

**Legitimation Strategies in Covid-19 Related Discourse**  
**Comparing Health Officials and Conspiracy Theorists**

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## Abstract

This thesis is focused on the use of legitimisation strategies in Covid-19 related online discourse. Legitimation strategies are used in discourse to create credibility and justify an action or a message. The purpose of this thesis is to find out what type of legitimisation strategies are used on two different types of news websites. The websites introduce two perspectives to this study. The data comes from the Natural News website, that represents a conspiracy theory point of view, and the World Health Organisation News website, that represents an official health agency point of view. Random sampling is used as a method to collect five articles from each website.

The research strategy in this thesis is mixed methods research, as both qualitative and quantitative research is combined. The approach to analysing the data is based on discourse analysis, as this thesis studies language as a social practice, as discourse. The data is analysed by conducting content analysis on the data by studying the legitimisation strategies from the collected data and interpreting the meanings behind the strategies. The analysis is finalised by comparing the findings between the two datasets.

According to the findings of this thesis use of legitimisation strategies to create credibility was found from both datasets. A total of 144 cases of use were found. However, a difference was discovered in the use of the strategies. The findings indicate that WHO News used legitimisation strategies that were based on rationality and expert authority the most, and strategies that were based on hypothetical future and emotions the least. Natural News was discovered to use legitimisation strategies that were based on hypothetical future and emotions the most, and strategies that were based on rationality and expert authority the least. Therefore, a significant contrast was discovered between the two sources of data. A different purpose and a different tone and style of communicating between WHO News and Natural News is discussed as a possible factor affecting the found differences and as a meaning of the results. The interpretation of the meaning of the results indicated that the purpose of WHO News is to convey factual and scientific information, whereas the purpose of Natural News is to express opinions and influence. Lastly, the limitations regarding this study and possibilities for further research are discussed.

**Keywords:** legitimisation, credibility, conspiracy theory, discourse analysis, Covid-19

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## **Abbreviations**

DA	Discourse Analysis
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
Covid-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
WHO	World Health Organisation

# 1 Introduction

Making different kinds of statements online seems rather easy nowadays. Therefore, one of the most central aspects of modern-day online communication most likely relates to judging what messages are credible and convincing and what are not, as technology constantly evolves and almost everybody has access to online communication. Researching recent discussion on Covid-19 related conspiracies makes the reader question how people are convinced to believe something they read online. Another question that comes to mind is “What makes these theories and the statements relating to them credible?” Therefore, the main thought or question behind this thesis regards how people are convinced to believe different types of information. Especially, the methods behind convincing people to believe in sometimes very extreme conspiracy theories that for example go against science are interesting.

Consequently, the purpose of this thesis is to figure out what kind of legitimisation strategies are used in Coronavirus Disease 2019 (Covid-19) related online news text or other type of informative text to create credibility, as legitimisation can be used in discourse to justify one’s actions and to gain credibility to one’s message. Those strategies are analysed from two different sources, the World Health Organisation (WHO) website and Natural News website. The WHO website represents the official health agency viewpoint, whereas the Natural News website represents the conspiracy theorist viewpoint. These two viewpoints were chosen to gather a more comprehensive idea of the phenomenon by comparing two opposite types of sources. As the main idea is to investigate the strategies for creating and gaining credibility for one’s message or action through discourse by using legitimisation strategies, the research questions for this thesis are the following:

1. What legitimisation strategies are used to create credibility in informative text and discourse about Covid-19?
2. What are the differences and similarities between the strategies used by an official health agency versus conspiracy theorists?

The hypothesis that this study is based on is that a difference in the use of legitimisation strategies between the two datasets exists. The baseline behind that hypothesis is the assumption that legitimisation strategies used to gain credibility can be found in the chosen data. Moreover, the suggested difference refers to the assumption that the strategies utilised by health officials are based on facts and science, and that the strategies utilised by conspiracy theorists are based on appealing to emotions and intimidation. In this thesis the term Covid-19 refers to an infectious disease caused by the virus SARS-CoV-2. The disease causes among other symptoms respiratory illness, and the severity of the symptoms and the illness can vary, in some cases leading to mild respiratory symptoms and in others to death (usually relating to other severe illnesses) (WHO). The Covid-19 pandemic and the related discourse are further introduced in the background chapter.

The structure of this thesis is the following. First, a general background information on the most central topics, such as Covid-19, discourse around Covid-19, and the term conspiracy theory is introduced. The next section covers the theoretical background that this thesis is based on; two perspectives on legitimisation by Theo van Leeuwen and Antonio Reyes. Next, the methodology including research strategy, and approaches to data collection and data analysis are introduced along with the materials and their sources. The methodology is based on the frameworks discussed in the theory section by tailoring them to suit the analysis part of this thesis. The frameworks of van Leeuwen and Reyes are combined to create a suitable method for categorising the data. The methodology of this thesis also consists of three different approaches: mixed methods as type of research, random sampling as method for data collection and data analysis as discourse analysis conducted through comparative content analysis. The data analysed in this thesis comes from two sets of articles collected from the two websites. At the end of the section research ethics relating to this thesis are also reviewed.

The methods section is followed up by the analysis section, that reviews all the legitimisation strategies in both datasets and introduces the findings through discussion of the strategies with examples. Differences and similarities within the findings are then introduced by comparing the frequencies of the collected cases. After that, the similarities and differences are further compared and discussed in the discussion section, and the limitations and credibility regarding this thesis are also considered. Moreover, the findings are further discussed and compared to the hypothesis. The possibilities for further research are lastly considered. Finally, the conclusion sums up everything that was covered in this thesis.

## **2 Background**

In this chapter, background information of the concepts that are central to this thesis is introduced. First, the concept of credibility is explained. Next, the definition for the term conspiracy theory is introduced. After that, the background of the Covid-19 pandemic is explained. Next, discourse around Covid-19, and especially the discourse on the two platforms from where the data was collected is reviewed. After that, other relevant research on the topic is discussed. The foundation for this thesis is based on the following concepts, so the meaning of these concepts in relation to this thesis is also clarified.

### **2.1 Credibility, Conspiracy Theory and Covid-19**

In this chapter the key concepts regarding this thesis are presented. Firstly, the concept of credibility is introduced. Credibility can be defined as “believability, trust, perceived reliability, liking, similar concepts, and combinations of them” (Self and Roberts, 2019, 435). It is one of the central concepts in this thesis, as the creation of believability and reliability are the point of interest in this thesis. Credibility consists of multiple aspects, such as the credulity of the people that are being convinced, the message itself, the used communication channel and the circumstances under which the message is conveyed and perceived (Self and Roberts, 2019, 435). In this thesis, the message and the way it is conveyed are the subject of research. Furthermore, according to Self and Roberts (2019, 437), credibility is also related to the message’s structure, language intensity, and quality of delivery. These are aspects that relate strongly to the topic of this thesis, as the point is to study the specific structure and quality of the message and its delivery as the use of legitimisation strategies. Next, another important concept, a conspiracy theory is introduced.

Multiple definitions for the term conspiracy theory can be found. Conspiracy theory is not an easy term to define, as Butter’s (2020) work indicates. Butter therefore gives multiple definitions for the term conspiracy theory from which a few examples could be presented to generally introduce the term. For example, in his work Butter (2020, 1) utilizes Cubitt’s definition of conspiracy theory. According to Cubitt (1989, 13), conspiracy theories are a way of making sense of current events that are characterised by intentionalism, dualism and occultism. Butter (2020, 1) also adds to that definition by including Barkun’s (2013, 3-4)

definition highlighting that according to conspiracy theories, nothing happens by accident or is as it seems. Moreover, the diversity of the definition for the term conspiracy theory is emphasized even further, as different perspectives are introduced to study the definition. Butter includes for example a definition from the semiotic perspective that explains conspiracy theory as “a representation that explains a series of events by postulating a conspiracy as its cause” (2020, 44).

Another work that contained useful definitions in relation to conspiracy theories is by Bodner, Welch and Brodie (2021), as they highlight the conspiracy theorists’ viewpoint as the “opponent” or the “underdog”. They define conspiracy theories generally as “vital idea expressions that purport to explain how the world truly works” (Bodner et. al., 2021, 10). Furthermore, they explain conspiracy theories as different types of narratives that are flexible in form but not in content, and that are shared among people who lack social power and point out efforts against them (2021, 10-11). Therefore, as Bodner et. al. state, conspiracy theories can be understood as “attempts to explain harmful or tragic events as the result of the actions of a small, powerful group” (2021, 11). However, as Bodner et. al. also point out, conspiracy theory is not the same as conspiracy, and add the notion of illegality and impropriety (2021, 11). After reviewing these definitions and looking at this concept from different angles, the definition of conspiracy theory could perhaps be summarised as a representation or a narrative that aims to explain how the world and a specific society works, and how injustice or evil intentions exist in it. Next, the Covid-19 pandemic and the discussion related to it are further introduced.

The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic got started from a Covid-19 virus outbreak in Wuhan, China in late 2019. The Covid-19 virus can spread through breathing in small liquid particles spread while coughing, sneezing and breathing (WHO). Rather quickly the situation expanded to a global pandemic. In February 2022 there were more than 394 million confirmed cases globally, and more than 10 billion vaccine doses had been administrated around the world (ibid.). As of early 2022, the Coronavirus has transformed and new variants have occurred around the world, such as the Delta-variant and another variant called Omicron (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare). Covid-19 vaccines, the virus itself, and the entire pandemic situation have given rise to a heated conversation, and numerous aspects regarding this topic have divided people globally. Opinions have divided for example for and against the vaccines. Before that, the discussion circulated around the source of the virus and its actual existence, as



Bodner, Welch and Brodie explain (2021, 29). The global pandemic is currently very topical and relevant issue, and both research and discourse around this topic are in full progress. A great deal of research on Covid-19 can be found, but there seems to be a gap in this kind of research related to Covid-19 and discourse. For instance, not a lot of research on legitimisation and Covid-19 related discourse could be found while researching this topic.

The style of communication of both sources, WHO and Natural News appears to be rather different, which is one of the reasons these two sources were selected. Based on the articles that are being studied in this thesis and the description on the WHO About us website, the purpose of WHO is to rather neutrally communicate important health and well-being related information. The Natural News style of communicating appears to be more aggressive, as the texts include for example threatening (section 5.1). Moreover, based on the analysis conducted on the selected articles, the Natural News tends to utilize strategies that appeal to emotions or are based on scaring and threatening more than the WHO. The WHO appears to rely more on strategies that are based on rationality and expert knowledge.

Based on the analysis, WHO does express general opinions in the articles but keeps the tone neutral and objective, whereas Natural News expresses personal opinions on for example health related topics like the vaccines and utilises provocative expressions and strategies. Both sites discuss Covid-19 related issues actively, but where WHO News focuses on conveying information on Covid-19 such as the symptoms, vaccines, research and the current situation of the pandemic, Natural News appears to focus more on the polarizing issues regarding Covid-19 such as the origins of the virus, the dangers of the vaccines and different agendas behind the vaccines or the entire pandemic. The definitions for the term conspiracy theory introduced above help provide a better understanding of the style of communicating on the Natural News website. Next, other relevant research on the topic of this thesis are introduced.

## **2.2 Previous Research**

In this section previous research that is relevant to this thesis is introduced. In general, legitimisation in discourse is a topic that has been researched previously, but legitimisation in informative discourse such as news text appears to be a rather new research topic. However, studies on legitimisation in for example political discourse proved to contain similar aspects to

this study and were useful in laying the foundation for this study, and in discussing the results and the comparisons between the two sources for data in this thesis. These studies indicate similarities in the findings to the findings of this thesis, and therefore validate the findings and the analysis process of this study. However, the following studies by Trajkova and Neshkovska, and Smart Oruh et. al. also indicate differences in the use of the strategies and the findings compared to this thesis.

Trajkova's and Neshkovska's (2019) study is focused on legitimisation and delegitimization strategies and processes in political discourse. The study utilises Reyes' (2011) strategies of legitimisation similarly to this study. Trajkova's and Neshkovska's (2019, 16) study indicates for example that legitimisation through emotions was used to evoke fear to create credibility for one's message, similarly to this thesis. Moreover, the study indicates that hypothetical future is used similarly to this thesis to create a threatening view of the future by evoking mistrust towards somebody's actions (Trajkova and Neshkovska, 2019, 24).

Trajkova's and Neshkovska's study is fascinating and useful to consider in relation to this thesis as it provides interesting results in comparison to the results of this thesis. The results of Trajkova's and Neshkovska's study were partially similar to this study in a sense that one of the subjects in their study mostly used legitimisation strategies that were based on emotions, and the other subject used strategies that were mostly based on rationality (2019, 22). However, the results also differ to the results of this study in a slightly surprising way, as the subject in Trajkova's and Neshkovska's study that used strategies that are based on emotions also used strategies that are based on rationality, and the other subject that used strategies that are based on rationality also used strategies that rely on hypothetical future. This is a contrasting result to this thesis as in this study the subject that mostly used strategies that are based on emotions (Natural News) also used strategies that are based on hypothetical future, and the subject that used strategies that are based on rationality (WHO News) used hypothetical future the least.

Another study that includes similar use of van Leeuwen's strategies is by Smart Oruh et. al. (2020). However, this study has used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as an analytic method, whereas the analysis of this thesis is based on Discourse Analysis. The difference between the two approaches is that CDA as an analytic method considers the data as indications of power abuse and includes the effect of context, whereas this study, that is based on Discourse Analysis focuses on how information and opinions are exchanged through discourse. However, the findings of the study by Smart Oruh et. al. indicate similarities to the findings in this thesis.

For example, their findings show that legitimisation through moralisation was used to present an action as fair and morally right in order to make it appear legitimate and ethical (Smart Oruh et. al., 2020, 2881). A similar use of this strategy was detected in this thesis, as for example WHO News utilised this strategy in Article 8 to legitimise their request for countries and their leaders, presenting the request as the right thing to do. Moreover, rationalisation was found to be used in a similar manner as was found in this thesis. The findings of the study by Smart Oruh et. al. (2020, 2883), indicate that legitimisation through rationalisation was conducted through instrumental rationalisation by presenting carrying out certain actions as a common benefit. In this thesis, WHO News (Article 6) used instrumental rationalisation to legitimise their actions or requests by presenting them as something that will benefit everybody.

### 3 Research Frameworks

This section covers the theoretical frameworks of this thesis. The research framework for this thesis concerns legitimisation. Legitimation as a theory provides useful tools to analyse the kind of data that this thesis studies, as within the scope of discourse analysis multiple examples of legitimisation can be discovered from the data. Also, as the interest behind this thesis regards the credibility of one's message, legitimation is a viable option to look at methods of creating credibility for a statement or an action. In sections 3.1.1 and 3.1.2 the work of two researchers, Theo Van Leeuwen and Antonio Reyes is used to introduce the central theory to this thesis and to clarify tools and methods for the analysis of the data. Firstly, the central theory is introduced, and basic terminology is covered. The reason for utilising two theories on legitimisation is also explained. Next, the legitimisation strategies that are utilised in the analysis of this thesis are introduced according to van Leeuwen's and Reyes' definitions.

#### 3.1 Central Theory - Legitimation

*Legitimation* is an important part of the theoretical background of this thesis. It is the foundation for the analysis part of this thesis, and the results gotten from the analysis rely on the strategies of legitimisation. Both van Leeuwen's and Reyes' work is being utilised to guide the analysis and clarify the term legitimisation's meaning. First, van Leeuwen's definition on legitimisation is introduced.

As Van Leeuwen explains one of the basic ideas of legitimisation, "purposes are constructed in discourse in order to explain why social practices exist" (2008, 113). The way of constructing those purposes in the selected materials is what this thesis is aiming to discover. Moreover, Van Leeuwen (2008, 106) defines legitimisation as an answer to "why" questions. These questions can be spoken or unspoken, questions like "Why should we not do this?" or "Why should we believe this?". What is aimed to be discovered through this research is how in the specific cases of this research these questions are being answered, and therefore, how credibility in one's message and justification for that message is formulated. Next, Reyes' definition of legitimisation is introduced.

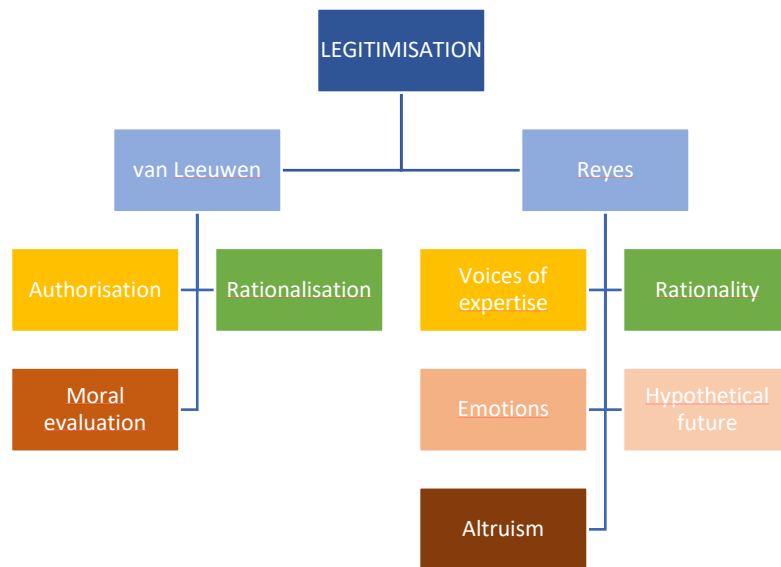
According to Antonio Reyes legitimisation relates to a situation where social behaviour is licenced or authorised by speakers (Reyes, 2011, 782). Legitimation is also a

way to explain one's ideological positions (Reyes, 2011, 788). Therefore, legitimisation can be understood as a type of justification of mental or physical behaviour that can be performed by argumentation, i.e., "providing arguments that explain our social actions, ideas, thoughts, declarations, etc." (Reyes, 2011, 782). Moreover, legitimisation is related to a goal of seeking the interlocutor's support and acceptance (Reyes, 2011, 782). The important aspect regarding this thesis are the means of seeking to achieve those goals. The certain goals can be pursued to obtain or maintain power, to achieve social approval and acceptance, to reach popularity or improve community relationships (Reyes, 2011, 782). The first and second reasons, to obtain and maintain power and to achieve approval are the reasons that relate to the theory and analysis of this thesis.

As Reyes (2011, 782) suggests, the interlocutor's acceptance and the message's credibility are often pursued through trying to present the proposal or message as the right thing to do. Similarly, the justification of the message on the Natural News website and the WHO News website can be understood to be pursued through trying to convince the readers that their message is the right one, or that what they are proposing is the right thing to do. Examples of this can be found under sections 5.1 and 5.2. However, studying the means and strategies of legitimising between those websites is where a difference can be discovered.

The strategies of legitimisation that van Leeuwen introduces are the foundation for the analysis for this thesis. However, van Leeuwen's theory on the strategies is extended by including some of the strategies Reyes introduces. These theories support each other, but also provide different type on information on this theory. Both viewpoints and the different descriptions of the strategies are necessary to include to comprehensively introduce legitimisation as the theoretical background of this thesis. Table 1 below demonstrates the key points of the similarities and the differences of both theories regarding the categorisations of the legitimisation theories. Similar colours indicate similar categories.

**Table 1** Differences and similarities in legitimisation strategy categorisations



As the colours on table 1 indicate, van Leeuwen’s rationalisation and Reyes’ legitimisation through rationality are rather similar concepts. However, Reyes’ definition seems to be more comprehensive than van Leeuwen’s, as Reyes defines for example naturalisation more comprehensively. Similarly, van Leeuwen’s authorisation and Reyes’ voices of expertise are overlapping concepts that complement each other, but unlike van Leeuwen Reyes includes shifting the blame, and van Leeuwen defines different types of expertise more comprehensively than Reyes. Both angles are necessary to include to gain full understanding of the issue.

Moreover, both theories were necessary to include as both theoretical frameworks have categories that the other one does not have. Those categories were found to be necessary to define the used strategies. For example, Reyes’ theory is missing equivalent of van Leeuwen’s moral evaluation, which was a commonly found strategy in the Natural News data. However, an equivalent of Reyes’ legitimisation through emotions or hypothetical future was missing from van Leeuwen’s theory, and that was another commonly found strategy in the Natural News data. Combining the frameworks was simple as both frameworks involve similar aspects. However, that also caused problems in finding the correct strategy to categorize the data into with similar or overlapping cases. Therefore, tailoring these frameworks to suit this thesis by combining some of the strategies like authorisation and voices of expertise was necessary to utilise these frameworks efficiently. Consequently, the purpose of this thesis is to discover the possible ways in which credibility is created and achieved through discourse. The

theory of legitimisation is used to clarify the methods of such strategies, as the following chapters indicate. Firstly, the definitions and strategies from Van Leeuwen are introduced.

### 3.1.1 Van Leeuwen's Categories

Van Leeuwen (2008, 105) sorts legitimisation into four categories that are authorisation, moral evaluation, rationalisation and mythopoesis. Only the first three, authorisation, moral evaluation and rationalisation are discussed in this thesis as those categories are the most relevant to this thesis. The last strategy from van Leeuwen, mythopoesis was left out because no cases that matched this strategy were found from the data.

**Authorisation** according to Van Leeuwen means legitimation by referencing to authority (i.e., personal or institutional), tradition or law (2008, 105). In *personal authority* a person like parent or public figure does not need any other justification than “because I said so” or “because blank said so” because of the legitimate authority that their status or role gives them (Van Leeuwen, 2008, 106). This type of authorisation matches the type of legitimisation discovered while analysing the Natural News articles, as section 5.1.3 indicates. However, *expert authority* was found to be more alike the legitimisation strategies in the WHO articles. Expert authority is “provided by expertise rather than status” (Van Leeuwen, 2008, 107). According to van Leeuwen (2008, 107), the expertise may be stated explicitly, or it might be taken granted without presenting any credentials, as most of the cases analysed in this thesis proved to be. Expert authority relies on expert knowledge, and therefore as WHO news relies mostly on facts and science according to them, they utilise expert authority within their publications. *Impersonal authority* is the final type of authorization that is accurate to this thesis. Impersonal authority is also a type of legitimization that might resemble the legitimisation strategies used by WHO, as the type bases its justifications on law and policies, as does WHO.

**Moral evaluation** refers to legitimation by indirect referencing to value systems (Van Leeuwen, 2008, 106). According to Van Leeuwen, moral evaluation is justification by referring to morals, and what is “good” or “bad”, “normal” or “right” (2008, 110). This is a type of legitimisation that the Natural News authors seems to utilize quite a lot, as for instance the example of moral evaluation of killing somebody in Article 5 indicates (section 5.1.2). As Van Leeuwen suggests, these justifications in discourse are not explicit, but rather hints (ibid.).

Therefore, the problem with moral evaluation is that morals are based on values, and values are not always universal and uniform. As Van Leeuwen suggests (ibid.), moral evaluation is connected to specific discourses of values, and problems with defining what is i.e., “good” or “bad” can occur, as those terms might not always translate universally. Furthermore, Van Leeuwen also points out that identifying moral evaluations is not possible with linguistically motivated methods, but they are recognisable through discourse analysis based on common sense on cultural knowledge (ibid.). Therefore, the analysis of this thesis focuses on the recognition of the certain strategies. Moral evaluation can be expressed for example through adjectives, like “healthy” or “abnormal” (Van Leeuwen, 2008, 111), or like “evil” and “disgusting” (Article 1).

**Rationalisation** refers to legitimisation by referencing to the goals and practices of institutionalised social action and to commonly accepted practices in the society (Van Leeuwen, 2008, 106). Rationalisation can be divided into two subcategories, instrumental rationality and theoretical rationality. Instrumental rationality is legitimisation executed by referring to goals, uses and effects of the legitimised practices (Van Leeuwen, 2008, 113). Theoretical rationality is legitimisation by referring to a natural order of things, naturalisations (ibid.). Examples of naturalisation in rationalisation are presented in section 3.1.2, as Reyes’ legitimisation through rationality is introduced.

The three introduced categories are the legitimisation types that are essential to the analysis of this thesis, as in the materials from both selected sources (WHO and Natural News) the central message is being legitimised and credibility is achieved through among others authorisation, moral evaluation and rationalisation. As stated in section 3.1, van Leeuwen’s definitions are next further clarified by Reyes’ definitions and other relevant strategies are also introduced through Reyes’ work. Consequently, the following paragraphs introduce Reyes’ definitions on legitimisation and Reyes’ categorisations of the different strategies of legitimisation and illustrate how they are relevant to this thesis.

### **3.1.2 Reyes’ Categories**

Five strategies to construct legitimisation in discourse exist according to Reyes (2011, 785). These are legitimisation through emotions, legitimisation through a hypothetical future, legitimisation through rationality, voices of expertise and altruism. These strategies provide



clarifications to the different ways legitimisation is constructed in the data of this thesis. These five strategies are discussed in this thesis, as cases of all these strategies were found from the data and therefore, the strategies are relevant to this thesis.

***Legitimation through emotions*** is based on influencing the interlocutor's opinions on a specific matter through appealing to their emotions (Reyes, 2011, 785). For example, creating negative or positive representation of something or someone, or creating a situation of juxtaposition (e.g., we versus them) can affect the interlocutor's emotions, and is used as legitimisation strategy by the agent in a specific situation (ibid.). Moreover, making a statement that will trigger an emotional response is a way of later legitimising that statement based on the emotions (Reyes, 2011, 788). Reyes presents mentioning the events of 9/11 to justify later military action as an example of legitimisation through emotions (2011, 789). Mentioning the events of 9/11 can be and most likely is related to the pursuit of evoking an emotional response of fear. According to Reyes (2011, 790), evoking fear is the most effective method to trigger an emotional response. Several examples of this can be found in the data of this thesis from the Natural News articles. For example, in Article 5 the emotion of fear was evoked by using expressions like "vaccine holocaust" or "vaccine death shots" when describing Covid-19 vaccines. According to Reyes (2011, 790), other ways to evoke fear are demonization (of someone or something) or creating negative attributes or describing past or future atrocities. Examples of these strategies can be found from the Natural News data, for example in Article 1 where "globalists" are described as demons who aim to execute human mass slaughter through vaccines.

***Legitimation through a hypothetical future*** is described as presenting a threatening view of the future needing immediate action (Reyes, 2011, 786). This strategy is used to exert power over the interlocutors, and therefore, gain legitimisation (ibid.). It appears to have similarities with the previous strategy, legitimisation through emotions, as presenting a threatening view of the future can cause the emotional response of for example fear. As an example, in Article 1 the deadliness of the vaccines is described in a manner that causes fear towards the vaccines and the future. In this thesis, legitimisation through both emotions and hypothetical future are used somewhat parallel, and in the analysis of this thesis they are presented as combined strategies.

The third category, ***legitimation through rationality*** means legitimising one's message by justifying decisions on thoughtful and evaluated consideration of all the possible

options (ibid.). The statement that is being legitimised is presented as rational, and the right thing to say or do (Reyes, 2011, 797). According to Reyes rationalisation needs to be considered society specific, as the suggested option or action needs to ‘make sense’ for the community it is aimed towards (Reyes, 2011, 798.). Similarly to van Leeuwen’s rationalisation, Reyes’ legitimisation through rationalisation needs to therefore match the society’s moral principles and commonly accepted practices. For example, Reyes suggests that in a certain society, violence can be legitimised as a justified response to violence, for example as self-defence (ibid.). As already mentioned in section 3.1.1, Van Leeuwen uses the term naturalisation of such legitimisation achieved through rationalisation. For example, in specific cases a response like violence can be naturalised in a society as self-defence, and therefore, commonly accepted.

A similar categorisation to van Leeuwen’s authorisation is Reyes’ *legitimation through voices of expertise*. Voices of expertise refers to an authoritative speech that is brought to a discussion to strengthen the speaker’s position or to share possible blame if mistakes happen (Reyes, 2011, 800). Therefore, the speaker is not fully responsible if the actions or words being legitimised cause an undesirable result and can refer to the expert whose knowledge was quoted and utilised. Reyes’ definition resembles van Leeuwen’s expert authority, as the legitimisation with expert authority relies on expert knowledge and expertise on a certain subject area. Expert authority was used as a legitimisation strategy for example in Article 10, where decisions and statements were justified by referring to an expert’s statements on the subject.

*Altruism* is the last one of Reyes’ categories, and it is a legitimisation strategy that proposes actions or statements as beneficial to others (2011, 801). The purpose of altruism is therefore to make the speaker appear selfless and benevolent (ibid.). The statements made using this strategy often refer to the goal of looking after others’ well-being (2011, 802). An example of this can be found in article 6, where the author of the WHO News article states that countries are forced to “make difficult choices on how to best meet the needs of their people”. This can be understood as legitimisation of a statement that encourages countries to act in order to help the citizens and ensure their well-being. Next, the methodology and materials of this thesis are introduced.

## **4 Research Methodology**

In this section, the methodology applied in this thesis is introduced. The research techniques and methods in this thesis were triangulated, so multiple different approaches were included. First, the research strategy is introduced, and the type of research is stated. After that, the research materials, i.e., the data is introduced. Next, the approach to data collection is presented, and the data analysis approach is explained. Lastly, the research ethics concerning this thesis are introduced and reviewed.

### **4.1 Research Strategy**

The research strategy of this thesis is based on the mixed methods approach. Mixed methods approach is a combination of both qualitative and quantitative research (Hesse-Biber, 2010, 3). Therefore, the material for the analysis consists of a combination of qualitative data (words) and quantitative data (numbers) making this mixed methods study. In more detail, the lexical content of the articles is being analysed, and the frequency-based statistics derived from the results of the analysis are reviewed and compared.

Utilising both qualitative and quantitative analysis can be done to acquire a better understanding of the data and the studied phenomenon, and therefore to gain complementarity (Hesse-Biber, 2010, 4). This is the main reason for using mixed methods research strategy in this thesis; to get a more comprehensive understanding of the data and the phenomenon. Another reason is to enhance the comparability of the data and clarify the results of the analysis, which is another aspect of complementarity (*ibid.*). Including frequency-based statistics to the comparison of lexical items improves the comparability, as comparing quantities is generally simpler than comparing qualities. That is because quality can be perceived as subjective, and that perception applies to the data analysis and interpretations of this thesis as well. All in all, the quality of the legitimisation processes and strategies behind creating credibility in the selected materials is the interest in this thesis. The strategies are categorised according to those qualities based on the tailored combination of the frameworks from van Leeuwen and Reyes. Moreover, the number of each used strategy in each article is counted. Eventually, the categories and the number of cases are compared to illustrate similarities and differences in the use of legitimisation strategies between the two datasets.

## 4.2 Research Materials

The data in this thesis consists of two different types of websites and the news articles on those websites. Hundreds of articles on Covid-19 can be found from both websites. Consequently, the news articles on Covid-19 from the World Health Organisation and Natural News websites are the target of analysis, i.e., the data in this thesis. These websites provide two different perspectives to this study, as they are quite different in tone and purpose. The legitimization strategies found from the articles are identified and analysed, and the used strategies from the two different sources of data are compared. A total of ten articles, five from each website, was collected to get a comprehensive understanding of the data and the studied phenomenon.

One website that is utilized is the **World Health Organisation (WHO)** website. WHO is an international health agency founded by the United Nations in 1948 (WHO, About Us). Their goal is to advocate universal health care, promote well-being, monitor public health risks, coordinate responses to health emergencies (WHO, What We Do). They also claim to “promote health, keep the world safe, and serve the vulnerable” (ibid.). The WHO is funded mostly by the member nations’ contributions and by private donors’ contributions as well. According to WHO, their credibility is based on four aspects: competence, transparency and honesty, dependability and commitment and caring (WHO, Credible and Trusted). The World Health Organisation aims to provide technical expertise regarding health and consult other experts and trusted organisations (ibid.). They also try to be transparent, dependable, trustworthy and committed (ibid.).

The other source of data, the conspiracy theory site is the **Natural News** website. According to the United States based website, Natural News is a “science-based natural health advocacy organization led by activist-turned-scientist Mike Adams” (Natural News, About Us). According to their website, Natural News aims to inform people of for example chemicals, hormone disruptors, holistic health, consciousness and government corruption (ibid.). Natural News also states that the purpose of the website is to criticize for example vaccines, corporate corruption and drug-and-surgery medicine (ibid.). Moreover, this site can be seen to be promoting conspiracy theories as the definition of a conspiracy theory given in section 2 as well as the type of narratives that the Natural News article texts represent match. Furthermore, an article (Weill, 2020) by the Daily Beast states that Natural News started as a health news site but has turned into a conspiracy empire with millions of followers. According to a blog post about Natural News by Mother Jones (2014), the Natural News website has approximately 7

million visitors per month. Moreover, the articles on the Natural News website clearly state author and date of each article, so it was found to be a suitable option for a source of data compared to other similar websites.

These specific materials were chosen as the data for this thesis because these websites provide a different angle and a viewpoint on Covid-19 related discourse. The WHO website publishes rather neutral, fact- or science-based articles on the most topical issues regarding Covid-19, as the WHO website and the analysis on the selected articles indicate. The Natural News website publishes articles on some quite well-known conspiracy theories and rather provocative and controversial themes like mass destruction and sinister government agendas, and they seem to refer to more unconventional sources for scientific research as for example the Bible (Article 1). Moreover, the websites appear to be using rather different strategies for creating the sense of credibility by legitimising their statements, so therefore they provide different perspectives on using legitimisation strategies and creating credibility in discourse. Therefore, these two sources of data also provide a basis for forming comparisons between them. This evaluation of the two sources of data and their suitability for this research is based on the descriptions stated on the websites as well as the analysis of the strategies. The table below introduces the data by indicating the article number, source, date of publication, the title and word count per each article.

**Table 2** Data information

<b>Article number and source</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Word Count</b>
1. Natural News	April 8, 2020	“COSMIC END GAME: Coronavirus Depopulation and The Demonic War to Claim Your Soul to Satan”	2081
2. Natural News	May 3, 2020	“Bill and Hillary Clinton want to recruit an “army of contact tracers” to hunt down and interrogate people with coronavirus”	639
3. Natural News	June 17, 2021	“Covid vaccine forced 19-year-old student into HEART TRANSPLANT, killing her within days”	630

4. Natural News	October 5, 2021	“DOCUMENTS: People vaccinated with Pfizer’s covid vax are 300% more likely to get COVID-19”	643
5. Natural News	September 14, 2021	“VAXSSASSINATION: How globalists convinced BILLIONS of people to exterminate themselves with biological weapons presented as “vaccines”	1326
6. WHO	March 30, 2020	“WHO releases guidelines to help countries maintain essential health services during the COVID-19 pandemic”	507
7. WHO	October 30, 2020	“As COVID-19 spread accelerates, IHR Emergency Committee urges focus on measures that work”	231
8. WHO	April 26, 2021	“Immunization services begin slow recovery from COVID-19 disruptions, though millions of children remain at risk from deadly diseases – WHO, UNICEF, Gavi”	1221
9. WHO	August 6, 2021	“Fraudulent “COVID-19 Compensation Lottery Prize” scam, falsely alleges association with WHO and others”	512
10. WHO	December 17, 2021	“WHO lists 9th COVID-19 vaccine for emergency use with aim to increase access to vaccination in lower-income countries”	606

The length of the articles i.e., the word count needs to be considered while studying these articles, as it affects the results of this thesis (number of cases) and therefore, their comparisons. This will be further considered and clarified during the analysis and in the results section. Rather significant differences in the length of the articles exist, as e.g., article number 1 is over 2,000 words, and articles 5 and 8 are over 1,000 words. The rest of the articles are the length of circa 500-650 words. This imbalance in the length of the selected articles is due to the data collection approach, which was random sampling. The data collection process is introduced in the next chapter.

### 4.3 Approach to Data Collection

The idea behind the selection of the two types of sources was to find sources that are almost opposites and create a contrast and therefore, to help the comparison between the sites. The data for this thesis was collected by first searching discourse and text on Covid-19 that appeared to be quite neutral and commonly understood as reliable. For a source providing reliable information on Covid-19, the international health organisation website seemed to be a fitting option. Next, conspiracy theory websites on Covid-19 were searched. Websites that published information on conspiracy theories were at first rather difficult to locate, but a Newsguard website article that listed Covid-19 misinformation superspreaders (on social media) was found (McDonald et. al., 2020). From the list on the Newsguard article, the site called Worldtruth.tv. was chosen, since it had a rather large following on for example Facebook and had a website that publishes the same articles that are linked on their social media. However, from the sources on the Worldtruth.tv articles, a website called Natural News was discovered. The Natural News website articles appeared to be the same ones published on the Worldturth.tv website, but the Natural News articles indicate author and publication date. Therefore, the Natural News website were chosen as the second source for primary data.

Consequently, the data, that in this thesis comes from the two sets of articles was collected by conducting random sampling to collect five articles from both lists of articles (10 articles in total). The sample was collected by searching Covid-19 related news articles on both websites. Hundreds of results were found from both websites. The articles were collected within a timeline of two years (2020 and 2021) since that was the existing timeline for Covid-19 related articles at the time of the collection process. The collection was begun from articles from early 2020 towards the end of 2021. According to Mackey and Gass (2005, 119) random sampling means “the selection of participants from the general population that the sample will represent”. In this case, the sample consists of the set of articles collected from the source websites. Moreover, random sampling was chosen as method of data collection to be able to make generalisations in relation to the utilised theories, as Taherdoost explains random sampling (2016, 20). Mackey and Gass (2005, 120) also point out that random sampling is used to be able to make generalisations that can represent the entire population.

As the size of the sample was chosen based on the principle of generalizability, which according to Mackey and Gass (2005,124), requires the minimum sample size of 100 cases for

descriptive studies, ten articles were collected. The ten articles to be analysed provided 144 cases in total. Consequently, as hundreds of news articles related to Covid-19 were found from both sites, the most suitable option was to use random sampling to gather a general, comprehensive overview of the entire set of data that was not too broad for analysis. Sampling was thus used as a method as it can help to reduce the number of cases (Taherdoost, 2016, 19). The collected data was then annotated manually into a list of categories and subcategories with all the cases listed under them. An example of this categorisation can be found in tables 5 and 6.

#### **4.4 Approach to Data Analysis**

The approach to analysing the data in this thesis comes from the framework of Discourse Analysis, as it concerns studying language and its effects (Johnstone, 2018, 1). This thesis studies language as a social practice, as a *discourse*. According to Johnstone, discourse is usually defined as “instances of communicative action in the medium of language” (2018, 2). What makes this study discourse analysis is that the intention of this study is not to study just language but discourse as a way of acting through language; for example, as exchanging information, expressing opinions and conveying influence, as Johnstone explains discourse analysis (ibid.). As the following chapters indicate, the actions expressed through language in this thesis are exactly that: exchanging information while also communicating opinions and influence. Moreover, this thesis concerns discourse as the data consists of online news text as pieces of language with purpose to communicate information and convey credibility and influence.

As van Dijk (1993, 254) explains influence, influencing others’ opinions comes from power, and power comes from control over for example a group of people. That kind of power is enacted through persuasion, dissimulation and manipulation (ibid.). Persuasion is the kind of discursive behaviour that this thesis is aiming to discover from the selected data, as the legitimisation process is viewed as means to persuade the reader to believe a certain message. van Dijk (ibid.) also points out, that other discursive practices that legitimate control exist. The type of control that is essential in this thesis are control from authority and power gained from expertise, as the results of this thesis indicate.



The analysis of this thesis belongs to the field of hermeneutics. Hermeneutics can be defined as the theory of interpretation of meaning by re-thinking and interpreting a message or a statement (Bleicher, 1990, 1-2). To interpret the meaning behind a message is the point of the analysis of this thesis, but however, the interpretations are always subjective. As Bleicher (1990, 3) suggests, hermeneutics does not eventually aim to gather an objective knowledge and understanding, but rather phenomenological understanding and description in general. Therefore, general interpretations were formulated according to a general understanding of the phenomenon.

Ultimately, the data analysis process follows a few steps and a couple of different approaches. Firstly, the collected articles were carefully read through, and then all identified cases of used legitimisation strategy were listed. This was done according to content analysis, as the point of content analysis is to make “replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use (Krippendorff, 2013, 4). After that, the cases were categorised into legitimisation strategies according to data-driven classification by utilising definitions from van Leeuwen and Reyes. Moreover, subcategories were created to identify and classify the collected data appropriately under the main categories. The categorisation and the subcategorization were done according to descriptive analysis, as according to Loeb et. al. (2017,1) descriptive analysis is used to identify patterns in data to describe a phenomenon, pattern in data, method or practice. The aim, therefore, is to describe the process of legitimisation in the dataset and after that, to classify the cases into different categories. The last stage in the data analysis process was to compare the two datasets from the two different sources. The comparison was conducted according to the process of detecting similarities and differences in the use of the legitimisation strategies.

#### **4.5 Research Ethics**

According to Byrne (2016), research ethics are based on informed consent, confidentiality, safety and unbiased research or neutrality. However, these issues mostly concern studies that involve human participants. As this study did not involve human participants and the data was collected from publicly available sources, the ethicality of this study is already rather well secured. Nevertheless, neutrality is a relevant aspect to this thesis, as the topic of this thesis is rather polarizing. Unbiased studying of the data and results was therefore essential while

conducting this study and making comparisons of the results. Moreover, forming conclusions was also important to be done neutrally. In this thesis the ethicality was also ensured by ensuring the transparency in all stages of this research process. For example, the methods that have been used to collect and analyse the data were introduced transparently, and transparency was also ensured in presenting the results and their comparisons by presenting the results truthfully and neutrally. Lastly, transparency in the use of sources was ensured by clearly stating the sources in the running text and the bibliography.

## **5 Analysis and Results**

In this section the process and the results of my analysis are introduced. Firstly, five Natural News articles are analysed, and legitimisation strategies are identified from the articles. After the legitimisation strategies utilised by Natural News are introduced, analysed, and illustrated with examples, they are categorised according to the definitions of Van Leeuwen and Reyes and the tailored combination of the frameworks. Similarly, five articles from WHO are analysed, and legitimisation strategies are identified after that. After categorising the legitimisation strategies found in the WHO articles, the results of the analysis are presented. Lastly, similarities and differences in the results are reviewed.

### **5.1 Strategies in Natural News Articles**

This section starts with the introduction of the legitimisation strategies utilised in the Natural News articles. Articles derived from the Natural News website are numbered and listed under Appendix 1. The strategies are presented according to categorisations obtained from van Leeuwen's and Reyes' work, the eight different strategies presented in sections 3.1.1 and 3.1.2. Altruism is left out of the analysis of the Natural News articles, as no cases were identified. Total numbers of all the strategies found in the Natural News articles can be found in Table 2 under section 5.3. The first strategies that are analysed belong to the category of legitimisation through hypothetical future.

#### **5.1.1 Legitimisation Through Hypothetical Future**

Legitimisation through hypothetical future appears to be a rather popular method of creating legitimisation in discourse in the Natural News articles, as a total of 47 cases of legitimisation through hypothetical future could be identified from the Natural News data. The articles aim to create a threatening image of the society's future, which is a way to legitimise through hypothetical future (Reyes, 2011, 786). Example 1 comes from Article 1 by Natural News owner Mike Adams promoting a message of the malignancy of the Covid-19 vaccine. In Article 1, Adams describes the people who are willing to get vaccinated as obedient, sheepish people willing and begging to be killed. In this article, the author creates a dark and threatening view

of the world and our society's future by stating that "the war for human freedom is already lost" (ibid.), and that in a couple of years people that were vaccinated are going to be buried in mass graves as they were purposely killed with the vaccine (ibid.). As the theory indicates, by creating these kinds of dystopic images of the society's future, Adams is legitimising his argument on the malignancy of the vaccine. Consequently, Adams is aiming to obtain credibility for his opinion, and get people to see his message as the right one.

Example 2 illustrating the use of legitimisation through hypothetical future can be found in a Natural News article by Ethan Huff (Article 2). The author creates an intimidating view of the US government's actions and ultimately the entire society's future by stating that the purpose of the Covid-19 testing and tracing is to create "a total police state" under "government tyranny" (ibid.). The message that is being legitimised in this article can therefore be understood stating that coronavirus testing and tracing is harmful to society, and that the government wants to have mass surveillance over the citizens. Therefore, Huff is aiming to convince people to believe his message on the US government's intentions via legitimisation through hypothetical future.

Describing a mass destruction that the vaccines will cause is another common strategy of legitimisation through hypothetical future in the Natural News articles. It is a strategy that combines both the threatening view of the future, and evoking the emotion of fear, so it is a combination of the strategies hypothetical future and emotions. Example 3 comes from Article 5, where Adams writes that the real goal behind the vaccines is "mass extermination of the human race", and therefore legitimises his statement on the vaccines by utilising hypothetical future and the emotion of fear. Next, legitimisation strategies based on emotions and moral evaluation are analysed.

### **5.1.2 Legitimisation Through Emotions and Moral Evaluation**

In the Natural News articles, legitimisation through emotions and moral evaluations seem to also be common methods of legitimising one's message or actions. However, in the data legitimisation through emotions can be perceived as comparatively alike to the first introduced category, legitimisation through hypothetical future. Emotions seem to be overlapping with hypothetical future, as the main idea of legitimisation through hypothetical future is to create a threatening, scary view of the future. Therefore, emotions have a central role in creating the reaction to the hypothetical future. After all, fear appears to be one of the most common

emotions to be evoked in the Natural News materials. A typical example of this is the author describing side effects of the Covid-19 vaccines or other illnesses, deaths or suggesting that malicious conspiracies against society exist. Example 4 illustrates that as in Article 3, the Covid-19 vaccine is described as “poison injection”, which is a fear evoking expression referring to the lethality of the vaccine. Therefore, the authors message on the dangers of Covid-19 vaccines is legitimised by evoking fear in the readers, and possibly making the readers avoid the vaccines.

Another emotion found to be used to legitimise was anger. Evoking anger towards “a common enemy” was used to legitimise the author’s message, and to gain credibility to support the accuracy of the message. This was often done by creating a negative representation of someone, and according to the theoretical categorisations this thesis follows (Reyes, 2011, 785) that is a way to legitimise through emotions. Example 5 demonstrates this strategy. In Article 1 Adams states that “[i]f humanity had any sense of survival, there would be a worldwide call to arrest, prosecute and execute every “death science” collaborator on the planet.” This statement can be understood as an encouragement of anger towards the “death scientists”, the people who have created the vaccines, as it can be seen as a call to capture and execute those people. Moreover, example 6 illustrates another usage of negative representation and anger as legitimisation strategy. In the same article Adams refers to the scientists behind the Covid-19 vaccine as for example “evil demons in human form” (Article 1). He also refers to people who support the vaccines as “demon-infested globalists”, or “cosmic death-cult” (ibid.). Using these kinds of terms to describe people can be understood as a method of creating a negative representation of people, and as a suggestion to target those people with anger. Consequently, through evoking anger in the readers towards certain people, Adams is legitimising his message on the dangers of the vaccine, and the counter-productiveness of the intentions of the specific people.

Furthermore, as example 7 demonstrates, words that can be understood as having a negative association, like “jab”, “poison injection”, “weapon”, “euthanasia injection” and “death shot” (Articles 1, 3, and 5) can be found from the Natural News articles. Using these kinds of words associated with the Covid-19 vaccine can be done to evoke the emotional reaction of fear towards the vaccines, or to indicate the author’s opinion on the moral conflict of distributing and recommending the vaccines. The usage of these words can therefore be understood as legitimisation through emotions or as moral evaluation.

Multiple cases of moral evaluation can also be found from the Natural News data. As van Leeuwen suggests, moral evaluation as justification can most often be discovered in discourse as a hint of the author's opinion instead of an explicit expression. Example 8 shows that in Article 3 Huff writes that myocarditis was the only explanation that the doctors were able to "come up with" for a patient's death after the patient was given the Covid-19 vaccine. Using an expression like 'come up with' in a context of explaining patient's death could imply for example that according to the author, the doctors were being untrue about the cause of death or that the doctors did not know the real reason for the death and made something up. Nevertheless, this statement is legitimised by creating an image of the vaccine's harmfulness by pointing out that the doctors needed to lie about the cause of death.

Another example (example 9) of moral evaluation can be found in Article 5, here Adams states that 'globalists' (supposedly in this case doctors, government etc. as the topic concerns vaccines and the people who decide all matters related to the distribution of those vaccines) have plotted against society and humanity to destroy large numbers of people. Adams writes that "globalists had to figure out a way to carry out mass slaughter on a planetary scale without alerting the masses to what they were doing", referring to the creation and distribution of the covid-19 vaccines (Article 5). Adams is legitimising his opinion on the harmfulness of the vaccines by implying that the vaccines are used to kill masses of people. A moral evaluation of the act of killing somebody can therefore be found from this example.

### **5.1.3 Legitimation Through Authorisation and Voices of Expertise**

Legitimation through voices of expertise and authorisation are also discussed and analysed together as they are overlapping concepts. Cases of legitimisation through voices of expertise were found from the data used to strengthen the author's position and therefore legitimise the author's statement. Example 10 from Article 2 illustrates this, when Huff refers to Adams as "The Health Ranger" to legitimise the health-relating statement made in the article. Moreover, example 11 from Article 4 demonstrates another case of the use of voices of expertise. Article 4 is mostly based on referring to Karne Kingston, who according to the article is a former employee of Pfizer and now works as "a pharmaceutical marketing expert and biotech analyst" (Article 4). Huff bases the information on Kingston's statements in this article, and through that legitimises his own statement on Covid-19 vaccines. Both examples are based on personal

authority (van Leeuwen, 2008, 106), where a satisfactory justification for a statement is that somebody has said so or explained the issue similarly. However, the expertise is indicated differently within these examples. In example 10, Adams is presented possessing self-evident expert status, whereas in example 11 Kingston's expertise is presented with credentials to justify the case.

#### **5.1.4 Legitimation Through Rationality and Rationalisation**

In the Natural News articles, cases of legitimation through rationality or rationalisation were found from two articles (Articles 4 and 5). This strategy was used to legitimise a statement or an action by justifying it with naturalisation or careful consideration. According to example 12, in Article 4 Toledo legitimises a statement about the vaccine's dangers by describing studies and documents that support the article's agenda. Moreover, in example 13 from Article 5 Adams utilises naturalisation by for example urging the reader to "face the reality" and legitimises his statement on the globalist conspiracy against human race by stating it as self-evident. Adams also states that the globalist agenda to assassinate masses of people through vaccines is "straight up cause and effect". Deaths caused by vaccines are therefore described as a natural consequence of the globalist actions. Next, the WHO News articles are analysed.

### **5.2 Strategies in the WHO News Articles**

In this section the legitimation strategies in the WHO News articles are analysed. The articles discussed in this section are numbered and listed under appendix 2. The strategies are presented according to categorisations obtained from van Leeuwen's and Reyes' work. Total number of all the strategies found in the WHO News articles can be found in Table 2 under section 5.3.

#### **5.2.1 Legitimation Through Hypothetical Future**

Legitimation through hypothetical future was not as common legitimation strategy in the WHO News articles as in the Natural News articles, but nevertheless, some examples could be identified. 13 percent of the strategies found from the WHO News articles were legitimation through hypothetical future. However, the basic idea behind the use of this strategy was rather

similar in the WHO News articles as it was in the Natural News articles; to present a threatening view of the future. Example 14 shows that in Article 6 multiple examples of the usage of this strategy could be identified in the form of expressing concern over the bearing capacity of the health system. For example, the article states that “[t]he rapidly increasing demand on health facilities and health care workers threatens to leave some health systems overstretched and unable to operate effectively”. This strategy is used in Article 6 to legitimise the demand or request for all nations to act rapidly and improve their health systems.

Moreover, example 15 demonstrates that in Article 7, legitimisation through hypothetical future can be found in the form of presenting politicisation as the “detriment to global efforts”, therefore justifying the recommendation for countries to not involve politics in responding to the pandemic. Lastly, legitimisation through hypothetical future in the form of warning could be identified. Example 16 from Article 9 is presented to illustrate that. Article 9 concerns scam messages sent fraudulently as WHO, and the article contains warnings about those messages and the people who have sent them stating that “WHO seeks to warn the public”. Consequently, the WHO asks for people to rely on reliable sources only and legitimises that request by giving a warning of the possible consequences of not doing so. A possible consequence of losing of money or personal information can be understood as a threatening view of one’s future.

## **5.2.2 Legitimation Through Emotions and Moral Evaluation**

Legitimation through emotions and moral evaluation are both again discussed under this section as they were with Natural News articles in section 5.1.2. These categories were also not as popular methods in the WHO News articles as they were in the Natural News articles. Legitimation through emotions was used to e.g., create positive or negative representation of someone or something, and therefore to influence on the readers’ opinion. Examples of legitimisation through emotions in the form of creating a positive representation of someone or something could be found from two articles. As example 17 suggests, appreciation to WHO’s actions by a committee is mentioned to create a positive representation of WHO’s leadership and actions in Article 7. Therefore, those actions are legitimised and justified by stating that “[t]he committee expressed appreciation [for WHO’s leadership and activities throughout the global response”].



Moreover, Article 8 talks about WHO's new global strategy, and the strategy is described as WHO's "ambitious new global strategy" that "aims to save over 50 million lives through vaccination". This example (number 18) illustrates how positive representation of WHO and the new strategy is therefore created by using the word ambitious and by portraying it as a life-saving strategy. Legitimation through emotions is therefore used here to justify the need for this new strategy and WHO's opinion on vaccines.

Legitimation through moral evaluation was found to be used in one of the WHO News articles. In this article, moral evaluation was used to make the reader grasp the injustice the article suggests, and to make the reader feel pity for children. For example, the article describes the illnesses and the harm that vaccination gaps have caused children and encourages everybody to "help every child catch up on" all vaccines, implying that failure to do so will lead to lost lives. Therefore, this example (number 19) shows that the request to get all available vaccines and help also children to do so is presented as the right thing to do and is therefore being legitimised by moral evaluation.

### **5.2.3 Legitimation Through Authorisation and Voices of Expertise**

Examples of the use of legitimation through authorisation and voices of expertise were found in three of the five WHO News articles. All the found cases were related to referencing to expert authority. In other words, an expert's words, statement or advice was referenced in the articles to support and legitimise the statements presented in the articles. According to example 20 from Article 10, expert authority was used to legitimise the statement on the effectiveness of the vaccines by stating that according to Dr. Mariângela Simão "vaccines remain one of the most effective tools to protect people against serious illness and death from SARS-COV-2". Referencing to a person who according to the article is "WHO Assistant-Director General for Access to Medicines and Health Products" in a context of discussion about vaccines can therefore be understood as legitimization through voices of expertise. Moreover, the safety and usefulness of the vaccines was also legitimised through voices of expertise or authorisation by expressing how experts "from around the world" have studied the vaccines (Example 21 from Article 10), creating the feeling that this expertise proves the statement that is being made.

Furthermore, in articles 7 and 8, legitimation through authorisation was created in the same way as in Article 10, by making a statement and then justifying it with for example a

quote from an expert on the matter. As example 22 demonstrates, in Article 8 the requirement for global improvement on vaccine access and uptake is legitimised by quoting Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus (WHO's Director-General), who spoke for the vaccines and their usefulness in ending the pandemic stating that "we must ensure routine vaccination services are protected in every country in the world".

#### **5.2.4 Legitimation Through Rationality and Rationalisation**

Legitimation through rationality and rationalisation was a common strategy in the WHO News articles as it was found in four of the five articles. This strategy was used to achieve credibility on certain messages or statements, and that was done through for example expressing that careful consideration has taken place to form certain decisions or statements, or through instrumental rationalisation. Example 23 from Article 6 illustrates this in a similar way to van Leeuwen's (2008, 113) instrumental rationality. In article 6, the legitimisation process of the statement "to ensure that increasingly limited resources provide maximum benefit for the population" as common goals and their effects can be therefore described as instrumental rationality.

Legitimation through rationality was utilised through expressing careful consideration of the legitimised matters in articles 7 and 10. As an example (number 24), the statement on safety of the vaccines was legitimised by describing "rigorous assessment" and the commitment to that assessment multiple times in Article 10. The third type of legitimisation through rationality that was found in the WHO News articles was categorised according to Reyes' (2011, 797) description; legitimising by stating what is the right thing to do. However, this has not been done directly, but rather through implying. Example 25, which demonstrates this can be found from Article 8. In that article WHO explains what world leaders should do in order to maintain the health care system by stating e.g., that "[w]orld leaders and the global health and development community should make explicit commitments". Their requirements are therefore being legitimised by expressing that the outcome of those requirements is something that everyone wants to achieve and can therefore be understood as the implied right thing to do.

### **5.2.5 Legitimation Through Altruism**

The last and the smallest category within these ten articles to be introduced is legitimisation through altruism. Altruism could only be found from the WHO News articles, and a total number of 3 cases could be recognised. Legitimation through altruism was used in these articles to justify actions or statements by expressing them as helping others or beneficial to everybody, similarly to how Reyes (2008, 801) describes this strategy. In example 26 from Article 9, WHO justifies the statements made of the fraudulent messages by presenting them as warnings stating that “WHO seeks to warn the public at large”, and therefore as a way of helping others. Furthermore, example 27 from Article 6 shows how altruism is used to legitimise the requirements to act by stating that WHO is “forcing countries to make difficult choices on how to best meet the needs of their people”. This statement can be understood as something that might be difficult for e.g., a smaller group of people, but beneficial to almost everybody else. Nevertheless, legitimisation through altruism among some other strategies might be one of the most difficult strategies to recognise due to its ambiguous nature, as it is never completely possible to interpret what the intentions behind a statement are, or what somebody wants or thinks.

## **5.3 Results in Numbers**

In this section the total numbers of the used strategies found in both the WHO News articles and the Natural News articles are presented to be reviewed for comparison. The cases are presented as case numbers, and later comparisons are presented with percentages (all rounded to the nearest integer for the reason of clarity). In table 2 below the numbers of legitimisation cases found from the articles are presented according to the legitimisation strategy categorisations acquired from van Leeuwen and Reyes. Rationalisation and legitimisation through rationality, and authorisation and legitimisation through voices of expertise are paired together as these categories include similar concepts and can in this table be presented as one. The numbers are also presented article by article, the first five marked with orange colour being from Natural News and the last five marked with blue colour being from WHO News. After both the first five articles and the last five articles the total numbers of cases from each source of data are presented. On the right most column, the total numbers of the strategies found from

each source of data are presented on their own rows. On the bottom row, the total numbers of all cases of the use of certain legitimisation strategy can be found.

**Table 3** The numbers of cases of different legitimisation strategies in all 10 articles

<b>NN/WHO</b>	<b>Hypothetical Future</b>	<b>Emotions</b>	<b>Moral Evaluation</b>	<b>Rationalisation/Rationality</b>	<b>Voices of Expertise/Authorisation</b>	<b>Altruism</b>	<b>Total</b>
Article 1	18	8	8	-	2	-	36
Article 2	2	6	1	-	-	-	9
Article 3	3	5	1	-	3	-	12
Article 4	1	4	-	2	3	-	10
Article 5	23	10	1	2	3	-	39
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>106</b>
Article 6	2	-	-	2	-	1	5
Article 7	1	1	-	1	1	-	4
Article 8	-	2	7	2	3	1	15
Article 9	2	3	-	-	-	1	6
Article 10	-	-	-	4	4	-	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>144</b>

A total of 144 cases of the use of legitimisation strategies were found from the entire dataset. The Natural News articles had a larger total number 106 (74 percent) of cases of use of legitimisation strategies compared to the WHO News articles that had only 38 (26 percent) cases. Therefore, Natural News had 179 percent more cases than WHO News. Altruism is the only category that could only be found from the other source of data, in this case WHO News. The rest of the strategies had cases in both datasets.

However, as previously mentioned, the length of the articles needs to be considered here. As presented in Table 2, three of the articles are considerably longer in word count than the rest. The comparison of the total case numbers between the articles and the two sources of data in Table 3 is therefore affected by the length (word count) of the articles. Moreover, the imbalance of the length of the articles also affects the comparison of the frequency of occurrence of each legitimisation strategy between the datasets (Table 7). The longest articles were numbers 1, 5 and 8. As the table above indicates, those articles had the largest numbers of cases compared to the other seven articles that were around the same length (c.a. 500-600 words). However, as both sources have longer and shorter articles, this does not considerably

affect the comparison of the use of the strategies between the sources. The Natural News dataset had two longer articles and three shorter ones, and the WHO News had one longer article and four shorter ones. Consequently, the amount of use of the legitimisation strategies is not the main focus in the comparison, as it is affected by this imbalance. Rather the popularity of a legitimisation strategy is compared between the datasets. Next, the frequency of occurrence of the legitimisation strategies of all 144 cases is presented as percentages in Table 4 below to clarify the differences in frequency between the strategies.

**Table 4** Frequency of occurrence of each legitimisation strategy by % in all 144 cases

Hypothetical Future	36%
Emotions	27%
Moral Evaluation	13%
Rationalisation/Rationality	9%
Voices of Expertise/Authorisation	13%
Altruism	2%

The largest category, legitimisation through hypothetical future had the total number of 52 cases of the use of this legitimisation strategy, which is 36 percent of all found cases, as Tables 3 and 4 indicate. The second largest group is legitimisation through emotions, which has the total number of 39 (27 percent). The next category is legitimisation through voices of expertise or authorisation with the total number of 19 and 13 percent. The next group, legitimisation through moral evaluation has the total number of 18 being also 13 percent, and the next one, legitimisation through rationality or rationalisation has the total of 13 and 9 percent. The smallest group with the least cases of the use of legitimisation strategies is legitimisation through altruism, with the total number of 3, which is 2 percent of the total number of the found cases. Next, the subcategories that were created by tailoring and van Leeuwen’s and Reyes’ categorisations are introduced.

Table 5 below presents an example of the subcategorization under the main categories. The table indicates how the cases of legitimisation through emotions found from the data are

categorised under two subcategories, anger and fear. Table 5 also presents all cases of legitimisation through emotions in Article 1 under the two subcategories. The eight cases presented in this table represent the number 8 in Table under column Emotions and on row Article 1.

**Table 5** Classification of the cases of legitimisation through emotions in Article 1

<b>Legitimisation Through Emotions in Article 1</b>	
<b>Anger</b>	<b>Fear</b>
“evil demons in human form who built them in the first place (the “death scientists”)”	“mass slaughter”
“demon-infested globalists who despise human form”	“euthanasia injection”
“If humanity had any sense of survival, there would be a worldwide call to arrest, prosecute and execute every last “death science” collaborator on the planet”	"death shot"
“anti-human, pro-communism demons who perceive humans as disgusting biological waste to be discarded at the earliest convenience”	“The dying elderly will simply be placed in “euthanasia rooms”

Under the six main strategies from van Leeuwen and Reyes the cases that were collected from the articles were classified according to a classification created for this thesis to match all types of legitimisation cases. This classification was based on van Leeuwen’s and/or Reyes’ definitions of the main strategies, and additional subcategories were included that best represented the type of the cases. Table 4 presents an example of this, as the subcategory ‘fear’ is directly borrowed from Reyes’ definition, but ‘anger’ was also included as it appears to be the most suitable option for the emotion that was being evoked, and therefore, a category was created based on the topic of the message.

Other subcategories that were created to support the analysis in addition to anger are listed next. Under hypothetical future were lethality or dangers of the vaccines, medical system’s problems, economic problems, globalist agenda and mass destruction, government conspiracies and mass surveillance, carrying capacity of the health system, destructiveness of

politics and warning and falsity of the virus. Under moral evaluation were religion, human experiments, abortion and children’s well-being. Categories borrowed from van Leeuwen’s and Reyes’ definitions in addition to fear were expert authority and personal authority under authorisation, negative and positive representation under emotions, and instrumental rationalisation, naturalisation, careful consideration and ‘the right thing to do’ under rationality. These classifications were utilised every time the data matched one of these classifications. This was done to help the classification and categorisation process, as these classifications were already named in the definitions for the legitimisation strategies by van Leeuwen and Reyes. Table 6 below presents an example of a different type of classification of the cases. This example is from Article 10.

**Table 6** Categorisation and subcategorization of all legitimisation strategies in article 10

<b>Legitimation strategies in Article 10</b>	
<b>Legitimation through voices of expertise/authorisation</b>	<b>Legitimation through rationalisation</b>
<b>Expert authority</b>	<b>Careful consideration</b>
“vaccines remain one of the most effective tools to protect people against serious illness and death from SARS-COV-2,” said Dr Mariângela Simão”	“The originator product produced by Novavax, named NuvaxovidTM, is currently under assessment by the European Medicines Agency (EMA)”
“(TAG-EUL), convened by WHO and made up of experts from around the world”	“The assessment weighs the threat posed by the emergency as well as the benefit that would accrue from the use of the product against any potential risks.”
“WHO’s Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization (SAGE) this week also reviewed the vaccine”	“a rigorous assessment of late phase II and phase III clinical trial data, as well as substantial additional data on safety, efficacy, quality and a risk management plan”
“independent experts and WHO teams”	“the company producing the vaccine must commit to continue to generate data to enable full licensure and WHO prequalification of the vaccine”

Two types of legitimisation strategies were found from Article 10, legitimisation through voices of expertise/authorisation, and legitimisation through rationalisation. The subcategories chosen to describe the data were directly drawn from van Leeuwen’s and Reyes’ definitions. As there was not more than one type of each strategy, the subcategorization was not absolutely necessary in this case. Authorisation had only cases that matched expert authority, and rationalisation had only cases that matched careful consideration. Nevertheless, all found cases were subcategorised within all articles for the reasons of clarity and coherence.

**5.4 Overview of the Similarities and Differences**

In this section the similarities and the differences between the data and results from Natural News and WHO News are introduced. In Table 5 below the frequency of occurrence of each legitimisation strategy is presented in percentages comparing the two sources for data, Natural News and WHO News.

**Table 7** Frequency of occurrence of each legitimisation strategy by % in the data from each source

<b>Legitimisation Strategies</b>	<b>Natural News</b>	<b>WHO News</b>
Hypothetical Future	44%	13%
Emotions	31%	16%
Moral Evaluation	10%	18%
Rationalisation/Rationality	4%	24%
Voices of Expertise/Authorisation	10%	21%
Altruism	0%	8%

For Natural News, the largest category is legitimisation through hypothetical future with the total of 47 cases (44 percent), and the smallest category is legitimisation through rationality or rationalisation with the total number of 4 cases (4 percent). Altruism was not counted here as the smallest category for Natural News as no cases of legitimisation through altruism could be



found from the articles, and therefore, the percentage is also zero. For WHO News the largest category is legitimisation through rationality or rationalisation with 9 cases (24 percent), and the smallest category is legitimisation through altruism with 3 cases (8 percent).

These percentages reveal an interesting part of the results as they indicate a juxtaposition within the use of the legitimisation strategies between the sources. The most popular strategy in the Natural News articles was legitimisation through hypothetical future whereas for the WHO News, it was the least popular strategy (if altruism is completely left out of the comparison, as Natural News had no cases). Moreover, the most popular strategy in the WHO News articles was rationalisation or legitimisation through rationality, whereas for Natural News, that was the least popular category. This is a major difference between the two sources, as the most popular and the least popular strategies are complete opposites between the two datasets.

Another difference between these two sources comes from the second most popular category. For Natural News the second most popular legitimisation strategy was legitimisation through emotions, whereas for WHO News, the second most popular strategy was legitimisation through voices of expertise or authorisation. Again, a juxtaposition can be identified as the second least popular strategy in the Natural News articles was legitimisation through voices of expertise/authorisation, and for WHO News it was legitimisation through emotions. A similarity between the sources is that the legitimisation strategy of moral evaluation was in the middle for both sources in regards of popularity. However, the results of the analysis indicate, that Natural News and WHO News have rather different styles of communicating their messages and making their messages appear credible and justified.

## **6 Discussion**

This chapter discusses the comparison of the legitimisation strategies found in the Natural News and WHO News articles. In other words, both the differences and the similarities between the legitimisation strategies found in the two sets of data are discussed. After that, the hypothesis set for this thesis is reviewed considering the findings. Next, the limitations that concerned conducting the analysis and this thesis in general are discussed. Moreover, the credibility of this study and the ways of ensuring the credibility are reviewed. Lastly, opportunities for further research on this topic are considered.

### **6.1 Comparison of the Use of the Legitimation Strategies and Results**

In this chapter, the similarities and differences in the use of the legitimisation strategies between the two sources of data, i.e., the results are introduced and discussed. First, the similarities are presented more generally and as an entity as the results indicated only a few similarities. After that, the differences are presented strategy by strategy according to the categorisations from van Leeuwen and Reyes that have also structured the analysis of this thesis. Lastly, some ideas on the possible meanings of the results are suggested.

As mentioned above, similarities between these two sources were rather difficult to find. This was nevertheless expected, as the style and general tone of the websites are completely different. However, a couple of similarities could be identified. Firstly, the purpose of both websites is to inform their readers about health-related issues they view as important. Both sites use legitimisation strategies to gain credibility to their message and to convince the reader to believe that message. A couple of the strategies were also used in a similar manner, such as legitimisation through hypothetical future, emotions and rationality. In legitimisation through hypothetical future, the purpose in both datasets was to create a threatening view of the future. Legitimation through emotions was also used to evoke an emotional response to influence the reader's opinion. Moreover, rationality was used similarly in both datasets by referring to what is the right thing to do or say.

However, differences in the use of almost all the strategies could also be detected. Firstly, differences in the use of legitimisation through hypothetical future could be identified. The view of the future appears to be presented as threatening within both set of articles, but the

slight difference comes from the message's targeted audience. When legitimisation through hypothetical future was used in the Natural News articles, the message was rather clearly targeted to a very specific group of people that was also often mentioned in the article. For example, a threatening view of the future was presented by explaining the damage a certain person or a group of people or their actions would cause. However, the WHO News articles did not usually contain messages targeted to any specific person or a group of people, but rather nations and entire societies. As an example, the WHO News articles contained requests to countries to improve their health systems, that were legitimised by presenting a threatening view on a national level if the health systems collapse.

The next strategy to be discussed is legitimisation through emotions. A difference in the use of this strategy can be found in the subcategorizations, as Natural News appeared to only be utilising negative representation in the articles, whereas WHO News utilised both the emphasis being on positive representation. Moreover, a rather common strategy for Natural News was to evoke emotions that can be labelled as negative such as fear and anger, whereas the data from WHO News did not contain any examples of that kind of usage.

Similarly, studying legitimisation through rationality/rationalisation reveals differences in the use of the strategy through observing the subcategories. WHO News rationalisation was mostly based on the category 'careful consideration' or on what is the right thing to do or good for a common cause. With Natural News, rationalisation was also based on the category 'naturalisation'. However, naturalisation was used in a way that presents the message as self-evident, whereas WHO News used careful consideration by presenting all the evidence behind a statement (example 24). This difference as well as the general style of writing in both sets of articles could indicate that WHO News aims to base the articles more on facts and scientific research, whereas Natural News appears to base the articles and the legitimisations on the opinions of the author.

Moreover, a difference within the use of legitimisation through moral evaluation can be detected. The Natural News articles contain use of this strategy in a way that makes the target seem guilty and bad (e.g., examples 8 and 9), whereas the WHO News articles aim to get the reader to understand someone else's perspective, which in one case is unprivileged children (example 19). This contributes to the tone of the articles and the image that is being conveyed; the people behind Natural News articles appear to be angry and not very interested in the other

perspective, whereas the people behind the WHO News articles appear to be mostly interested in conveying important information.

Consequently, the WHO News text and the Natural News text are quite different in style and tone. The general tone of the articles is rather different, as the Natural News articles were often more negative in tone, whereas the WHO News articles were more neutral in tone. As an example of aspects that affect the tone of the article, Natural news describes people or issues with rather negative expressions, such as “death-scientist” and “demon” (examples 5 and 6), whereas the WHO News articles do not contain these kinds of strongly opinionated expressions. Moreover, the difference in tone is also visible in the sense that the author’s opinion is more clearly visible in the Natural News articles than in the WHO News articles, that are in that sense also more neutral. Most of the Natural News articles are in fact based on the expression of an opinion, and the opinions are often expressed in rather provocative way, as the examples of e.g., the word choices above indicate. The WHO News articles seem to be focusing more on merely conveying information and appealing to the readers through presenting information, Furthermore, the style of communicating in the Natural News articles was more aggressive than the style of the WHO News articles. Natural News used expressions that encouraged the reader to attack certain people or group of people (example 5), whereas the WHO News articles did not contain any examples of the usage of those kinds of strategies.

Perhaps the most central difference that was discovered is that WHO News relies on rationality and expert knowledge to legitimise their statements, whereas Natural News relies on creating the emotion of fear and threatening when legitimising their statements. Therefore, differences in the use of legitimisation strategies to justify statements and make messages sound credible were found. This is a central difference between the two sources as it affects the general tone of the text, the credibility of the text to the reader and the general view and image the authors and the site convey to the readers about them and their ideology. Moreover, as the most and the least used strategies from both sources were totally opposite, it emphasizes the differences between the two sources rather distinctively. A difference in the frequency of use of legitimisation strategies exist as well, as the results indicate. One interpretation of the cause of this difference could be that the type of strategies that are being utilised affects the amount of use. Certain strategies might be easier to use, such as creating a threatening view through using words that evoke fear, whereas using strategies that require a scientific or factual base

might take more effort. Therefore, the difference in the total amount of cases between the datasets could be affected by this kind of factor.

These specific websites were chosen partly because their style appeared to be from the total opposite ends of the spectrum, and these findings support that distinction rather well. The accuracy of the hypothesis set on this thesis can ultimately be interpreted as correct. A difference in the use of the strategies was found, as stated above. Moreover, the strategies used by the health officials (WHO) were based on more scientific information and rational delivery of information, whereas the conspiracy theorists (Natural News) used strategies that were based exactly on emotional responses and threatening views of the future. The differences in tone and communication style can also be interpreted as an affecting factor to the detected differences in the use of the legitimisation strategies discussed above.

Ultimately, ideas on the possible explanations for the results are presented. The meaning of these results can be pondered and discussed but making definite statements about the possible meanings is challenging. However, one of the most central meanings of these results is based on the already mentioned difference between the source websites. In general, the differences that the results indicate show that the purpose and the message to be conveyed on these two websites is rather different. Whereas WHO News aims to convey information that is based on facts and science, Natural News clearly aims to express opinions and perhaps influence the readers' opinions via their message. Therefore, the differences mean that the websites have different goals and purposes. The nobility of said purposes is probably a matter of opinion, as well as the effectiveness of the means to get to that purpose. After all, the effectiveness depends on the readers' preferences on what they find credible.

Moreover, the meaning of the frequency difference of the used strategies is interesting to consider. A possible conclusion that could be drawn from the difference is that texts that contain frequent use of legitimisation strategies are less factual or less scientifically based. The need to use strategies that are based on hypothetical future and emotions could therefore signify that the text is less scientific, and that less facts or information exist. Based on the results of the use of legitimisation strategies with Natural News, this could be a possible reason for their dominance in the frequency of use. The meaning of more specific differences in the results can also be discussed. The main difference in the use of legitimisation strategies between the sources of data could signify the following meanings. Firstly, as Natural News utilised legitimisation through hypothetical future and emotions the most and the tone of the articles is

provoking, the purpose of the website and the articles could be to evoke strong emotional responses such as fear in their readers, and through that influence the opinions and behaviour of the readers. After all, the description of the strategies mentions these purposes.

Secondly, as WHO News utilised legitimisation through rationality and expert authority the most and the tone of the articles is neutral, the purpose of the website and the articles could be to spread neutral, scientific information. All in all, a rather self-evident interpretation of the results is that Natural News is less scientific news outlet than WHO News based on the utilised legitimisation strategies. Moreover, as Natural News is based in the United States, the culture related to opinion expression might be one of the causes behind the differences in the results. In relation to that, the differences in the use of the strategies might also arise from the target audiences of the websites. WHO's articles are possibly aimed towards a general, international audience, and that is most likely one of the reasons for their neutral style and use of strategies. Natural News has a different, perhaps more radical target audience, and the use of the strategies in the Natural News articles might reflect the target audience and what works for that audience in terms of credibility.

## **6.2 Limitations and Credibility**

In this section the limitations concerning this thesis are stated, and the factors that affect the credibility of this thesis are considered. In general, the phenomenon of Covid-19 is rather new, so even though research on Covid-19 is constantly conducted, not a lot of research regarding for example Covid-19 and language or discourse can be found to support this research. However, this is also an aspect that provides multiple possibilities for this and further research on this topic. A few limitations regarding the methods and materials of this thesis can also be stated. Firstly, some limitations regarding the collection of the data were identified. For example, using simple random sampling as a method for data collection might originate some limitations. Limitations alike to Taherdoost's listing (2016, 21) were found. According to Taherdoost (*ibid.*), simple random sampling has disadvantages such as errors in estimating and the need to collect a complete frame of all units in the population. In the process of conducting this study, collecting all the cases of legitimisation from the entire set of data was found to be a time-consuming task.

Next, troubles with estimations and interpretations are discussed. A limitation that concerns the data can be that the sample size of the data is slightly narrow in terms of the number of articles and sources of articles. Two websites to be analysed is rather few to make generalisations of broad concepts, such as health officials or conspiracy theorists. In addition, ten articles among hundreds are not very much to base generalisations of the entire website's legitimisation strategies on. However, this was the number of articles that provided enough data for this thesis, and the amount that was possible to process within the time limitations of this thesis. Ultimately, the actual size of the data was not found to be a limiting factor in this thesis.

However, the data proved to be a bit problematic regarding the comparability and generalisability of the results, as WHO News had considerably less cases in total than Natural News. Comparing the use of the legitimisation strategies was therefore not completely simple, as the percentages of the frequencies of used strategies were impacted by this difference. However, this difference was affected by the length of the studied articles. As the articles that constitute the data were not all around the same length, a difference in the number of used strategies is to be expected. As the articles that were considerably longer had more cases, this affected the presentation and the comparison of the results. Precisely, the comparison of the number of cases in each article and between the datasets in Table 3 was affected by the imbalance in the length of the articles. Therefore, conclusions about the amount of use of a legitimisation strategy could not be made simplistically. Furthermore, comparisons of the use between the datasets cannot therefore be formed directly based on the case numbers.

Moreover, some limitations regarding the analysis part of this thesis were found. Firstly, a general problem with some of the utilised categories was discovered while conducting the analysis. The problem occurred while trying to determine the intention behind a statement, and therefore know which category the strategy belongs to. For example, from time to time determining whether a statement that described a scary, threatening situation belonged to the category legitimisation through hypothetical future or emotions was difficult. However, in those cases, the category was determined by drawing a line to cases that state something about the future and to cases that do not. This way all the cases that did mention future were categorised under hypothetical future, and the ones that did not under emotions.

Another example of a limitation regarding the analysis and the categorisations according to the strategies is that defining 'good' and 'bad' in legitimisation through moral evaluation cannot be done universally, as those terms are not universal. As van Leeuwen (2008,

110) states, identifying the moral evaluations is not explicitly possible, so the interpretations rely on a common understanding of cultural knowledge. Therefore, the classification and the interpretations are in this thesis based on one conception of certain ethical standards. All in all, the identification of the cases of used legitimisation strategies might not be completely precise, as it is based on interpretations of what counts as a case of legitimisation. It is also based on the interpretation of a meaning behind a sentence or expression, and therefore cannot be completely certainly said to be categorised universally. Next, actions taken to ensure the credibility of this thesis are explained.

The credibility of the research and the results in this thesis was ensured by using a few different methods. First, triangulating the research techniques and sources was utilised to include multiple perspectives and improve credibility, as Mackey and Gass suggest (2005, 368). Moreover, using random sampling as a method on a set timeline ensures that the results provide a comprehensive and non-biased picture of the data. By collecting the data randomly, the results are not biased by for example the selection of certain kind of articles. According to Mackey and Gass (2005, 180), to enhance credibility data collection could be continued for a long period of time. The articles were collected from a timeline of two years, which in the case of Covid-19 is a rather long time. Moreover, by collecting the same number of articles from both sources of data provides a balanced picture of both viewpoints that are represented in this thesis.

Other ways of studying the credibility of a research are to look at reliability and validity. Reliability refers to the study's consistency, and validity refers to the meaningfulness of the study and its success to reflect what it is supposed to reflect (Mackey and Gass, 2005, 106-128). The versatile materials of this study and the solid theoretical background of this thesis ensure the repeatability of this study. Furthermore, as the selected websites that provide the data are rather different in style, but similar in topic, the results would most likely be similar if this study was repeated. Therefore, this study can be confirmed as reliable. Moreover, the purpose of this study was to depict the use of legitimisation strategies in two different types of informative discourse and compare the similarities and differences between the two sources. As the results indicate, this study provides a clear image of the type of legitimisation strategies that these sources use, and the results and the differences the results indicate are rather distinct. Therefore, the validity of this study can be considered successful.



### 6.3 Possibilities for Further Research

Finally, in this section the possibilities for further research on this topic are considered. Since not a lot of research on legitimisation in news text discourse can be found, plenty of opportunities for research in this field exist. An interesting idea for further research could be to study e.g., causality in relation to legitimisation in discourse. For example, to study the effects of using certain legitimisation strategies in a specific discourse could reveal interesting aspects on the effects of discourse. This could be done for example by studying the use of legitimisation strategies in a discourse between participants, and then studying the style and tone of responses between the participants by utilising Conversation Analysis. Moreover, the reasons behind the usage of a certain strategy could be studied. These types of studies could for example research the effects of using threatening and scaring as a legitimisation strategy in political or informative discourse. These are aspects that were not studied in this thesis but form a research idea that this thesis could also be continued into.

Another idea for further research could be to study the use of legitimisation strategies from the viewpoint of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as Smart Oruh et. al. (2020) had done in their study. For instance, the use of these legitimization strategies could be further studied related to the context of their use. If the context is for example political discourse, the effect of that context on e.g., the word choices in the discourse could be investigated. This viewpoint could also be combined with causality by studying the context of the discourse as an affecting factor behind the selection of a certain legitimisation strategy or behind the style of the response. Moreover, the use of the legitimisation strategies could also be studied as aiming to control the readers or the participants, and for example as scaring people into doing or not doing or believing or not believing something. The status or position in society of the person using the legitimisation strategies could be included into the analysis. The use of the strategies and the discourse could perhaps therefore be studied as power abuse through the framework of CDA. Moreover, the effects of such power abuse to a certain group of people or for example a community could be investigated.

Lastly, another possibility that was not considered in this thesis, but could be an idea for a further study based on this study is including the concept of delegitimisation. To study the delegitimisation process within the data of this thesis would be an interesting and natural continuum for this thesis. Aspects that could be studied are for example the use of strategies to

delegitimise a message or an action. Moreover, the possibility of delegitimising a counter message or counter-opinion by using the legitimisation strategies could be studied. That type of research could also be used to discover and clarify the deeper reasons behind using a certain legitimisation strategy.

Further research that includes the concept of delegitimation could be conducted for example in a similar manner to Baritono's (2020) study on delegitimization in the US political discourse, as the study researches the use of delegitimation strategies in the American presidential electoral campaigns. This study could furthermore be used as an example for further research that combines this study and delegitimation as it studies the use of words and their different possible meanings as a way of acting and conveying a message through language, similarly to this thesis. Moreover, the previously mentioned study by Trajkova and Neshkovska (2019) could also be used as an inspiration to a further research based on this thesis, as it combines legitimisation and delegitimation, and has a similar approach to the phenomenon. Furthermore, as the results of Trajkova's and Neshkovska's study indicate differences compared to the results of this study, interesting comparisons could be formed.

## 7 Conclusion

The point of interest in this thesis was the creation of the sense of credibility to one's actions or statements. Therefore, this thesis studied the use of legitimisation strategies in informative discourse to legitimise actions or statements. The background and platform for this thesis is Covid-19 related discourse or news texts. The research questions in this thesis concerned the methods of using legitimisation strategies in Covid-19 related discourse, and the similarities and differences in those methods between two different types of sources, a conspiracy theory site and an international health agency site. Consequently, the legitimisation strategies were analysed from the discourse on two websites called Natural News and World Health Organisation News. Ten articles in total were randomly sampled from the two websites (five from each), and the data was manually annotated into categories and subcategories based on the theoretical frameworks utilised in this thesis from van Leeuwen (2008) and Reyes (2011). The content of the articles was analysed according to the methods of content analysis.

The results were analysed comparatively, as the similarities and the differences in the use of the legitimisation strategies and in the results were discussed. The findings indicate that Natural News, the conspiracy theory site utilised strategies that are based on creating a threatening view of the future and evoking emotional responses such as fear and anger the most. Moreover, Natural News was found to have used the strategies that were based on rationalisation and authorisation the least. However, WHO News utilised strategies that are based on rationality and expert authority the most, and strategies that are based on threatening and emotional responses the least. Therefore, the results indicated a significant difference in the use of legitimisation strategies. Lastly, the limitations regarding this thesis and the aspects of credibility were discussed, and ideas for further research were considered.

This thesis shed light on the different ways of legitimising in discourse and introduced a fresh perspective on this topic as legitimisation in news texts. This thesis also provided possibilities for interesting further research, such as studying the causal effects of the use of such legitimisation strategies in specific discourse or studying the use of legitimisation strategies from the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis as power abuse and the use of control. May this thesis therefore act as a base or a background for a plenty of interesting research on how people create credibility for their actions or statements in discourse using legitimisation strategies, and for interpretations of the possible effects of such use.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Natural News Articles

Article 1:

Adams, Mike. Natural News: “COSMIC END GAME: Coronavirus Depopulation and The Demonic War to Claim Your Soul to Satan”, April 8, 2020. Available at: <https://www.naturalnews.com/2020-04-08-end-game-coronavirus-vaccines-depopulation-demonic-war-soul-satan.html> [Accessed 24.10.2021]

Article 2:

Huff, Ethan. Natural News: “Bill and Hillary Clinton want to recruit an “army of contact tracers” to hunt down and interrogate people with coronavirus”, May 3, 2020. Available at: <https://www.naturalnews.com/2020-05-03-bill-hillary-clinton-army-contact-tracers-hunt-down-coronavirus.html> [Accessed 26.10.2021]

Article 3:

Huff, Ethan. Natural News: “Covid vaccine forced 19-year-old student into HEART TRANSPLANT, killing her within days”, June 17, 2021. Available at: <https://www.naturalnews.com/2021-06-17-covid-vaccine-student-heart-transplant-killing-her.html> [Accessed 11.11.2021]

Article 4:

Toledo, Arsenio, Natural News: “DOCUMENTS: People vaccinated with Pfizer’s covid vax are 300% more likely to get COVID-19”, October 5, 2021. Available at: <https://www.naturalnews.com/2021-10-05-pfizer-vaccine-increases-chance-of-getting-covid.html> [Accessed 2.11.2021]

Article 5:

Adams, Mike, Natural News. “VAXSSASSINATION: How globalists convinced BILLIONS of people to exterminate themselves with biological weapons presented as “vaccines”, September 14, 2021. Available at: <https://www.naturalnews.com/2021-09-14-vaxssassination-how-globalists-convinced-billions-of-people-to-exterminate-themselves-with-biological-weapons-presented-as-vaccines.html> [Accessed 15.11.2021]



## Appendix 2: World Health Organisation News Articles

Article 6:

WHO. “WHO releases guidelines to help countries maintain essential health services during the COVID-19 pandemic”, March 30, 2020. Available at: <https://www.who.int/news/item/30-03-2020-who-releases-guidelines-to-help-countries-maintain-essential-health-services-during-the-covid-19-pandemic> [Accessed 8.1.2022]

Article 7:

WHO. “As COVID-19 spread accelerates, IHR Emergency Committee urges focus on measures that work”, October 30, 2020. Available at: <https://www.who.int/news/item/30-10-2020-as-covid-19-spread-accelerates-ihc-emergency-committee-urges-focus-on-measures-that-work> [Accessed 9.1.2022]

Article 8:

WHO. “Immunization services begin slow recovery from COVID-19 disruptions, though millions of children remain at risk from deadly diseases – WHO, UNICEF, Gavi”, April 26, 2021. Available at: <https://www.who.int/news/item/26-04-2021-immunization-services-begin-slow-recovery-from-covid-19-disruptions-though-millions-of-children-remain-at-risk-from-deadly-diseases-who-unicef-gavi> [Accessed 10.1.2022]

Article 9:

WHO. “Fraudulent “COVID-19 Compensation Lottery Prize” scam, falsely alleges association with WHO and others”, August 6, 2021. Available at: <https://www.who.int/news/item/06-08-2021-fraudulent-covid-19-compensation-lottery-prize-scam-falsely-alleges-association-with-who-and-others> [Accessed 10.1.2022]

Article 10:

WHO. “WHO lists 9th COVID-19 vaccine for emergency use with aim to increase access to vaccination in lower-income countries”, December 17, 2021. Available at: <https://www.who.int/news/item/17-12-2021-who-lists-9th-covid-19-vaccine-for-emergency-use-with-aim-to-increase-access-to-vaccination-in-lower-income-countries> [Accessed 10.1.2022]

## **Appendix 3: Tables and Abbreviations**

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### **List of Abbreviations**

DA	Discourse Analysis
Covid-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
WHO	World Health Organisation

## Appendix 4: Finnish Summary

Lähes kuka tahansa pystyy kirjoittamaan internetiin mitä tahansa nykyään. Nykypäivän haasteena on siis ottaa selvää, mihin internetissä lukemaansa voi luottaa ja mihin ei. Koronaviruspandemiaan liittyneet viime aikoina esillä olleet keskustelut ovat herättäneet kysymyksen; millä tavoin ihmiset vakuutetaan uskomaan jotain nettiin kirjoitettua, ja millä tavoin diskurssin kautta luodaan uskottavuutta jollekin sanomalle tai teolle? Tämän tutkielman tarkoituksena on selvittää, minkälaisia legitimaatiostrategioita käytetään luomaan uskottavuutta koronaviruspandemiaan (Covid-19) liittyvässä diskurssissa. Legitimaatio on strategia, jota käytetään perustelemaan puhetta tai toimintaa ja luomaan uskottavuutta kyseiselle puheelle tai toiminnalle.

Tutkimuksen materiaali kerätään kahdelta verkkopohjaiselta uutissivustolta, Maailman terveysjärjestön eli WHO:n uutissivustolta sekä Natural News nimiseltä sivustolta. Kyseiset internetsivut valikoituivat tutkimuksen kohteeksi muun muassa siksi, että ne edustavat kahta erilaista näkökulmaa koronaviruspandemiaan liittyvää keskustelua kohtaan; WHO:n sivusto edustaa maailman virallisen terveysjärjestön näkökulmaa, kun taas Natural News edustaa salaliittoteorioihin perustuvaa näkökulmaa. Kultakin sivustolta kerätään satunnaisotannalla viisi artikkelia vuosien 2020 ja 2021 ajalta. Tutkimuksen kohdeaineiston muodostavat WHO:n uutissivustolta sekä Natural News -sivustolta kerätyt artikkelit. Tutkimuskysymykset ovat seuraavat:

1. Millaisia legitimaatiostrategioita käytetään luomaan uskottavuutta koronaviruksesta tietoa välittävässä tekstissä ja diskurssissa?
2. Millaisia samankaltaisuuksia ja eroavaisuuksia voidaan löytää maailman virallisen terveysjärjestön ja salaliittoteorioitsijoiden käyttämien strategioiden välillä?

Hypoteesina tässä tutkielmassa on, että artikkeleista löytyy legitimaatiostrategioiden käyttöä, ja että käytettyjen strategioiden välillä on samankaltaisuuksia ja eroavaisuuksia. Hypoteesina on myös, että WHO News käyttää strategioita, jotka perustuvat tieteeseen ja faktoihin, ja että Natural News käyttää strategioita, jotka perustuvat tunteisiin ja pelotteluun. Tärkeitä käsitteitä ja konsepteja tässä tutkimuksessa ovat käsitteet *legitimaatio* (legitimation), *uskottavuus* ja

luotettavuus (*credibility*), *koronaviruspandemia*, *salaliittoteoria* (*conspiracy theory*) sekä koronaviruspandemiaan liittyvä yleinen keskustelun tyyli verkkopohjaisilla uutisalustoilla. Nämä käsitteet luovat pohjan tälle tutkimukselle. Uskottavuus on tässä tutkimuksessa määritelty luotettavuutena ja vakuuttavuutena (Self ja Roberts, 2019, 435). Koronaviruksella ja koronaviruspandemialla viitataan vuonna 2019 Wuhanista alkunsa saaneeseen SARS-CoV-2 viruksen aiheuttamaan pandemiaan, jonka myötä miljoonia tapauksia on todettu ympäri maailman. Käsitteellä salaliittoteoria tarkoitetaan asioiden selittämistä tarkoituksenmukaisuudella, dualismilla ja okkultismilla (Cubitt, 1989, 13). Bodnerin ym. (2021, 10) mukaan salaliittoteorioitsijat korostavat myös usein altavastajaan asemaansa.

Legitimaation käsitteen selittämiseen ja legitimaatiostrategioiden tutkimiseen hyödynnetään van Leeuwenin (2008) määritelmiä. Van Leeuwenin määritelmää täydennetään Reyesin (2011) määritelmällä ja muutamalla tätä tutkimusta varten kehitetyllä lisästrategialla. Van Leeuwenin mukaan legitimaatiota käytetään selittämään tarkoituksia jonkin teon tai sanoman taustalla (2008, 113). Legitimaatiota antaa vastauksen ”miksi” kysymyksiin (van Leeuwen, 2008, 106). Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on selvittää, millaisia legitimaatiostrategioita käytetään kerätyssä aineistossa. Toisena tarkoituksena on selvittää, minkälaisia eroavaisuuksia kahden eri verkkosivustolta kerätyn aineiston välillä on. Reyesin (2011, 782) mukaan legitimaatio liittyy tilanteisiin, jossa sosiaalista käyttäytymistä perustellaan ja oikeutetaan puhujan toimesta. Legitimaatiolla yritetään saavuttaa kuulijan luottamus ja hyväksyntä, ja täten tehdä puhujan sanomasta tai teosta uskottavampi.

Van Leeuwen ja Reyes esittelevät yhteensä kahdeksan eri legitimaatiostrategiaa, joihin tämän tutkimuksen analyysi perustuu. Van Leeuwenin (2008, 105) strategiat ovat *auktorisointi* (*authorisation*), moraalinen *arviointi* (*moral evaluation*) ja *rationalisointi* (*rationalisation*). Auktorisoinnilla tarkoitetaan auktoriteettiin, tapaan tai lakiin viittaamista (*ibid.*). Auktorisointi voidaan jakaa henkilökohtaiseen (*personal*), asiantuntevaan (*expert*) ja persoonattomaan (*impersonal*) auktorisointiin (van Leeuwen, 2008, 106–107). Moraalinen arviointi tarkoittaa arvoihin sekä oikeaan ja väärään viittaamisen käyttämistä perusteluna (van Leeuwen, 2011, 106). Rationalisoinnilla tarkoitetaan yhteiskunnassa yleisesti hyväksytyihin tavoitteisiin ja käytänteisiin viittaamista (*ibid.*) Rationalisointi voidaan jakaa instrumentaaliseen rationalisointiin (yhteiset tavoitteet ja käytänteet) sekä naturalisaatioon (asioiden luonnollinen järjestys) (van Leeuwen, 2008, 113).

Reyesin strategioissa on samankaltaisuuksia van Leeuwenin strategioiden kanssa, mutta myös muutama uusi strategia esitellään seuraavaksi. Reyesin (2011, 785) viisi strategiaa ovat *legitimaatio tunteiden kautta* (legitimation through emotions), *legitimaatio hypoteettisen tulevaisuuden kautta* (hypothetical future), *legitimaatio rationalisoinnin kautta* (rationality), *legitimaatio asiantuntijuuden kautta* (voices of expertise) ja *altruismi* (altruism). Legitimaatio tunteiden kautta perustuu lukijan tai keskustelukumppanin tunteisiin vaikuttamiseen herättämällä tunnereaktion kuten viha tai pelko, tai luomalla negatiivisen tai positiivisen kuvan keskustelun kohteesta (Reyes, 2011, 785–790). Legitimaatio hypoteettisen tulevaisuuden kautta perustuu uhkaavan tulevaisuudennäkymän esittämiseen ja täten lukijan tai keskustelutoverin vakuuttamiseen oman sanoman tai teon uskottavuudesta (Reyes, 2011, 786). Legitimaatio rationalisoinnin kautta vastaa van Leeuwenin määritelmää, mutta lisää huolellisen harkinnan ja järkipärisen ajattelun määritelmään (ibid.). Myös legitimaatio asiantuntijuuden kautta vastaa van Leeuwenin määritelmää lisäten, että asiantuntijan näkökulma tuodaan keskusteluun vahvistamaan uskottavuutta (Reyes, 2011, 800). Altruismilla tarkoitetaan oman sanoman tai tekojen esittämistä muista huolehtimisena ja kaikkia hyödyttävänä asiana (Reyes, 2011, 801–802).

Tämä tutkimus yhdistää kvantitatiivisen ja kvalitatiivisen tutkimusotteen tutkimalla artikkeleissa käytettyjen strategioiden määrää ja laatua. Artikkelit analysoidaan täten diskurssinanalyysin menetelmin selvittämällä käytettyjen strategioiden määrä ja laatu. Artikkeleista poimitaan kaikki tapaukset, joista löydetään legitimaatiostrategian käyttöä. Nämä esimerkit lajitellaan artikkelin ja strategian mukaan kategorioihin ja alakategorioihin kuvailevan analyysin mukaisesti. Lopuksi kahdesta eri lähteestä kerättyä aineistoa vertaillaan keskenään, ja yhtäläisyydet ja eroavaisuudet kirjataan. Löydettyjen esimerkkien lukumäärä kirjataan taulukkoon ja yhtäläisyyksiä ja eroavaisuuksia tarkastellaan esittämällä käytettyjen strategioiden prosentuaalinen esiintyvyys artikkeleissa. Tutkimuksen eettisyydestä huolehditaan takaamalla menetelmien, analyysin ja tuloksien avoimuus sekä neutraaliudesta huolehtiminen analyysiä tehdessä ja tuloksia vertailtaessa.

Tutkimuksen analyysin perusteella saadut tulokset osoittivat, että Natural News hyödynsi artikkeleissaan eniten legitimaatiostrategioita, jotka perustuivat hypoteettiseen tulevaisuuteen (44 %) ja tunteisiin (33 %). Vähiten Natural News hyödynsi strategioita, jotka perustuivat rationalisointiin (4 %) ja auktorisointiin (10 %). Tunteisiin perustuvat legitimaatiostrategiat ilmenivät Natural News -sivuston artikkeleissa muun muassa ilmauksien

tai sanavalintojen käyttämisenä, joilla pyrittiin herättämään pelkoa tai vihaa lukijoissa. Esimerkkejä tällaisista ilmauksista ja sanavalinnoista olivat esimerkiksi sanan ”tappava ruiske” (lethal injection) tai ”eutanasiaruiske” (euthanasia injection) käyttäminen kuvailemaan koronavirusrokotuksia (esim. Artikkelit 3). Hypoteettiseen tulevaisuuteen perustuvat strategiat Natural News -sivuston artikkeleissa ilmenivät uhkaavan tulevaisuudenkuvan esittämisenä. Esimerkiksi Artikkelissa 1 kuvaillaan, että rokotetut ihmiset täyttävät muutaman vuoden päästä joukkohautoja, ja Artikkelissa 5 kuvaillaan rokotteita joukkotuhoaseena. Näiden strategioiden käytön tarkoitus oli useimmin luoda uskottavuutta kirjoittajan mielipiteelle koronavirusrokotteista. Auktorisointia käytettiin legitimointiin henkilökohtaiseen auktoriteettiin viittaamalla, ja rationalisointia käytettiin vetoamalla naturalisointiin ja huolelliseen harkintaan. Esimerkiksi Artikkelissa 5 legitimoidaan kuvaus globalistien agendasta aiheutuvasta massatuhosta kuvaamalla sitä tapahtumien luonnollisena jatkumona.

Analyysin perusteella saadut tulokset osoittivat myös, että WHO News hyödynsi artikkeleissaan eniten legitimaatiostrategioita, jotka perustuivat rationalisointiin (24 %) ja auktorisointiin (21 %). Vähiten WHO News hyödynsi strategioita, jotka perustuivat tunteisiin (16 %) ja hypoteettiseen tulevaisuuteen (13 %). Legitimaatio rationalisoinnin kautta ilmeni WHO News -sivuston artikkeleissa huolellisen harkinnan tai instrumentaalisen rationalisoinnin muodossa. Esimerkiksi Artikkelissa 6 perustellaan valtioille esitettyjä vaatimuksia tarpeellisina yhteisen hyvän saavuttamiseksi (instrumentaalinen rationalisointi), ja huolellista harkintaa ilmaisevaa tutkimusten kuvailua hyödynnettiin luomaan uskottavuutta artikkelissa esitetyille tiedoille. Legitimaatio auktorisoinnin kautta ilmeni WHO News -sivuston artikkeleissa asiantuntevan auktorisoinnin hyödyntämisenä. Tämän strategian avulla perusteltiin esimerkiksi Artikkelissa 10 lausuma rokotteiden hyödyllisyydestä vetoamalla alan asiantuntijan esittämiin tietoihin. Legitimointia tunteisiin vetoamalla käytettiin WHO News -sivuston artikkeleissa muun muassa luomalla positiivinen tai negatiivinen mielikuva tai herättämällä sympatian tunteita, ja hypoteettista tulevaisuutta hyödynnettiin perustelemaan valtioille tehtyjä vaatimuksia. Esimerkiksi Artikkelissa 6 kuvaillaan terveysjärjestelmän kantokyvyn luhistumista mahdollisena seurauksena, jos artikkelissa esitettyihin vaatimuksiin ei vastata.

Analyysin tulokset osoittavat siis vastakkainasettelua. Tuloksien perusteella suosituimmat strategiat Natural News artikkeleissa olivat vähiten suosittuja strategioita WHO News artikkeleissa ja päinvastoin. Analyysin tulokset viittaavat siis huomattaviin eroavaisuuksiin lähteiden kommunikaatiotyylien ja legitimaatiotyylien välillä. Tuloksen

osoittavat eroavaisuuksia myös samojen strategioiden käytössä artikkelien välillä. Natural News käytti tunteisiin vetoamista enimmäkseen negatiivisen mielikuvan luomiseen, kun taas WHO News käytti tunteisiin vetoamista myös positiivisen mielikuvan luomiseen tai sympatian herättämiseen. Tämän kaltaisten eroavaisuuksien sekä tutkimuksesta saatujen tuloksien perusteella voidaan todeta, että Natural News -sivuston tyyli kommunikoida on huomattavasti negatiivisempi, hyökkäävämpi sekä provosoivampi, kun taas WHO News -sivuston tyyli kommunikoida on neutraalimpi ja informatiivisempi. Sivustojen tarkoitus on todennäköisesti myös erilainen. WHO News -sivuston tarkoitus on välittää tieteellistä tietoa neutraalisti, kun taas Natural News -sivuston tarkoitus on välittää mielipiteitä ja vaikuttaa lukijoiden mielipiteisiin. Sivustojen käyttämien strategioiden väliltä löytyi kuitenkin myös yhtäläisyyksiä muutamien strategioiden käytössä sekä tarkoituksessa. Esimerkiksi legitimaatiota hypoteettisen tulevaisuuden kautta käytettiin luomaan uhkaava kuva tulevaisuudesta molempien sivustojen artikkeleissa.

Lopuksi kuvaillaan tähän tutkimukseen ja sen menetelmiin ja materiaaleihin liittyviä rajoitteita ja puutteita ja pohditaan tutkimuksen luotettavuutta sekä jatkotutkimusmahdollisuuksia. Tämän tutkimuksen rajoitteina ovat muun muassa koronaviruksen (Covid-19) ilmiön tuoreus, materiaallinen keräämisen työläys, aineiston koko, yleistettävyyden ja tulkinnanvaraisuus. Tutkimuksen luotettavuus varmistetaan muun muassa huolehtimalla puolueettomuudesta, reliabeliuudesta ja validiudesta datan monipuolisuuden ja tulosten tarkoituksenmukaisuuden kautta. Useita jatkotutkimusmahdollisuuksia ilmeni tälle tutkimukselle. Aiheen tutkimusta on mahdollista jatkaa esimerkiksi syy-seuraussuhteita tutkimalla, kriittisen diskurssinanalyysin kautta tai ottaen mukaan de-legitimaation (delegitimation) käsitteen. Kaiken kaikkiaan, tämä tutkimus valottaa legitimaatiostrategioiden käyttöä diskurssissa ja kyseisten strategioiden käytön eroavaisuuksia kahden eri tyyllisen lähteen välillä. Tämän tutkimuksen pohjalta voidaankin varmasti tehdä monia mielenkiintoisia tutkimuksia legitimaatiostrategioiden ja niiden käytön aiheuttamien vaikutusten saralla.