

MASS MEDIA INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

"Press freedom is a blessing when writing about others and calamity when we find ourselves accused of many," said the English poet and essay-writer Samuel Johnson, at the middle of the 18th century. Everyday reality shows us that things almost haven't changed in the last 300 years. Aggressiveness, scandal, the appetite for sensational and the suburban language represent a number of facts characteristic to both the past and the present. Not a day goes by without us reading in the paper or watching on TV reports on accidents, aggressions, rapes, scandals which involve public figures. These types of events trigger our curiosity and interest. We like it when justice is done on TV, because we feel that we are part of the "panel." Therefore we have whom to sympathize with or whom to blame. However, we are much more cautious when the main characters of such events would be us. In this context, the present research aims at evaluating consumers' media perception on the information they receive, from a double perspective: that of observers and that of potential protagonists of such events. We have analysed the perception, impact, objectivity and last but not least, the dependence towards this type of information.

Keywords: *media consumers, information dependence, objectivity, press*

1. INTRODUCTION

In a society in which manipulating people using their hunger for sensational hides impotence, disappointment and a high lack of interest, media represents a very important element. Because, sometimes, it plays a fundamental role in distracting attention from issues that are really important such as the fragility of the Romanian health system, which excels only due to individual values, and not as a system, the lack of professional and financial motivation of those involved in the teaching process, the high poverty rate of the population,

towards precise and spectacular events. A spectacular accident, with three or four victims, pupils who aggress their colleagues or teachers, or breakups and reconciliation between domestic celebrities will impress and stir up the interest if they are well presented, more than the fact that Romania is among the last countries in Europe when it comes to health expenses, these being around 600 Euro per capita in comparison to 1800 Euro the average of the European Union. On the other hand, in this unfortunate context one has noticed that around 75% of the adults in Romania have given up going to a doctor because of their financial problems. The same statistics show that 6% of the Romanians are illiterate, more than in Bulgaria, 2%, or Hungary, 1%, and that no fewer than 40% of the Romanians read very badly or cannot read at all. Well, these disturbing statistics, if we compare ourselves to a normal society, pale, when it comes to interest and perception, for a large part of the mass media consumers in comparison with some articles or TV shows which aim at the trivial sensational, totally not informal and instructive.

2. MATERIAL AND METHOD

In order to have the results of the questionnaires as clearly and relevant as possible, the respondents were chosen in such a way that it led to a conclusion very close to what the media consumers want to find in the written press or on TV. Therefore, both men and women aged above 18 took part in the study, regardless of their religion, level of education or place of residence (urban/rural).

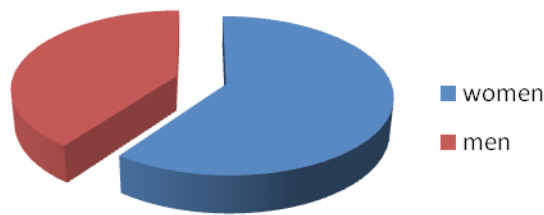


Fig. 1. Sex distribution of the subjects who took part in the research

A number of 1000 questionnaires were distributed and completed, equally divided to men and women. 360 were annulled because they had been wrongly or incompletely completed, and therefore 360 women and 280 men took part in this study (Fig. 1) The 720 respondents which have correctly completed the questionnaire answered 5 questions.

The answers were statistically analysed, the 5 questions being used to find out consumers' expectations of the media, at an informal and ethical level. The answers were processed, question after question, firstly for the entire sample, and then separately according to gender, the place where the respondent lives, level of education, religion, and on age intervals. All the results were pooled under the form of a graph and there was a conclusion according to the weight of the answers. The conclusion for each question was also analysed, leading to the final conclusions, according to the people's expectations.

Research variables

1. Informed consent questionnaire through which all the people who agreed to take part in this study signed an "Informed consent paper." Moreover, the questions they answered to and their personal information were developed in such a way that those people could not be identified, and this is how the confidentiality of participants was preserved.

2. Independent research variables: sex (female/male), level of studies (8 graders, 12 graders, university), residence (urban/rural), age (18-29 years, 30-39 years, 40-49 years, 50-59 years, above 60 de years).

3. RESULTS

The people who were interviewed answered 5 questions which targeted the following aspects: 1. How often do you get information from mass media? (a. daily, b. weekly, c. rarely), 2. Are you a loyal consumer of information pertaining to accidents, rapes, aggressions, suicides, rows, especially if they involve well-known people? (a. Yes, they attract my interest, b. I don't find them useful, c. It depends, from one situation to another), 3. Do you find the information included in question 2 useful? (a. Yes, because it reflects daily events, b. No, this type of information is not part of my interest area, c. It depends, from one situation to another), 4. Do you consider that publishing some photos of you or of members of your family who are in a difficult situation (immediately after an accident or an aggression, such as a rape or suicide attempt, etc.) would hurt your image? (a. Yes, because I wouldn't want to be seen in such a situation, b. On the contrary, I think that the photos would be useful to me as a victim in solving the case, c. I have never asked myself this question), 5. Who do you think is to blame when information as the ones mentioned above end up in the media? (a. The journalists who are always looking for something sensational in order to sell the paper, or to attract more audience, in the case of the television, b. The ones who are constantly reading in the paper or watching on TV articles/shows that target such situations, c. I have never asked myself this question).

According to the answers of those who took part in the study, men were generally more interested in finding information (68% daily), in comparison to women (39% daily), result that can be explained through the fact that men are interested in subjects from fields such as politics, sport, economy, etc. (Fig. 2).

When it comes to the answers related to the place of residence, there weren't major percentage differences for women, but for men, the number of those living in urban areas who consume mass media information is higher (56%) than that of those who live in rural areas (38%).

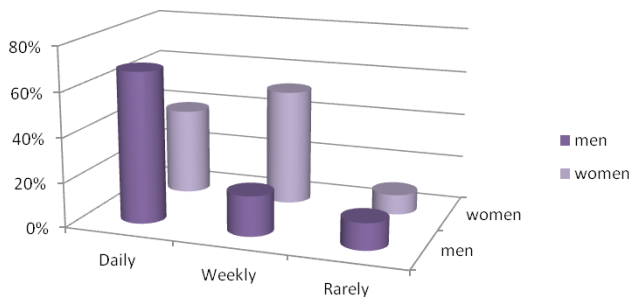


Fig. 2. Distribution of women and men, according to their interest to such news

The people who were the most consistent in getting “their share” of mass media information were especially the one who graduated 12 grades, followed by those who graduated 8 grades. On the other hand, faculty graduates proved that they use other sources of information, the number of those who read the press daily being half the number of the others, both for women and men (M-18%, W-23%). The study clearly showed that the respondents aged 18-29 and those aged 30-39 are not loyal consumers of mass media. Interest increases with age and it reaches its maximum point for people above the age of 60, the proportion being 62% men and 71% women, when they are logged on daily to different types of media.

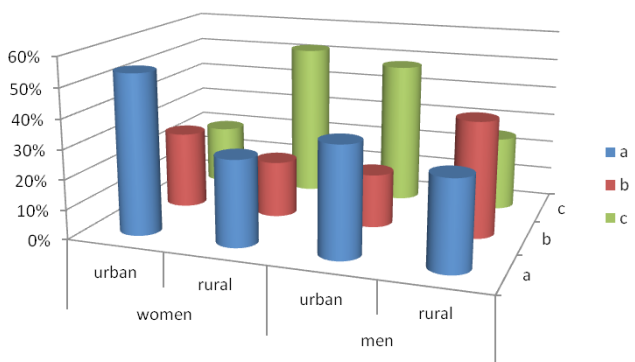


Fig. 3. Distribution of women and men, taking into account their place of residence, according to their interest to events such as accidents, aggressions or scandals

Related to the interest regarding information that target topics such as accidents, aggressions or scandals that involve public figures, a higher one was noticed in women (53%). Although men are also connected to information offered by the media, this type of events doesn't seem to interest them as much as it interests women, only 26% of men follow them with interest. Also, one can notice that respondents from urban areas are more interested in being up to date with such news, in comparison to the rural areas, the difference being significant, 20% (Fig. 3). This aspect could be explained by the fact that in rural areas people are more engaged in household chores and are less interested in what happens in the country, if it doesn't affect their lives directly. According to studies, people who have graduated a faculty occasionally watch these kind of shows (9% women, 6% men), a higher interest being for those who graduated 12 grades (39% women, 27% men), whereas the highest interest can be seen in those who have graduated 8 grades. It was also noticed that the respondents aged 50-59 (21% women, 19% men) and those over 60 (35% women, 28% men) are interested in this kind of news and that the interest diminishes for younger respondents. Related to the usefulness of this type of personal information, people living in rural areas (63%) say that they haven't asked themselves this question and that they are simply watching these shows because they connect them to the daily life. Those living in urban areas consider that it is useful to be up to date with such events in a quite significant percentage (79%). Mainly women (61%) find it useful to know more about the private lives of public figures and also about accidents, aggressions, rapes or suicides. It is true that men have other spheres of interest and this is something they clearly expressed in this survey (78%). According to their studies (Fig. 4), both women (56%) and men (51%) find glimpses of everyday life in such information, men with medium level of education are interested (30%) but they don't have an explanation why because they have never asked themselves this question (46%).

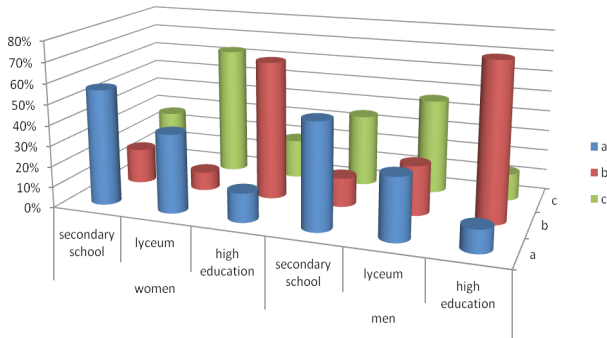


Fig. 4. Distribution of women and men, taking into account their level of education, according to the usefulness of such information

After the age of 40, women rediscover themselves in the events they we pursue. It almost does not matter the motivation for their appetite for this information, a statement demonstrated by the fact that over 60% of them never wonder why they they pursue such news. In return, comunly/ as usual, the young men of 18-29 and 30-40 years old tend to have other preferences, over 70% stating that this kind of information is not in their area of interest. Things tend to change when, from among the spectators, the respondents are asked to put themselves in the role of the victim. The majority of both women (58%) and men (71%) said that the publication of such photos / images could harm their dignity and would not like to be seen in such a situation. Those in rural areas seem to be even more ashamed than those who live in the city, which could be explained by their exposure in small communities where everyone knows everyone. Although they have declared that they are such news consumers, regardless of training, women with higher education in an overwhelming percentage (87%) do not agree to be caught in such situations.

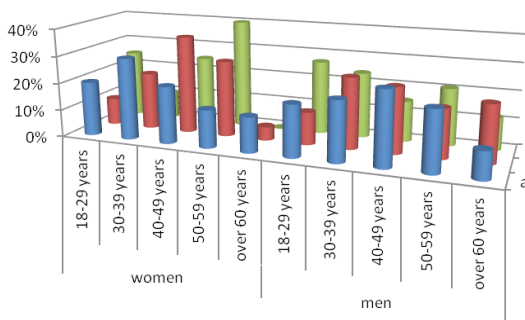


Fig. 5. The distribution of women, depending on age consent to to be the subject of such events

Instead, men 8th grade graduates have shared their options, some of them (39%) believing that the publication of a photograph in the role of victim might be helpful, especially in legal elucidation of the case. Also, among men who have graduated 12 grades the highest number of undecided (47%) is met.

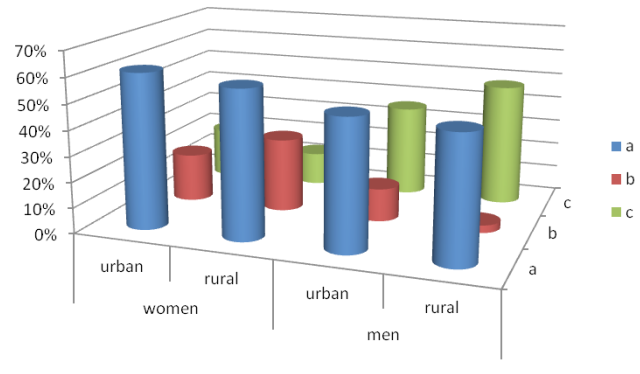


Fig. 6. The distribution of W / M, reported to place of residence regarding the culpability due to the issue in the media of this information

Women of age groups 40-49 years old and 50-59 years old have specified that they are not disturbed by the fact their images in situations of victims might be issued would not be a major problem in their life (36% and 42%) (Fig. 5). The rest, however, believe that it is not normal to be photographed and your image to be published when you are in a delicate situation, especially when it comes to personal life. Finally, the men interviewed, regardless of age, categorically said (60%) that they did not agree their photo to be published or image broadcasted while in difficult situations in terms of private life.

Most women in urban areas consider that when information about one's private life get in the media the guilty ones are the journalists (61%) (Fig. 6) who are looking for the sensational. The percentages marking the answers of the women in the rural area are more balanced than those in the urban area, but, overall, opinions converge towards the same conclusion, that journalists are guilty for the lack of confidentiality in the media. If rural women believe that the journalists are those who publish news without obtaining the consent of those who they write about, men in rural areas said they did not think of this issue (48%). For women, the distribution

of responses by level of education is the following: women who graduated eight grades and 12 grades have declared that they have never thought of this issue (41% and 49%). While women (53%) and men (71%) with higher education were largely agreed that responsible for the issue of such information in the media are the consumers of media who regularly watch such broadcasts. Out of the five age categories, three believe that the perpetrators of the appearance in the press of confidential information about the private life of each individual are the journalists, in their pursuit of the sensational. The other two age groups, 18-29 and 30-39 respectively, believe that only the increased interest in such information brings it in the newspapers and on television.

4. DISCUSSIONS

Whether we like it or not, the media, in all its forms - written, spoken or video - is part of our daily life. Daily, we read, hear or see information or comments we approve of or, contrary, annoy us, cause us discomfort or we simply ignore them. The focus of the media on such issues is not random. The feed-back from those who declare to be steady consumers of media (3) did nothing but reinforce the belief of journalists that such issues are well received and even expected for. An accident with one or more victims, rape, suicide, aggression or of marital row of so-called VIPs awaken emotions¹, empathy, outrage, revolt but all have a common denominator: curiosity. An experiment done more than ten years ago by Antena 1 has proved fruitless. When, according to the timetable program, Pro TV broadcasted then, as it does now too, the news about accidents, rapes, assaults, suicides -the famous news from 5 pm - Antena 1 tried to give viewers an alternative news, broadcasting the so-called positive mundane news⁷. It was a utterly failure. The loyal viewers of that broadcasting hour stuck to their habit of watching the often traumatic events offered by Pro TV, where they could learn about and, especially, see children left unattended in the house that burned alive, or young women at a certain age or downright venerable women raped by their grandchildren or neighbours⁴

what accident, in which several people perished in the last 24 hours. Images, unbearable even for an adult, but which were presented unblurred at the beginning of the broadcast even at a time when children had access to watch programmes unattended. Starting from the idea that, most likely, viewers had no option in that hour of a show to choose to watch the initiative of Antena 1 was intended to be an alternative to that news that many of those who watched and blamed, but kept watching daily⁸. Book or songs issues, or the professional activity of people be they public or not, the kind of tepid news², proved that no one was interested in. The rating points clearly in favour of the aggression presented by Pro TV, rapidly led to the suspension of the show from the program schedule. Few, however of the viewers, present in front of the TV at 5 pm¹⁰ admitted that they preferred to watch the violent news from Pro TV to the tepid Antena 1 news⁵. Interestingly enough, although since then more than 10 years have passed, the things do not seem to have changed almost at all. Consumer appetite for this type of information media seems to have remained highly constant⁹. As a matter of fact, this research included, highlights it. On the other hand, equally interesting it is that then, as now, neither the majority women nor men who participated in the study did not take into account the possibility that the materials published in newspapers or television to be the result of their own preferences⁶, as consumers of media. The philosophy joining this type of media consumers is simple but highly stable both in time and in preferences. We like to live, on the edge, the lives of others, empathize or judge the emotions of the characters presented to which, aware or not we actively witness¹. We like to comment subsequently dramas with neighbours, friends, co-workers or family. We do all that hiding behind the thought that we can only learn from such tragedies. There seems nothing out of place that we share in the interference in the private space of some strangers. We pretend, avoiding our consciousness with the thought that all has an educational goal⁸. Up to a point. and that point is when it comes to us or to someone close to us or our family. Then the things we enjoy watching on television daily or newspaper in hand might quickly turn to

defamatory information which goes unbearably beyond the normal limit⁷ of a private life. In such circumstances the word professional ethics seems to be really meaningful. We are willing to vehemently stigmatize such journalistic practices which put us intimate life on the wall² in the harsh spotlight light of public opinion¹⁰. We stigmatize the insistent journalist and apparently unscrupulous who takes advantage of the confusion state of people in dramatic situations and obtains from these images and information which maybe in a perfectly conscious situation they would not be offered . The indignation of those who condemn such practices seems, to a point, to be based on a judgment of normality and common sense⁶. Few people question whether the journalist seems to be hungry for this kind of information, has a morbid propensity to present drama and aggression or, he simply, merely does it out of a routine work, providing for a constant public the type of information that they want⁹. As in most cases, this time too, the truth seen from two perspectives, seems to be somewhere in between. We have two constants: the journalist who is paid, most often, depending on the number of news he produces every month³ and the preferences proven by the rating points of a segment of consumers, the so-called niche consumers⁴. Readers and viewers of niche that are structured and restructured continuously and are part of a global audience, more or less media connoisseur¹⁰. This permanent change in texture of the⁵ the public is in agreement with the education level, the socio-economic level, the personal beliefs and traditions and not least, the habit. On the other hand, journalists motivate their production of such information⁸ that they normally personally do not agree with, through the constant appetite, of those niche viewers for such events. They say that they make use of the methods commonly used in marketing practices: which take into account the demand in order to establish the offer. On the other hand, perhaps out of laziness but, why not recognize it, because of a lack of financial motivation¹, the journalist relies on the fact that, according to professional rules, the role of those working in the media is to inform and not to educate⁹. Protected by these precepts such as:

“I inform you about what you want to know”, he gets into a routine job that does not bring neither to him the professional satisfaction nor to those who, out of habit, faithfully look pursue type of information. In this context it appears to have been set up a perpetuum mobile³ which, at least at this moment, is difficult to stop. Certainly, it is very important to be informed but it also matters and quality of information. Because, unfortunately, it was found that the journalist has become not only a source of information but more than once, he becomes willingly or not, directly or indirectly, opinion maker⁵. A role that seems to seize especially in less efficient environments in socio-economic terms. A change, if obviously so desired, should come from both areas of interest. This tacit, but obvious complicity between the journalist and media consumers should be destroyed¹⁰. The sewage of the information content is certainly an obligation of both sides. A commitment that the press in its wholeness must take them, so as to be aware that only united it can change the tastes² of a public that, eventually, even it itself has formed at the risk of decreasing for a period of time of the interest of that niche public, lack of interest that will be obviously translated by decreasing rating points and possibly the incomes from advertisements.

5. CONCLUSION

1. This research has revealed that many of the people, a large proportion, are informed through media channels, be it print or the television.
2. Men more watch television more often than women or read articles in newspapers, but seek different events and shows.
3. After centralizing the responses of those who attended the interview we found that over 50% of women respondents read or watch TV. reports describing the accidents, assaults, attempted suicide, rape, rows, especially when public persons are involved.
4. Respondents admit that they have made it a habit to watch such events which they consider of interest and even useful, appreciating them as a reflection of everyday life.

5. The attitude of respondents changes when asked to imagine that the protagonists of such events could be themselves or someone in their family. Over 60% said that they disagreed, the publication of such information being likely to prejudice their image.

6. The vast majority of participants in this study (70%) believe that the guilty ones for this kind of information coverage are exclusively the journalists in their quest for the sensational.

7. A relatively small number of study participants (about 20%), mostly men, they found that this increased appetite for this kind of news which promotes violence, might be the element that triggers its search and publication.

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