

TELEVISION NEWS AS AN INFORMATION SOURCE AND ITS PERCEPTION IN SLOVAKIA

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ABSTRACT:

Television news reporting is one of the most significant information sources, through which the media audiences get acquainted with the current affairs related to all aspects of social life in order to understand them. The research study focuses on the issue of news perception and its interpretation by the recipients with emphasis put on acquiring new information. The theoretical outlines of the study reflect on specific demands and expectations of the society associated with TV news, as well as on today's television audiences, the process of news perception and its determinants. The authors also offer results of their own research inquiry into television news reporting that aim to define the meaning of news in terms of everyday lives of its recipients, stressing out its information and educational function bound to social demands associated with media. This topic is also related to the recipients' ability to 'decode' pieces of news and acquire the necessary information. The research was conducted by combining various research methods and tools – focus groups, standardised questionnaire surveys and a quantitative content analysis of selected news stories (in total 120 respondents were involved). The researchers used the selected research material consisting of news stories broadcast by Slovak commercial television station *TV Markíza* to examine the respondents' ability to interpret news coverage with regard to its function as an information source.

KEY WORDS:

audience, credibility of TV newscast, decoding, information source, information quality, perception, television, television news

Introduction

Research has long confirmed that media have a significant impact on the ways we perceive and understand reality. J. Lohisse defines the present days as an era of "formlessness", for which, as S. Gálik



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states, the typical medium is the Internet and the dominant communication environment is the cyberspace.¹ Although J. Lohisse's socio-anthropological view of the media's influence on societal structures has been widely welcomed within the scientific community, we must not forget the presence and effects of other media tools shaping today's society. The world we live in is under constant pressure of technological and technical progress, which is reflected, amongst other things, in changes of consumption patterns and habits related to the use of 'traditional' media.

In addition to the dominance of computer and mobile technologies, television has managed to preserve its audiences' favour. As pointed out in our previous works² and as numerous current studies confirm,³ television is still popular and its news coverage is considered by its recipients as one of the basic information sources about the world 'out there'. It is, however, doubtful whether the audiences can really 'decode' individual news reports and how much information they are able to obtain from them. Being one of the mediators of social events, television acts plausibly to provide reflections of objective reality, since the interconnection of the auditory and visual components enhances the 'real' nature of the transmitted images in relation of human senses.

The study focuses on the issue of the current transformation of perceptual determinants influencing the recipients of news and their interpretation patterns. It deals with the production of news and the regulatory requirements for this specific journalistic area, reflecting on the phenomenon of TV news audiences and their perceptive strategies. The aim of the study is to highlight the position and role of the TV news in everyday lives of its recipients and define the extent of its importance and relevance in terms of disseminating new information (or updated information associated with longer-lasting processes and events), with special emphasis put on the ways television news broadens the audience members' general knowledge of society. In addition, we aim to draw attention to the ability (or inability?) of TV news recipients to 'decode' the importance of individual news stories in the context of multiple perceptual determinants.

TV News Reporting and Its Functions

Making news is one of the key areas in media production and its importance for the society is constantly growing. The technological development and advances in today's society are associated with the decline of certain types of media and their changing role in everyday life as a source of information. Competing against the Internet that offers up-to-date information almost instantly and is available to a large number of recipients, television still maintains its prominent place as a source of news.⁴

We regard the term "news reporting" as a conscious journalistic activity as well as its specific visible (and often also audible) product. It is based on the facts and events which it searches for, collects, classifies and sorts out, and then interprets and delivers them to recipients using print, electronic or digital media. Moreover, the function of the news coverage is also to provide the general public with enough 'inputs' and thus help them to form their own views and opinions.⁵ One of the functions of news reports is to reflect the ambiguity of our opinions on society and everyday life. Therefore, it should provide important information that is as specific as possible, timely, objective, unbiased, thematically and informationally balanced and, of course, verified by at least two independent sources.⁶ Timeliness, readability and clarity are its important features as

well. The personal views of the journalist are not welcome here, even inadmissible. News coverage should be purely impartial,⁷ which is closely connected with the desired objectivity of news. The notion of "objectivity" in journalistic practice – in spite of its relatively clear definition in the theory of journalism – is associated with the idea of impartiality, as it speaks of the maximum purity of the presented information.⁸ However, the choice of the information itself and identifying the main idea, i.e. what we want to tell the recipient about an event (or the choice of the genre itself) are subjective interventions of a journalist. Therefore, as J. Vojtek states, it is necessary to maintain fairness, impartiality and open-mindedness of news. Any subjective attitudes used in opinion-based journalism should therefore be published separately, or marked clearly as a matter of subjective opinions.⁹

Historically, news emerged in the press; it further developed in film, radio and television. Today, in the information society, it mostly spreads through digital media. However, in different ways.¹⁰ Television news reporting is a specific type of audio-visual journalistic creation. Its primary attributes are regular periodicity, which is usually planned for every day, and a combination of a moving image and spoken word.¹¹

In order to understand news, it is necessary to focus on its core mission. The term "newscast" refers to both the preparatory phase of seeking and selecting information, as well as to its subsequent transfer towards the audiences through specific journalistic messages. Given the subject matter we deal with, "information" is a message that causes changes in the public sphere or in people's opinions, regardless of its factual nature or truthfulness. P. Valček understands "information" as a material content or verbal form of a journalistic message.¹²

Both the general understanding of the term "information" and its scholarly perception have undergone rapid development, which is discussed by, for example, E. Mleziva. The author claims that journalistic information has gained new meanings, scope, functions and impact that are in sharp contrast with its original perception as a source of knowledge. He characterises "information" as:

- universal and present in every area of social life;
- integrative, i.e. allowing people who live all around the world to connect and communicate, thus contributing to globalization of society;
- multifunctional, because it is used for various purposes, in a wide range of social activities;
- dynamic – it is developing rapidly due to the technological progress and social demands.¹³

Information (in various visual, auditory or textual forms) reaches the viewer either immediately (via direct broadcasting and simultaneous television watching conditioned by the viewers' attention) or after a certain period of time in case the programme is pre-recorded or rebroadcast.¹⁴ Therefore, it can be stated that the impact of television broadcasting has not only a current, momentary effect on recipients, but also an additional, long-term or repetitive one.

Since TV stations (and television newsrooms in particular) receive a lot of information, which cannot be processed and published due to various reasons,¹⁵ editors are positioned as 'creators' of a certain reality. Information is selected according to the judgment of the editor-in-chief, the head editors, as well as editors

1 GÁLIK, S.: *Úvod do filozofie médií*. Trnava: FMK UCM, 2011, p. 45-46.

2 See: GREGUŠ, L., MINÁRIKOVÁ, J.: News Values in Slovak Television News. In *Communication Today*, 2016, Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 78-89; VIŠŇOVSKÝ, J.: *Televízia vo Veľkej Británii: História, fakty, súvislosti*. Trnava: FMK UCM, 2013.

3 See: RADOŠINSKÁ, J.: Cultural Aspects of the Post-Television Era: Television in Terms of Today's Media Culture. In *SGEM: International Multidisciplinary Scientific Conference on Social Sciences and Arts: Volume I*. Sofia: STEF 92 Technology, 2017, p. 141-148; ŠTEFANCOVÁ, V.: *Kam odchádza divák (K premene úlohy televízie a masových médií v spoločnosti)*. Nitra: UKF, 2016.

4 Despite the fact that the Internet is the most widely used medium of the young and middle-aged generations, in general, TV has kept its stable position of the most extensively sought information source, which is proven not only by results of representative researches (in Slovakia, e.g. the National Survey of Consumption, Media and Lifestyle, abbr. MML – TGI), but also by findings of various researches carried out in the academic environment.

5 OSVALDOVÁ, B.: Úvod. In OSVALDOVÁ, B. (ed.) et al.: *Zpravodajství v médiích*. Prague: Karolinum, 2011, p. 19.

6 Compare: VOLEK, J., URBÁNIKOVÁ, M.: In the Spiral of Mistrust: On the Decline of Public Trust in Czech Journalists. In *Central European Journal of Communication*, 2017, Vol. 10, No. 2, p. 159-179. [online]. [2019-03-10]. Available at: <https://www.cejc.ptks.pl/attachments/In-the-spiral-of-mistrust-On-the-decline-of-public-trust-in-Czech-journalists_2018-06-08_09-00-49.pdf>.

7 OSVALDOVÁ, B.: Úvod. In OSVALDOVÁ, B. (ed.) et al.: *Zpravodajství v médiích*. Prague: Karolinum, 2011, p. 19-20.

8 See: MIKHALEVA, G.: Hermeneutic Analysis of Television Programmes of English-Speaking Countries about School and University. In *Media Education (Mediaobrazovanie)*, 2018, Vol. 58, No. 4, p. 109-118. [online]. [2019-02-10]. Available at: <http://ejournal53.com/journals_n/1544016929.pdf>.

9 VOJTEK, J.: *Zákre anglicky písaného novinárstva (s ukázkami)*. Trnava: FMK UCM, 2012, p. 6.

10 Compare: GÁLIK, S.: Temporalita (nových) médií. In *Filozofia*, 2018, Vol. 73, No. 5, p. 408-417.

11 RADOŠINSKÁ, J.: Multiplatformové novinárstvo v kontexte mediálnej kultúry. In PRAVDOVÁ, H., RADOŠINSKÁ, J., VIŠŇOVSKÝ, J. (eds.): *Koncepty a praktiky multiplatformovej žurnalistiky: Slovensko v sieťach digitálnych diaľnic*. Trnava: FMK UCM, 2017, p. 115.

12 VALČEK, P.: *Slovník teórie médií A – Ž*. Bratislava: Literárne informačné centrum, 2011, p. 146.

13 MLEZIVA, E.: *Diktátúra informácií*. Plzeň: Vydavatelství a nakladatelství Aleše Čenka, 2004, p. 9.

14 GRACOVÁ, S. et al.: *Základy audiovizuálnej tvorby*. Trnava: FMK UCM, 2018, p. 73-74.

15 Note: In case the main news programme scheduled for broadcasting starts at 7.00 p.m. and ends at 7.30 p.m., and the information about a major event comes to the news room at 7.25 p.m., it is virtually impossible to include the message into the programme. The newsroom staff may create a read message that could interfere with the continuity and smoothness of the broadcasting as well as with the broadcaster's daily scheduling timeframe.

of particular departments; it passes through the 'gate', i.e. the gatekeeper who approves it to be broadcast or marks it as inappropriate for publishing. The selection depends on a variety of criteria that are affected by the value satiation of the message itself, the journalist's intelligence, journalistic practice in general, routines established in the given medium, but also by various pressures of influential economic groups or media owners.¹⁶ Thus, a certain reality, presented by the medium itself and perceived by recipients as a real aspect of the everyday world is created.¹⁷ It is based, in particular, on the idea of an assumed relation between the newscast and the reality reported by the media that is perceived as relatively reliable set of information about the world, people and societies.¹⁸ Its credibility lies in the presumption that the media are able to provide the recipient with what is really important, meaningful and relevant.¹⁹

Standard News Reporting Requirements and the Normative Theories of Media

Normative reporting requirements result from the position of news services as (often) the only source of information on the current events both at home and around the world, whereas this information has a very significant impact on society. While understanding newscast in this way, recipients do not have the opportunity to verify the published information through their own experience. Normative theories thus define standards and norms, according to which the performance of media organisations and journalists is assessed. At the same time, they also include certain expectations in terms of news structure, journalists' behaviour and media performance. Thus, if we are talking about normative theories, we are talking about the rights and responsibilities of media – based on their expected contribution to both an individual and society as a whole.²⁰

Late modern liberal-democratic societies consider it important to have reliable and competent sources of information that enable citizens to make sense of the world and make responsible decisions.²¹ In this respect, these citizens rely on media-disseminated news, which is associated with a great deal of expectations in terms of how the news content and its relationship to reality should look like. Normative theories thus help us define good practices in the production of news reports or determine the adequate ways information should be processed. The most common normative requirements include objectivity, balance and independence. These standards apply to practically all stages of processing information into a message.

Media are expected to deliver news that reflects democratic values, whereas these values may not match the political or economic goals of journalists or media owners. It means that the functions of media should be, in particular, to inform about, 'check up on' and at the same time 'watch' or criticise those possessing power in society or threatening democracy.²² An important element in the field of the normative theories and the impact of media products is, undoubtedly, the media audience.²³ The media do everything they can to attract and reach as many recipients as possible. As a result, they adjust their offer and change their behaviour. J. Volek

defines the term "audience" as a set of individuals who consistently or occasionally use media. Their activities are diverse, including different levels of distance kept from the media and inclination to varying modes of reception, not to forget their different media consumption choices and individual experience with the media content.²⁴ P. Valček looks at the media audiences in two ways, seeing them as spatially and demographically dispersed communities of recipients who obtain cultural or media products occasionally or systematically, or as various types of social activities that are typical for people using media.²⁵

The media audiences are undergoing various changes. We can, therefore, consider them as unstable, but also dynamic and volatile in terms of their choices. Audience changes are primarily caused by the technological possibilities related to receiving, processing and storing media reports. Instant access to information through digital media and technologies increases the recipients' expectation to be able to choose from the offer, especially by exploring the possibilities of expressing different behavioural patterns and personalising the selection in accordance with their own needs, interests, and so on. Thus, we are talking about an interactive audience choosing from multiple media offerings, about their rather uneven time management and content perception.²⁶ An interactive audience also takes for granted the possibility to create their own 'media programme' that would be in accordance with their actual mental 'setting' (feelings, opinions, interests, etc.). One-way communication becomes two-way communication where each audience member can more easily respond to mediated statements or become a creator of media content. Typical is the possibility of immediate feedback regarding the content and form of the statement (as well as the communicator themselves).²⁷ The television audiences are dynamic and thus less loyal to a specific TV station, switching between broadcasters frequently and sometimes even chaotically.²⁸ The decisive factors that influence selecting a TV channel are specific themes, contents or formats.

In their study *Uses and Gratifications Research*, E. Katz, J. G. Blumler and M. Gurevitch define four basic reasons why recipients consume television content:

1. Escaping from everyday reality. People need to forget about their everyday problems and worries by focusing on media entertainment.
2. Building personal relationships. The media can play the role of a 'partner'; in other words, repeated 'meetings' with news announcers can provide a lonely recipient with a feeling of having a true relationship or 'conversation' with the media.
3. Creating personal identity. The media provide the recipients with an infinite range of different social roles that allow the viewers to shape their lifestyles, imitate celebrities or even fully identify with fictitious heroes.
4. Survival. As the media and, above all, news stories offer a great deal of information, the recipient uses it to know the environment in which they live, to be able to survive in society.²⁹

According to M. W. Shanahan and N. Brown, avoiding the isolation and loneliness, establishing the feeling of participation and engagement, and ultimately fulfilling the need to stimulate imagination are the main reasons for seeking and using media.³⁰ As a result, individual members of the audiences access the media with certain expectations, for which they may receive – for them already known – 'rewards'. We understand them as the psychological effects that recipients appreciate. In this way, we can talk about a certain kind of satisfaction. These 'rewards' come either from the media type itself or from popular genres, formats

16 Compare: STEBLYNA, N.: Uncertain Geography of the Local News and Civic Participation in New Media Era. In *Communication Today*, 2018, Vol. 9, No. 1, p. 78, 91.

17 Note: The issue of selecting events for newscast and constructing (media) reality has been discussed by numerous foreign theorists, including W. Lippman, B. McNair, M. McCombs, D. Shaw, J. Galtung, M. Holmboe-Ruge, W. Schulz, J. Westerstahl and others.

18 TRAMPOTA, T.: *Zpravodajství*. Prague: Portál, 2006, p. 24.

19 Remark by the authors: J. P. Robinson and M. R. Levy, however, talk about overestimation of the TV newscast as a source of information. They have found out that many routine ways of production and presentation of the news are opposed to the proper grasping of the information on the side of the audience. On the other hand, D. A. Graber has proved that visual impressions help recipients recall the content of TV news even after a certain amount of time has passed, thus afterwards. In general, it is reported that the average level of obtaining notions from TV news in order to understand and recall the disseminated information is very low and such knowledge is only fragmentary.

20 McQUAIL, D.: *Úvod do teorie masové komunikace*. Prague: Portál, 2009, p. 174-178.

21 GRECUŠ, L., MINÁRIKOVÁ, J.: News Values in Slovak Television News. In *Communication Today*, 2016, Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 79-80.

22 HAGEN, L.: Informační kvalita a její měření. In HAGEN, L., KONČELÍK, J., REIFOVÁ, I. (eds.): *Analyza obsahu mediálních sdělení*. Prague: Karolinum, 2004, p. 51.

23 See also: HURAJOVÁ, A., MINÁRIKOVÁ, J.: *TV and Broadcasting: Basic Outlines and Current Position. Specialised Academic Textbook in English*. Trnava: FMK UCM, 2018.

24 VOLEK, J.: Publikum, jeho aktivita. In REIFOVÁ, I. (ed.) et al.: *Slovník mediální komunikace*. Prague: Portál, 2004, p. 197.

25 VALČEK, P.: *Slovník teorie médií A – Ž*. Bratislava: Literárne informačné centrum, 2011, p. 271-272.

26 RADOŠINSKÁ, J.: *Mediální zábava v 21. století*. Trnava: FMK UCM, 2016, p. 104-105.

27 HRADISKÁ, E.: Psychologická charakteristika publika. In HRADISKÁ, E., BREČKA, S., VYBÍRAL, Z. (eds.): *Psychologie médií*. Bratislava: BVŠP, 2009, p. 247-249.

28 See: NENADIĆ, I., OSTLING, A.: Media Innovation in Europe and Reinvention of Audiences: Between Citizens and Consumers. In *Media Studies*, 2018, Vol. 9, No. 17, p. 4-21. [online]. [2019-02-12]. Available at: <https://www.mediaudies.fpzg.hr/images/50022061/ms%20vol9%20br17.pdf>.

29 KATZ, E., BLUMLER, J. G., GUREVITCH, M.: Uses and Gratifications Research. In *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 1973, Vol. 37, No. 4, p. 513-515.

30 SHANAHAN, M. W., BROWN, N.: Radio Listening as a Function of Basic Human Need: Why Did Maslow Listen to Radio? In *Journal of Media Psychology*, 2002, Vol. 7, No. 3, p. 4-5.

or specific contents. Amongst the sought and achievable or already reached media contributions can be counted information, guidance, lessons, advice, distractions, social contacts, cultural satisfaction, emotional relaxation, lifestyle expressions, feeling of security, sexual excitement or fostering of values.³¹

News reporting can also cause 'narcotic' effects. This view has been expressed by D. Morley, who claims that audience research has shown very low remembering rates of information gained from the content offered to regular news viewers, i.e. certain slowdown or even 'narcotic' state. At the same time, he argues that the Uses and Gratifications Theory confirms the hypothesis that each recipient receives, uses and interprets a particular media content or product differently, and mostly understands it in a different way than the authors have intended.³²

Perception of News Content and Its Determinants

"Perception" refers to an inadvertent and unintentional impression. It is an immediate reflection and sensory presentation of reality by one's *psyche* or consciousness. It has systematic significance for understanding of psycho-semantic and aesthetic mechanisms of apperception.³³ Apperception is the dependence of each new sensation on one's previous empirical experience and, at the same time, on their mental state at the moment of the perception process. Thus, it is a 'past' experience.

According to S. Brečka, the perception process and processing of a media message consists of several components:

1. the cognitive component – the viewer learns about certain fragments of objective reality, while the level of cognition depends on the quality and form of information, but also on the ability of the recipient to identify, understand and actively process the information, i.e. acquire and grasp it;
2. the evaluation component – when perceiving mediated information, the viewer adopts a certain evaluative attitude; it is the basis for active processing of the contents. Evaluation is understood as the process of comparing one's own knowledge with the knowledge presented by the communicator (the evaluation level is therefore determined by the recipient's empirical experience, their current knowledge, intelligence, mood, etc.);
3. the transformation component – the transformation of the perceived message and its subsequent inclusion into one's own cognitive activity takes place, thus the message can become a source of new knowledge, an instruction for action or, for example, guidance that can be used in everyday life;
4. the communication component – within this component, we include interpersonal communication and feedback.³⁴

Perception is also determined by the identification of meaning embedded into individual media contents by their authors. With certain types of texts, they try to make the recipients perceive and understand the content in the exactly same way it was mediated by the author. This is called "preferred reading". Broadcasts (or, in fact, any other types of media products) contain a hidden message as to how the presented texts are to be perceived and interpreted. In case the recipient identifies this message, it is highly probable that their reaction will be in accordance with the author's expectation.³⁵ The Birmingham School's theorists and researchers claim that a text is not created by its writing, but by its subsequent reading. Thus, the meaning of a text does not arise on the basis of what the author intended to put in it, but on the basis of its understanding by the recipient, or rather on the basis of what the reader is able to read in it.³⁶ It can be concluded that every

news story activates multiple meanings in various recipients, thus it is poly-semantic in its nature. Recipients possess a certain "semiotic power" on the basis of which they can choose and activate meanings using their own abilities and experience. This semiotic power, however, is not absolute and it is determined by the content of the message and the context of its perception. This means that by changing or modifying any of the elements in the 'recipient – message – context' chain the same media content can generate a different meaning.³⁷

In order for news editors to convey certain meanings to the audience, these have to be 'encoded' in a certain way during the process of creating a news story. However, the recipient might not possess the given code and thus, when 'decoding' the message, they might come to a meaning different from the one intended by the media professional. S. Allen, therefore, understands encoding and decoding as relatively autonomous processes.³⁸ S. Hall proposed the theory of encoding and decoding and defined three different ways media audiences may use to 'decode' a mediated message:

- dominant/hegemonic position – the meaning decoded by the recipient is identical with the meaning encoded into the message by its creator;
- negotiated position – the recipient knows what kind of meaning has been encoded into the message by its sender; however, they do not identify with this meaning, and they do not understand it as natural;
- oppositional position – expresses the recipient's absolute rejection of the meanings encoded into the message by its author.³⁹

Thus, understanding is an important element of perception. It comprises the connection between conscious and unconscious mental processes, resulting in the revelation of objects' nature (in our case media messages, various relationships or otherwise hidden social phenomena). It is a subjective experience of the feeling of satisfaction. As a result, the recipients also need to invest their attention and time in media products enabling certain experience. Understanding is connected with remembering, recipients' emotions, as well as with their previous empirical experience. In a logically arranged message, there is a higher degree of probability that the most important parts of the whole and the relationships between different phenomena will be understood and then remembered. A previous experience may facilitate the understanding of a media pronouncement.⁴⁰ If the recipient has seen a media message dealing with the same or very similar topic, it is highly probable that the currently watched media content will be understood, too.

Relevant elements of perception of media products can be defined as perception determinants that affect all stages and phases of perception. Their impact is obvious in case of active audiences that approach media content through critical thinking. Passive audiences are not affected by perception determinants as this approach assumes that the perception process is the same for each recipient and that it leads to the same effect.⁴¹ Active audiences possess various demographically determined competences, such as ethnicity, sex, education, temperament, personal experience, etc. Sharing (or not sharing) the existing cultural patterns and modes of behaviour, either individual or social, is crucial, too. These patterns are related to 'decoding' or framing of media messages.⁴²

The key factors affecting the viewers' choice (from the audiences' point of view) are discussed by D. McQuail. These include personal attributes (age, sex, marital status, income level, job title, whether the recipient is a student or not, lifestyle, specific personality features); social origin and environment (social class, education, religion, place of residence, political, cultural or family background); media-related needs (looking for company, distraction, entertainment, etc.); personal taste and affection (mainly in relation to certain genres, formats or a specific content); general habits expressed while using media in leisure time (using

31 McQUAIL, D.: *Úvod do teórie masovej komunikácie*. Prague: Portál, 2009, p. 438.

32 MORLEY, D.: *Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies*. London: Routledge, 1992, p. 51-52.

33 VALČEK, P.: *Slovník teórie médií A – Z*. Bratislava: Literárne informačné centrum, 2011, p. 245.

34 BREČKA, S.: *Teoreticko-metodologické východiská žurnalistiky a masovej komunikácie*. Bratislava: Novinársky študijný ústav, 1987, p. 35-42.

35 HRADISKÁ, E.: Psychológia mediálnej percepcie. In HRADISKÁ, E., BREČKA, S., VYBÍRAL, Z. (eds.): *Psychológia médií*. Bratislava: BVŠP, 2009, p. 300-303.

36 Note: Under "reading" we may understand also auditory perception of a text presented, from which we "read" on basis of our ability to process meanings of spoken words and sounds.

37 TRAMPOTA, T.: *Zpravodajství*. Prague: Portál, 2006, p. 133.

38 ALLAN, S.: *News Culture*. Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2010, p. 157.

39 HALL, S.: Encoding/Decoding. In DURHAM, M. G., KELLNER, D. M. (eds.): *Media and Cultural Studies*. Malden, Oxford, Victoria: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2006, p. 164-169.

40 PRAVDOVÁ, H., UNGEROVÁ, M.: *Periodical Press and Media in the Online Environment: Specialised Academic Textbook in English*. Trnava: FMK UCM, 2018, p. 37.

41 VRABEC, N., PETKÁČOVÁ, P.: Television Broadcasting and Its Multimodal Approach in Relation to Visual and Hearing Impairment in Slovakia. In *European Journal of Science and Theology*, 2016, Vol. 12, No. 4, p. 203-213.

42 See also: VIŠNOVSKÝ, J., BALÁŽ, M.: Nastofovanie tém a vplyv lokálnych médií na formovanie verejnej agendy. Prípadová štúdia. In *Communication Today*, 2012, Vol. 3, No. 2, p. 105-120.

media at a particular time, economic possibilities of the audiences); conscious choice (i.e. the recipients choose what they will watch and during what time horizon; this mainly concerns active audiences who usually plan their media use in advance); specific context of media usage (in relation to sociability or the place where media are used)⁴³ and chance. Coincidence is an important part of the process of audiences encountering media, while the impact of chance (opportunity) reduces our ability to realistically explain the composition of the audiences and their subsequent choice of content.⁴⁴

The elements of the recipient's personal structure that determine their relationship to media and, at the same time, perception are, in particular, sex, age, social role, social status, intrinsic dispositions, perception mechanisms, cognition, understanding, imagination, emotions, feelings, thinking, memory, speech, education, intelligence, knowledge, experience, needs, expectations, opinions, attitudes, assumptions, etc. Thus, the attention passivity, perception selectivity or experience impact can present barriers to perception mechanisms employed by television viewers.

Research Methodology

Objectives

The aim of the research was to define the position and role of TV news reporting in everyday lives of a selected research sample consisting of recipients living in the Slovak Republic and the importance and relevance of obtaining new information or, more precisely, updated information on long-term processes and events, with emphasis on spreading general knowledge. The research also reflected on the recipients' ability to understand the meaning of television newscast. An important attribute was the recipients themselves and their perception of presented news stories. That is why we focused on their ability to receive and evaluate broadcast news in light of the theory of information quality of news. The main criteria (also known as the general information quality of a news item) are, according to L. Hagen, relevance, truthfulness and comprehensibility.⁴⁵ Amongst the qualitative criteria, we may also include compliance of a news report with information values, studied e.g. in the research article published in *Communication Today*⁴⁶ by two co-authors of this study.

One of the main reasons to carry out the research was the fact that there has been no academic inquiry focused on perception of television news in Slovakia yet, which would discuss the perception of TV news reporting in terms of its relationship to recipients and the importance of informing about the course of events in society or, more precisely, the perception of television news by their viewers. However, some commercial researches⁴⁷ focus on this issue, trying to evaluate the level of objectivity of TV news.

Partial notions about the popularity of television as a medium and the perception of its objectivity were presented in the research carried out by J. Višňovský in 2014 (on a sample of 616 respondents). However, it primarily examined the relationship of newspaper readers to media products and their perception of differences between print and online newspapers.⁴⁸ Interesting and inspiring were also results of the questionnaire aimed at monitoring the media competence and level of media literacy in the senior population of Slovakia, which was carried out as a part of research activities of the International Media Education Centre (IMEC) at the Faculty of Mass Media Communication UCM in Trnava by D. Petranová. The researcher evaluated 1,022 structured

43 Compare: GÁLIKOVÁ-TOLNAIOVÁ, S.: Determinants of Humanising Effect of Modern (Electronic) Media. In *European Journal of Science and Theology*; 2014, Vol. 10, Suppl. 1, p. 195-206.

44 McQUAIL, D.: *Úvod do teórie masovej komunikácie*. Prague: Portál, 2009, p. 440-441.

45 HAGEN, L.: Informační kvalita a její měření. In HAGEN, L., KONČELÍK, J., REIFOVÁ, I. (eds.): *Analýza obsahu mediálních sdělení*. Prague: Karolinum, 2004, p. 51.

46 GRECUŠ, L., MINÁRIKOVÁ, J.: News Values in Slovak Television News. In *Communication Today*; 2016, Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 78-89.

47 Note: The National Survey of Consumption, Media and Lifestyle called MML – TGI has been continually carried out by the company *Median SK* since 1997. It is a representative research conducted by a combination of face-to-face interviews, online questionnaires and personal or telephone conversations. In terms of media consumption, it monitors the readership of dailies, weeklies, monthlies and bi-monthlies, along with the ratings of radio and TV stations. This company also regularly organises the research MML Omnibus, which takes notice of the objectivity of news reporting in relation to Slovak nationwide TV stations.

48 See: VIŠŇOVSKÝ, J.: *Aktuálne otázky teórie a praxe žurnalistiky v ére internetu*. Trnava: FMK UCM, 2015.

questionnaires with closed questions, and focused, besides other topics, on the use of individual types of media amongst seniors and measuring the extent of media competence within this age group of recipients.⁴⁹

Understandably, we are fully aware of our research's potential limits. These include the size of the research sample – results of the research thus cannot be generalised – and the highly specific object of the research, i.e. news stories broadcast by the commercial *TV Markíza*. On the other hand, using these particular research methods makes it possible to carry out the research continually in order to monitor possible differences over a longer period of time.

Analysis of the Methodological Approach

With regard to research requirements and objectives, we used triangulation of several research methods and techniques. The first part of the research consisted of a questionnaire survey and a quantitative content analysis. The second part was conducted in the form of focus groups in connection with a standardised questionnaire aimed at the respondents' ability to understand a TV news story and estimate its importance.

Regarding the structure of the primary questionnaire, besides identifying questions (gender, age, residence and education), it consisted of 16 questions (a combination of closed and semi-closed questions). The questions focused on:

- physical and mental state of the respondents (question 1);
- their preferred source of information (questions 2 and 3);
- their experience related to watching television news (questions 4, 5 and 6);
- the respondents' attitudes towards television news (questions 7, 8 and 9);
- perceptions of its objectivity and credibility (questions 10, 11, 12 and 13);
- finding out whether news stories are the object of the respondents' discussions and social encounters (questions 14 and 15);
- thematic preferences of the respondents in terms of seeking news (question 16).

We used a coding book and record sheets to note down results of the subsequent content analysis. The following identification variables were recorded in the codebook: the broadcast date, the rank of a single news item within the programme, the footage, the topic, the news value and the information quality.

To verify the information function of television news via the research, we also used a short test of the respondents' general knowledge on the current affairs taken both before presenting them the selected news stories (the 'input' test) and after doing so (the 'output' test). It consisted of 28 closed questions, each with three possible answers to choose from. All of the given questions were associated with information included in the selected news items. We used the software *SPSS Statistics, version 23*, to process the results. The obtained data was rounded off to one decimal place in numerical and percentage terms. The data was also included into the codebook, either numerically or verbally.

Operationalisation of Terms

We operationalised the term "news report" for research purposes, formulation of goals and hypotheses. We defined it as a complex news contribution, which is presented in TV news and authored by a specific reporter. We do not consider as a news report a shot or any other part(s) of the newscast television programme, which are not the outputs of editorial work (contents created with the aim of informing the general public).

49 For more information, see: PETRANOVÁ, D.: *Mediálna gramotnosť seniorov*. Trnava: FMK UCM, 2013.

Formulation of Hypotheses

- H1:** Recipients will achieve better results of the general knowledge test after watching the selected news stories than before their reception.
- H2:** Respondents in worse mental and physical condition will score poorer results in terms of ordering and determining the news quality than respondents in positive mental state and good physical condition.
- H3:** Respondents with higher education will achieve better results in both the general knowledge test and ordering presented news reports on basis of their quality.

Research Material

The research material consisted of news stories broadcast by the commercial television station *TV Markíza*. The reason of this selection was the forefront position of the broadcaster on the Slovak television market and the ratings of its main evening newscast programme that are highest amongst all Slovak TV broadcasters. The selected contributions were presented during *TV Markíza's* main evening newscast programme called *Television News*. The research material was randomly selected from *Television News* broadcast between 27th February 2017 and 12th March 2017. We selected 6 domestic and 3 foreign news reports broadcast during this period.

We used the quantitative content analysis of the research material and then we conducted inquiries based on focus groups in order to find out more about how the people participating in the research perceived those particular news stories. The total length of the researched news items was 24 minutes and 4 seconds. The research material included these news stories:⁵⁰

- News Story 1 – *Mečiar about His Amnesties* (broadcast on 8th March 2017);⁵¹
- News Story 2 – *He Wants to Stay at the Castle* (broadcast on 10th March 2017);⁵²
- News Story 3 – *Good News and Uncertainty* (broadcast on 10th March 2017);⁵³
- News Story 4 – *Fire at the Castle Krásna Hôrka* (broadcast on 10th March 2017);⁵⁴
- News Story 5 – *Uniforms in Schools* (broadcast on 3rd March 2017);⁵⁵
- News Story 6 – *Threatening Words of Erdogan* (broadcast on 6th March 2017);⁵⁶
- News Story 7 – *Another Mega Investment on Its Way* (broadcast on 6th March 2017);⁵⁷
- News Story 8 – *Saving Money Even on Diapers* (broadcast on 6th March 2017);⁵⁸
- News Story 9 – *They Want Weiss to Face Trial* (broadcast on 6th March 2017).⁵⁹

50 Remark by the authors: The selected news stories were broadcast in Slovak language. The following titles have been translated for the purposes of this research study. Original titles of the news reports are specified in the references below.

51 KREJČA, H. (Director of the Centre of News and Current Affairs): *Mečiar o svojich amnestiách*. *Televízne noviny*. [The Main Evening Newscasting Programme of TV Markíza]. Broadcast on 8th March 2017. Bratislava : TV Markíza, 2017.

52 KREJČA, H. (Director of the Centre of News and Current Affairs): *Chce zostať na hrade*. *Televízne noviny*. [The Main Evening Newscasting Programme of TV Markíza]. Broadcast on 10th March 2017. Bratislava : TV Markíza, 2017.

53 KREJČA, H. (Director of the Centre of News and Current Affairs): *Dobré správy aj neistota*. *Televízne noviny*. [The Main Evening Newscasting Programme of TV Markíza]. Broadcast on 10th March 2017. Bratislava : TV Markíza, 2017.

54 KREJČA, H. (Director of the Centre of News and Current Affairs): *Požiar Krásnej Hôrky*. *Televízne noviny*. [The Main Evening Newscasting Programme of TV Markíza]. Broadcast on 10th March 2017. Bratislava : TV Markíza, 2017.

55 KREJČA, H. (Director of the Centre of News and Current Affairs): *Uniformy v školách*. *Televízne noviny*. [The Main Evening Newscasting Programme of TV Markíza]. Broadcast on 3rd March 2017. Bratislava : TV Markíza, 2017.

56 KREJČA, H. (Director of the Centre of News and Current Affairs): *Výhrážné slová Erdogana*. *Televízne noviny*. [The Main Evening Newscasting Programme of TV Markíza]. Broadcast on 6th March 2017. Bratislava : TV Markíza, 2017.

57 KREJČA, H. (Director of the Centre of News and Current Affairs): *Prichádza ďalšia megainvestícia*. *Televízne noviny*. [The Main Evening Newscasting Programme of TV Markíza]. Broadcast on 6th March 2017. Bratislava : TV Markíza, 2017.

58 KREJČA, H. (Director of the Centre of News and Current Affairs): *Šetrenie aj na plienkach*. *Televízne noviny*. [The Main Evening Newscasting Programme of TV Markíza]. Broadcast on 6th March 2017. Bratislava : TV Markíza, 2017.

59 KREJČA, H. (Director of the Centre of News and Current Affairs): *Weissá chce postaviť pred súd*. *Televízne noviny*. [The Main Evening Newscasting Programme of TV Markíza]. Broadcast on 6th March 2017. Bratislava : TV Markíza, 2017.

Respondents (Research Sample)

There were six groups of respondents who became the objects of our inquiry. These participants live in six different Slovak towns, namely in Bratislava, Trnava, Nová Baňa, Banská Bystrica, Prešov and Košice. Each group consisted of 20 people. Their age range, degree of education, work background and social status varied. 120 respondents took part in the research.

The socio-demographic characteristics were as follows: 40.9% of the respondents were men compared to 59.1% who were women. The respondents were divided into six groups according to their age. Out of these 120 respondents, 8 respondents (6.7%) were 16 to 20 years old, 49 respondents (40.8%) were 21 to 25 years of age, 22 respondents (18.3%) were aged 26 to 30, 16 respondents (13.4%) were 31 to 35 years old, 7 participants (5.8%) were aged 36 to 40 and the remaining 18 respondents (15%) were older than 41. Based on the criterion of the achieved level of education, 37.5% of the respondents claimed having a Bachelor's and 32.5% a Master's degree. Elementary or secondary school was the highest level of education for 29.2% of the respondents. A single respondent had earned a doctoral degree (0.8%).

Results Interpretation and Main Outcomes of the Research

Newscast as a Source of Information and Perception of TV News amongst the Respondents

58.3% of all the respondents state that media are the primary source of information present in their everyday lives. This fact shows that the respondents get the latest information by watching, reading or listening to media. Surprisingly, 56.7% of the research sample also claim that they consider educational institutions to be one of the main sources of information. As stated above, more than a half of the respondents consider media to be the general source of information; in addition, even more (71.7%) of the participating people say that they obtain information from news stories. However, they do not follow news reporting regularly, but only occasionally, once a week or month, casually, a few times a week. On the other hand, 29.2% of the respondents follow newscast daily or even more than once a day. The most numerous are radio listeners (43.2%) and those who search for news online, i.e. on the Internet (40.3%). Taking into consideration all these facts, only one third of all respondents have regular (daily) experience with 'decoding' news.

The respondents were also asked about the value they attribute to newscast in their everyday lives. 22.5% of them consider seeking news to be their everyday routine, a certain ritual. 13.3% of the respondents consider news to be a certain legitimization of social hierarchy and 4.4% perceive newscast to be a kind of relax. As many as 64 respondents (53.3%) see news reports as their everyday source of information. 75.8% of the research participants perceive newscast as educative as it offers current information. The respondents who act positively towards newscast (38.3%) explain their attitude by claiming that news broadens their actual knowledge of home and foreign affairs. They mostly mention information originating abroad. Others (26.7%) consider newscast to be a source of all kinds of information, not only news stories related to domestic political events, foreign affairs or economic development.

News reporting offers timely information and thus broadens the general knowledge possessed by the public. 10% of the asked people think that news is educational as it 'boosts' critical thinking. For the purpose of the research the respondents provided more insight into their claim. They are aware of journalistic information's ability to improve their knowledge of general social issues. Influenced by news stories, many of the participants tend to change their existing opinions on particular events, topics or social issues. Given this, newscast is considered to be one of the main determinants of opinion-making. As S. Hall would say, these

recipients assume the negotiated position. The respondents verify information based on their experience; they neither 'decode' information in the exactly same way the sender 'encoded' it nor they refuse the dominant code. On the other hand, those respondents (19.2%) who do not consider newscast to be educational (or providing them with new pieces of knowledge) claim that news reporting is tendentious and biased. The most common words they used to describe news were "distorted" and "manipulated".

Only 30% of the respondents prefer TV newscast. Most of the respondents (84 out of 120) claim that they watch television news irregularly – mainly once a week or a few times a week or once a month. However, the frequency attributed to TV news is in most cases higher than how often they follow newscast in general (in TV, radio and elsewhere). Only 16 respondents watch TV news regularly. The news programme broadcast by *TV Markíza* is preferred by 38.3% of the respondents. This does not mean, however, that the viewers are used to specific coding of this media organisation. Many of *TV Markíza's* newscast viewers also watch news programmes broadcast by the specialised commercial TV station *TAS* (49.2%) and seek news offered by the public-service television or the public-service radio – together called *RTVS* or *Slovak Radio and Television* (46.7%).

Regardless of the gathered data, the research proves that TV newscast can be regarded as an important source of information present in the respondents' everyday lives. This fact is also underlined by the general knowledge test's results. The respondents' scores achieved in the general knowledge test taken after watching the research material significantly increased compared to the results of the same knowledge test taken prior to watching it. The difference between the results of two identical knowledge tests is statistically significant; prior to watching TV newscast the respondents scored 24.00 on average (median = 24.00). Later on, after watching the selected news stories, the same respondents scored 25.00. The outcome data was $z = -5.725$, $p < .001$ (based on the non-parametric Wilcoxon signed-ranks test). Statistically significant is the correlation of two variables, according to Spearman's correlation coefficient ($r_s = .790$). Detailed results are available in Table 2 below.

Our testing proves that the respondents were able to score better in the general knowledge test after watching the research material and 'decoding' it. By proving that news media have both informational and educational function in society, one of the basic functions of news can be confirmed as well. We may assume that newscast broadens the respondents' actual knowledge of domestic and foreign affairs.

Perception of TV Newscast in the Context of Mental and Physical State of the Respondents

As mentioned above, we monitored both mental and physical state of the respondents as one of the important determinants of the process of perceiving news, 'decoding' presented messages and acknowledging actual information. 61.7% of the respondents describe their mental state as good, positive. On the other hand, only 42.5% of the asked people say they are in good or positive physical condition. Altogether, 35.8% of the respondents exhibit both good mental state and positive physical condition. Moreover, as much as 20% of all participants declare that they do not feel well – either mentally or physically. However, neither positive nor negative (subjectively defined) physical condition of the respondents correlates with the results of the general knowledge tests they underwent, no matter if before or after watching TV newscast. This would mean that the subjective perception of one's physical condition does not in any way influence their ability to perceive, 'decode' or get information from newscast.

Surprisingly, though, the results prove that the respondents who felt well mentally achieved better results in the first general knowledge test (the 'input' test) than people who considered themselves to be in bad mental condition. Another positive correlation exists between increasing age of the respondents and growing score achieved during the first general knowledge test (i.e. the 'input' test). The older the respondents were, the better 'input' test results they were able to achieve. Another interesting fact is that after watching the research material and taking the 'output' knowledge test, the correlation between the respondents' rising age and better test results lost its statistical significance. The same applied in case of the correlation between the

respondents' mental state and the results of the second general knowledge test. No correlation was recorded. Once the respondents saw the newscast, they achieved better results of the general knowledge ('output') test, but their mental state or age did not influence the score, at least not significantly. The outcomes of the research confirm that before watching the selected news stories, the respondent's mental condition and age played a certain role. However, after seeing the newscast, this statistical relation ceased to exist.

Given these facts, we assume that perception of news reports, i.e. 'decoding' and getting knowledge via audio-visual perception mechanisms makes the differences amongst people to disappear – this applies to both new knowledge as well as already known information. The respondents experiencing negative mental state can 'decode' messages and acquire information as sufficiently as the people who feel well mentally. Moreover, neither mental state nor physical condition of the respondents have any effect on their ability to rank news stories on basis of their importance (there is no significant, statistically proven correlation). This would mean that it is only one's mental state that has an influence on their perception and acquirement of new knowledge, and only before watching TV news. This temporary influence disappears once a recipient starts to watch the news.

Perception of TV News in the Context of the Respondents' Education

Our assumption that education level is one of the key determinants of obtaining new information (i.e. that having higher education will result in better test results regarding the general knowledge, as well as in more accurate determination of the importance of specific news items) cannot be confirmed. The research findings suggest that there is no statistically significant correlation between the respondents' education level and the test results they achieved, neither before nor after watching the selected news reports. Therefore, we cannot say that the respondents with Master's degrees achieved significantly better or worse results than the other research participants. Moreover, there is no direct correlation between rating the individual news stories by their importance and education level.

However, regarding two specific education groups (the people with Bachelor's degrees and the people with Master's degrees), there is a statistically significant difference between their ability to rank news reports by their importance. Surprisingly, the respondents with Bachelor's degrees ranked the watched news reports significantly better than the participants with various kinds of Master's degrees.

Perceiving Usefulness of News and Credibility of TV Newscast

Regarding the attribute of importance and usefulness of news, more than 50% of the respondents identified as important and useful these particular news items: News Story 3, News Story 4, News Story 7 and News Story 8. However, News Story 1 and News Story 6 were marked only as important. News Story 5 was regarded as not important and News Story 9 as both unimportant and useless. In case of News Story 2 none of the available viewpoints reached more than 50%.

The fact that the respondents decoded some of the news stories included in the research material contrary to their authors' intentions may be related to applying the negotiated decoding position, but also to internal dispositions of the respondents, mainly their overall relationship to television newscast. After all, newscast was considered to be trustworthy and truthful by less than 1/3 of the respondents. On the other hand, it was marked as untrusted by 37.5% of the respondents, 29.2% defined it as false, and up-to 72.5% of the research participants regarded news as biased and subjective. Manipulation with public opinion was the most common reason for seeing news as untrusted. Moreover, other reasons such as shattering reality, deliberate formation of what people should think and forcing a particular view were mentioned frequently as well. Other significant reasons of the respondents' rather negative attitude towards TV news were as follows:

- subjectivity and distortion of information, especially in case of editors,
- not presenting all global and national events in accordance with their importance,
- providing unverified or incomplete information,

- being unable to achieve complete objectivity,
- failing to handle the choice of relevant topics,
- the fact that any 'objective' news story is based on a journalist's decision to create it and their opinion, and therefore subjective.

Several respondents claimed that their distrust of television newscast results from the issues of media ownership and economic interests of television companies. They pointed mainly at the notable absence of television's independence from various lobbyists and pressure groups, political and economic alike. Thus, according to them, political parties, financial groups, but also the media owners themselves negatively affect impartiality and objectivity of television news. For example, they may favour one particular political party, and thus offer one-sided reporting to influence the general public to adopt the same opinion. As it comes to economic interests of televisions, the respondents named mainly the key effort to achieve the best ratings and strengthen their existing market positions. However, regarding objectivity, impartiality, truthfulness and credibility of television news, several respondents also claim that it is important to take into consideration which particular television company we are talking about, because it is impossible to preserve the same relationship to all of them.

Balance and Information Quality of TV News

While evaluating the selected news stories and determining their information qualities, equity and balance, more than 50% of the respondents marked up to 5 out of 9 reports as objective (News Story 2, News Story 4, News Story 5, News Story 7 and News Story 8). As it comes to the three remaining news items (News Story 1, News Story 6 and News Story 9), more than a half of the respondents were unable to evaluate their objectiveness. One news report (News Story 3) was evaluated ambiguously (as neither objective nor subjective). Therefore, the respondents were not able to evaluate this message's objectiveness.

However, at the same time, every single report was considered as balanced and independent by 88.5% of the respondents. Regarding any undesirable subjective assessments or opinions expressed by the news reports' creators, based on the results of our research, 91.4% of the respondents claimed there was no such misconduct. Despite the fact that up to 72.5% of all respondents consider TV news as a whole as subjective and one-sided (as noted above), they evaluate these specific news reports differently. This paradox can refer either to their inability to evaluate news reports properly or to their inaccurate opinion on news subjectivity which results from prejudices present in the contemporary society. After all, today's journalism is all about being the promptest and most up-to-date; given that our society is marked by uncertainty, constant suspicions and volatility of values, it is only natural that their trust in television news (or any news for that matter) has decreased rapidly.

As our findings suggest, television news is considered to be significantly influenced by media companies and political parties. Moreover, most television companies present such views themselves, accusing their direct competitors of being economically or politically biased. Of course, this is not seen only in terms of television production but also in other mass media (in radio, the press and on the Internet, especially news portals available online). On the one hand, the media recipients are confronted with the opinion that media bring biased, untrue and incomplete information on a daily basis. On the other hand, as it comes to perception and 'decoding' of specific news stories, most of them either cannot identify such deficiencies or are unable to evaluate them. It is thus necessary to point at the fact that the news stories where an overwhelming majority of the respondents said they could not assess their objectivity, informed about the former Slovak Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar, the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the controversial Slovak footballer Vladimír Weiss. All three news stories thus articulated expressions of publicly known people or certain information on them.

Regarding the information quality of news, the respondents state that TV news is presented in a clear and understandable way. As of some cases of clarity lack, they rather pointed to lack of objectivity or balance of views than to clarity of the news report itself. The news reports' clarity is also proved the fact that most of

the respondents were able to 'decode' the main idea or essence of the individual news stories. Regarding five news reports out of nine, most of the respondents were able to define their main ideas either accurately or at least approximately. There were two reports (News Story 4 and News Story 5) with the same amount of correct 'decoding': their main ideas were correctly identified by more than 50 people included in the entire research sample. However, 'decoding' of two particular news reports was very weak – one topic was related to foreign or rather international news (News Story 6, i.e. *Threatening Words of Erdoğan*), while the other to domestic news (News Story 9: *They Want Weiss to Face Trial*).

We assume that generally speaking, the respondents are able to 'decode' television news reports, perceive their essence and evaluate them critically. However, we cannot forget another important human factor, which influences perception of news and its 'decoding'. We talk about the external influences originating within society or amongst people living in our neighbourhoods. According to the research results, books and family or friends are considered to be some of the most significant sources of information we take into account. This opinion was expressed by 46% of the respondents. Regarding news stories, approximately 76.8% of all respondents communicate about them with their relatives and acquaintances. On the other hand, only 45% of the respondents trust these 'mediated' interpretations, while 55% of them think otherwise – that their close relatives cannot 'decode' news well and thus provide them with inaccurate or incomplete information, which needs to be further verified and based on their own experience, confronted with their personal opinions. However, it is important who exactly interprets a news story for them and which TV newscast programme has disseminated it in the first place.

Verification of Hypotheses

Normality of scale variables (the general knowledge test taken before reception of news, the general knowledge test taken after reception of news, news ranking) was used to conduct statistic evaluation of the obtained data. It was tested visually by inspection of Q-Q graphs and Shapiro-Wilko test of normality. Standard distribution of the data was confirmed only in case of the general knowledge test taken before news reception and only in the sub-group consisting of women. For this reason, we used the non-parametric statistical tests.⁶⁰

There were two extreme values (outliers), which appeared in the data, one dealing with the variable "General Knowledge Test after News Reception" and second with the variable "Order of News". Both extreme values reached Z-score higher than 3.29 (or lower than -3.29) and were therefore removed for the purposes of statistical tests. The following table provides a total overview of the descriptive data dealing with the given scale variables:

Table 1: Descriptive data

		Descriptive Data		
		Test before Reception	Test after Reception	Order of News
N	Valid	120	119	119
	Missing	0	1	1
Mean		23.53	24.58	0.98
Median		24	25	1
Std. Deviation		2.777	2.682	1.017
Variance		7.714	7.195	1.034
Range		11	12	4

60 FIELD, A.: *Discovering Statistics Using SPSS*. London : SAGE, 2009, p. 57-60.

Percentiles	Minimum	17	16	0
	25	21	23	0
	50	24	25	1
	75	26	27	2
	Maximum	28	28	4

Source: Own processing in SPSS, version 23, 2018

No statistically important difference was proven between women and men in any of the three evaluated scale variables. Thus, testing of hypotheses was conducted on the whole research sample without further segmentation based on sex. Due to low amount of the respondents with elementary education and a doctoral university degree, these groups were not included into the testing.

Both groups possessing secondary education (with/without the school-leaving exam) were merged into a new category "Secondary" in order to avoid further decrease in the already small group of the research participants with secondary education without the school-leaving exam. Therefore, only groups with "Secondary Education", "Higher Education of First Degree" and "Higher Education of Second Degree" were included into the final testing.

H1: Recipients will achieve better results of the general knowledge test after watching the selected news stories than before their reception.

We used the non-parametric Wilcoxon signed-ranks test in order to compare possible differences between the results of the general knowledge tests taken before and after reception of the selected news stories (the 'input' and 'output' knowledge). The difference between 'input' score (median = 24.00) and 'output' score (median = 25.00) was statistically significant ($z = -5.725, p < .001$).

Focusing on the individual research participants, we were able to confirm that 72 respondents out of 120 improved their 'input' scores and achieved better results of the 'output' test; on the other hand, 22 respondents had worse 'output' scores than 'input' scores and in 25 cases there were no changes whatsoever. The hypothesis was therefore verified.

H2: Respondents in worse mental and physical condition will score poorer results in terms of ordering and determining the news quality than respondents in positive mental state and good physical condition.

In order to investigate the relationship between the respondents' mental and physical condition, several other variables, the test results achieved before and after reception of the newscast and ordering the watched news reports, Spearman's correlation coefficient was applied. The results of the knowledge test taken before the news reception statistically significantly correlated with the results of the knowledge test taken after the news perception ($r_s = .790$), age ($r_s = .288$) and mental condition ($r_s = .232$).

The results of the knowledge test taken after the news reception correlated in a statistically significant way also with ordering the watched news reports ($r_s = -.242$). Determining order of the news stories did not correlate with any other variable. The hypothesis was therefore falsified; however, the attributes of mental state and age positively correlated with the results of the general knowledge test taken before the news reception.

H3: Respondents with higher education will achieve better results in both the general knowledge test and ordering presented news reports on basis of their quality.

As resulted from the correlation matrix (for more information, see Table 2 – Spearman's rho correlation), there is no statistically significant correlation between education and results of the general knowledge test. Kruskal-Wallis test was used for further investigation of the individual education groups in

relation to the results of the general knowledge test. However, no statistically significant difference amongst the results of the individual groups was proved ("Secondary Education", "Higher Education of First Degree", "Higher Education of Second Degree"); neither in case of the general knowledge test taken before the news reception nor the second one taken after it.

On the contrary, there is a statistically significant difference amongst the groups in terms of ordering the news reports $2(3) = 7.539, p = .023$. The acquired score related to ranking the news items is statistically different for the groups "Higher Education of First Degree" and "Higher Education of Second Degree" ($p = .019$). The respondents with Bachelor's degrees reached much better scores than the respondents with Master's degrees. The hypothesis was therefore falsified.

Table 2: Spearman's rho correlation

Spearman's Rho Correlation						
	Test after Reception	Order of News	Age	Education	Mental Condition	Physical Condition
Test before Reception	.790**	-.174	.288**	.026	.232*	.138
Test after Reception		-.242**	.163	.083	.139	.128
Order of News			-.070	-.172	-.114	-.099
Age				.156	.207*	.156
Education					-.011	.065
Mental Condition						.367**

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Source: Own processing in SPSS, version 23, 2018

Conclusions

Our research proves a clear position of TV newscast as an important information source present in everyday lives of recipients, which provides them with relevant knowledge on domestic, but also foreign and international affairs. At the same time, it is a useful tool for obtaining updated information on long-term economic, political and cultural processes and events. Thus, it offers news stories the viewers are able to process, remember and later recall. As shown through the results of testing the respondents' general knowledge, which was carried out after their reception of nine TV news reports (i.e. the 'output' test), many research participants were able to achieve significantly better scores than before, thus during the test of the respondents' general knowledge taken prior to the news reception (the 'input' test).

We found out that in relation to acquiring information or in terms of one's ability to order individual news items on basis of their significance, no important impact of either the mental and physical condition of the viewer, or their education and age, can be seen. However, the age and mental condition had an influence on the results of the general knowledge test carried out before reception of the selected news. This also means that people in more positive mental condition or older respondents reached better outcomes in this test. On the other hand, the given impact of age and psyche ceased to exist after watching the news stories. Statistically, neither age nor mental state markedly determined the results of the general knowledge test taken after the news reception.

Certain differences may be observed in the ways specific education groups 'decode' news reports. There is no statistically significant difference between the results of the individual groups ("Secondary Education", "Higher Education of First Degree", "Higher Education of Second Degree") achieved in the tests of the general knowledge taken before or after reception of the selected TV news. On the contrary, statistically important is the difference between two particular groups in terms of ordering the news items according to their importance. The scores reached at ranking the news reports' importance are significantly different

for the groups “Higher Education of First Degree” and “Higher Education of Second Degree”, whereas the respondents with Bachelor’s degrees obtained much better scores than the respondents with Master’s degrees.

Nevertheless, in general the recipients can ‘decode’ TV news stories and determine the extent of their objectivity, balance and impartiality; even though they express certain prejudices towards newscast as such, which, however, has no significant impact on their ability to ‘decode’ news. In spite of the fact that news informs and educates the media audiences, it often becomes a target of their sharp criticism, primarily because of its presumed partiality and bias. The competitive struggles all news media have to face appear to be leaving their marks – the media recipients are well aware of the fact that in the endeavour to ‘be the first to report it’, they often present unverified or incomplete information. On the other hand, today we are witnessing rather tempestuous discussions regarding social status of the so-called ‘alternative’ media and their functions in relation to informing (or misinforming?) the general public.⁶¹ The number of their readers, viewers and followers on the Internet is growing significantly, especially amongst younger generations of the media audiences.

Thanks to the presented research we obtained a wide spectrum of data which is not included in the study. This fact, on the other hand, does not exclude the possibilities of its follow-up examination and further processing. The questionnaire form that allowed us to gather the data can be re-used and we may therefore continually follow the ongoing changes in perception of TV newscast (along with other investigated aspects of television news) in the future, i.e. in specific time intervals. However, if we wanted to ensure the validity of the outcomes via further similarly focused research, it would be necessary to extend the research sample and structure it in a way that would make it compliant with the requirements related to representative research inquiries.

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⁶¹ See, for example: RADOŠINSKÁ, J.: Alternatívne novinárstvo. In PRAVDOVÁ, H., RADOŠINSKÁ, J., VIŠŇOVSKÝ, J. (eds.): *Slovník vybraných pojmov z mediálnych štúdií. Kľúčové termíny v súčasnej mediálnej komunikácii*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2017, p. 16-19.

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