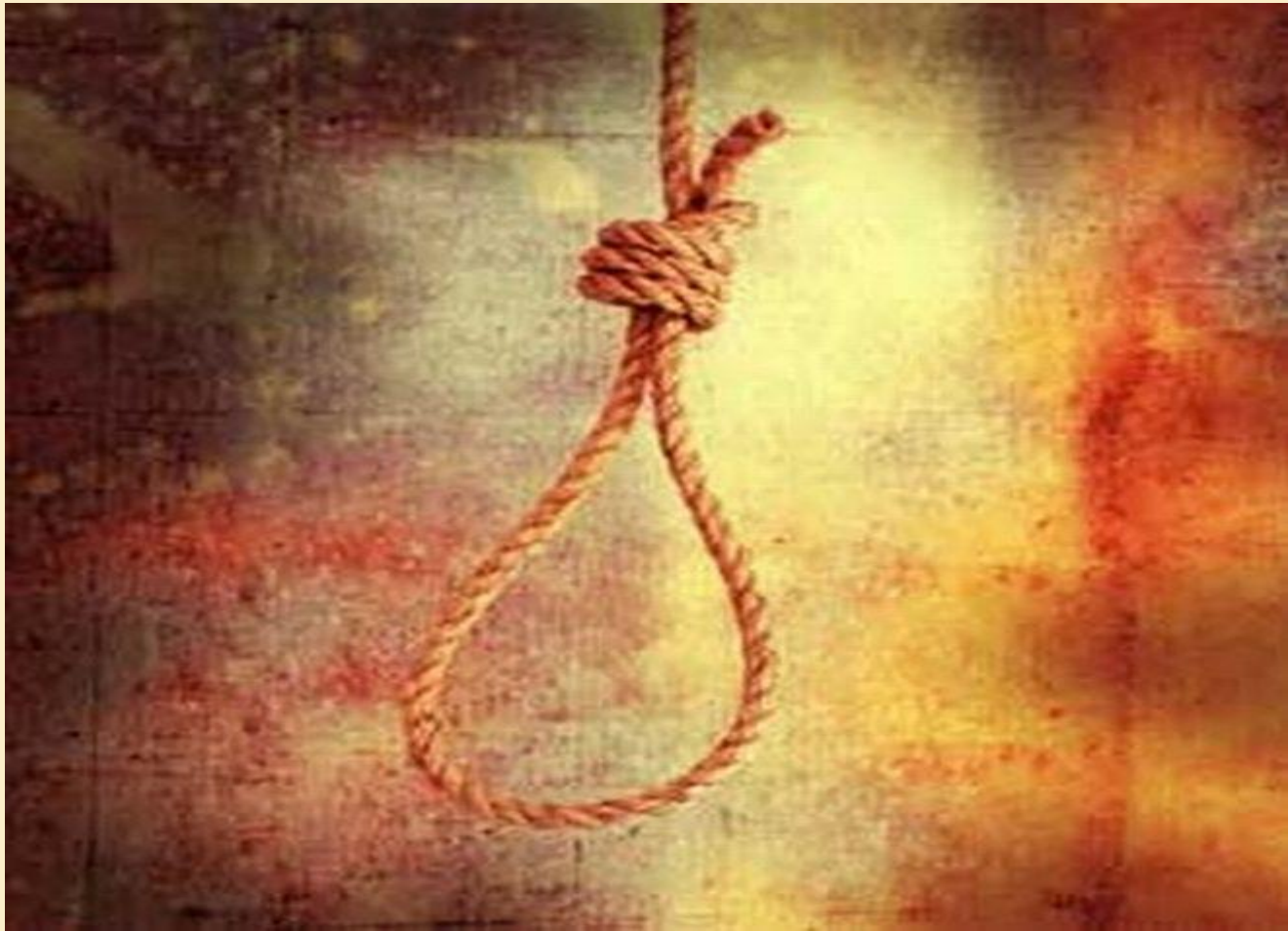
- Images featuring individuals (62.1%) or with a symbolic/abstract theme (48.4%) mainly supported texts on living conditions.
- Images featuring institutions (e.g. hospital) mainly supported texts on health issues (39.5%).
- Very few images supported unemployment, human rights and civil society, i.e. the issues less raised in the items examined.

Individuals





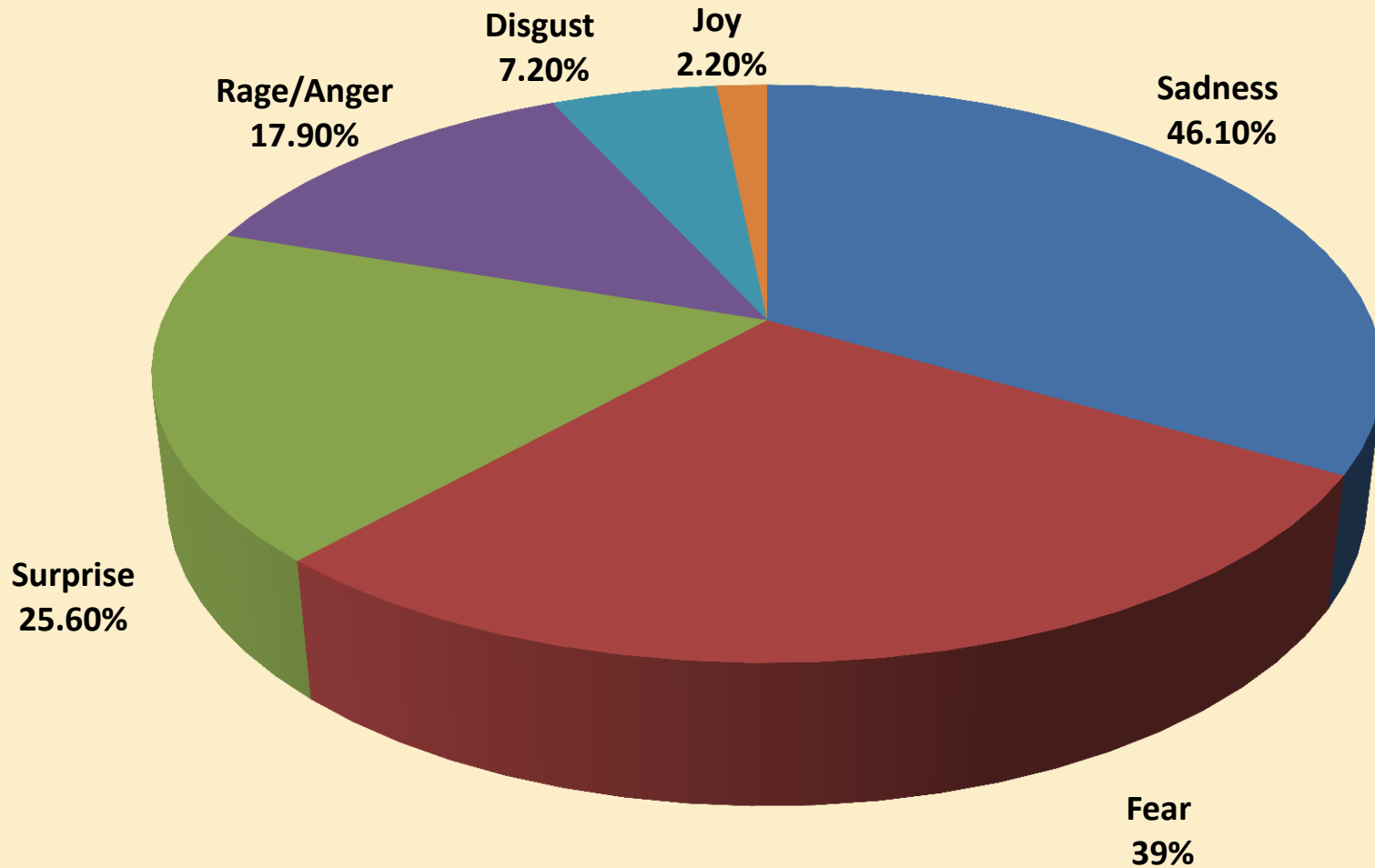
Symbolic/abstract themes



General distribution of visual material to text

Visual material featuring	Main theme of text				
	Health	Unemployment	Living conditions	Human rights	Civil society
Individuals	18,1%	14,8%	62,1%	4,4%	0,5%
Institutions	39,5%	28,4%	28,4%	2,5%	1,2%
Symbolic/abstract	32,8%	17,9%	48,4%	1,0%	0,0%
Total	29,6%	18,3%	49,7%	2,1%	0,3%

Prevalent emotions



Prevalent emotions in statements and narratives

Source	Prevalent emotion
Politicians	Fear or “neutral”
Scientists	Fear
Citizens	Sadness
Editor	Sadness

General climate that emerges:

- Main emotions generated are fear and sadness.
- Main focus on personal drama (suicides most frequent theme).
- Thematic framing more frequent in titles but episodic framing more frequent in texts.
- Rare reference to institutions or collectivities formed to relieve pressure and pain (NGOs, church, neighborhood, non-formal groups etc.).

Study III:

Experiencing the crisis:
From emotion
to action

Method

Semi-structured, in-depth, face to face interviews (Nov. 2014 - June 2015)

Interview schedule based on the emotion → motivation → action model

Participants

50 men and women, aged 18 – 70, with different levels of education and employment condition.

Prominent emotions reported

- Anger, rage
- Fear, insecurity
- Anxiety, stress
- Sadness, disappointment, despair
- Guilt, shame
- Envy, jealousy (towards those “untouched” by the crisis)
- Joy (from participants involved in some form of collective action)

Emotional climate

I have a feeling that they have thrown out over people, a collective guilt, so to speak, a guilt that spreads like smog and crumples us up, and grieves us because it beclouds our sky. (M, 31)

Triggers of emotions

Evaluations, interpretations: as individuals evaluate personal condition (e.g. running out of money weeks before next pay, or fear of losing job).

Remembering: Distribution of basic foods to people below poverty threshold resound collective memories of the 1941-42 famine under the axis occupation.

Imagination: Media, political commentators and rumors excite imagination with various catastrophic scenarios.

Empathy: While witnessing fellowmen dying suddenly at middle age, committing suicide, begging, becoming homeless or standing in a long cue for a meal (two trends):

- i. **Inhibition of empathy** (desensitization, inefficacy and focus on personal struggle for survival).
- ii. **Motivating empathy**

Discussions (two trends):

- i. 'Don' talk about it' (as a mechanism for regulating emotions): Mostly participants who have been affected the most, are not clear about causes, are politically confused and feel politically and personally inefficient.
- ii. 'Talk it out' (to relieve emotions, to understand, to resist): Mostly participants who express a relatively stable political ideology, personal and political efficacy and can tolerate emotions generated by discussions, which they conceive as a means to deal with problems.

Implied feeling rules: both at the personal and at the socio-cultural level (e.g. implicit and explicit suggestions of how citizens *should feel* about the present situation by commentators or politicians; usually **fear** of bankruptcy or Grexit and **guilt**).

Violation of norms: changes in social and financial policies that threaten stability and sense of control.

Do these emotions lead to action?

(three trends)

- i. Inaction
- ii. Atomocentric action (for personal or interpersonal purposes)
- iii. Sociocentric and/or political action

Inaction:

- Participants immediately affected, shocked or traumatized (emotions frozen or neutralized, immobility, helplessness)
- Participants in 'double bind' (acting against the measures = Grexit; not acting = more measures)
- Participants distancing emotional reality of the situation through defense mechanisms (denial, rationalization)

Atomocentric action:

(for personal or interpersonal purposes)

Participants with:

- Psychological resilience
- Personal but not political efficacy
- No hope for change / pessimism
- “Quasi-political” tendencies (i.e. complaining in social networks)

Sociocentric and/or political action:

Participants with:

- Psychological resilience
- Political efficacy
- Hope / optimism
- Relatively stable political orientations (mostly leftist)

Summary of findings

- At the beginning of the crisis participants already at a disadvantageous position thought it as an opportunity for restoration of social justice. By time they lost hope.
- Some participants immediately affected were traumatized.
- For participants not immediately affected, it obtained increasing emotional reality as defense mechanisms collapsed and/or the crisis touched them personally. This resulted to changes in political action during the different phases of the crisis.

- Participants were generally low in optimism, with the exception of some interviewed around the January 2015 elections, who expressed cautious hope.
- Participants and especially those over 55, reported to feel quite resilient, due to past experiences of recovery from sociopolitical distress.
- Highest political efficacy was reported by the youngest and oldest age-groups (18-24 and 55-70). For older individuals it seems connected to a pre-existing political ideology, while younger individuals seem to try to defuse negative emotions in seeking new action repertoires.

- Middle age-groups (25-44) appear confused and uneasy in terms of political efficacy; they don't know who and in what to trust and feel their actions have no political impact, as they live in a corrupted country; instead they feel quite efficient to invest on personal goals and interpersonal relationships (e.g. by helping friends in need).