

Media in public opinion poll

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The CVVM public opinion polls focus, among other themes, on media. We chose three areas of questions from their continuous research – 1) level of trust in media, television, newspaper and radios¹, 2) opinions on accuracy and inaccuracy of information provided by specific media², 3) choice of news programmes³, frequency of watching news⁴ and respondents' assessment of the news programmes that they follow.⁵

For media as social institutions that attempt to act as an authority in the public life, credibility is the key indicator of this authority. The CVVM (previously IVVM) had surveyed the media from February 1995 to March 2003. In October 2002 we started to survey trust in television and newspapers separately and in June 2005 we included also radio stations. Two substantial divergences were recorded in the development of trust in media (see Diagram 1). The initial high figure of 72 % of those who trusted media in February 1995 decreased to 63 % by February 1996. In the following period, the trust in media remained (with minor divergences) around the level of 66 %. Another significant decrease occurred in a short period from October 2001 to February 2002. The number of those, who trusted media, decreased again from a high figure of 71 % by fourteen percentage points to a “historical” minimum of 56 %. Presently, we can hardly find out the cause of those slumps. The second loss of trust in media might have been caused by the dispute concerning Nova TV that resulted in arbitration between the Dutch CME company and the Czech Republic. The verdict that the Czech Republic was responsible for the financial losses of the CME company was delivered in September 2001, immediately before the decrease of the trust in media.

¹ Wording of the question: “Please, tell us, whether you trust...” Possible answers: I definitely trust, I rather trust, O rather mistrust, I definitely mistrust, I do not know.

² Wording of the question: „Do you think that the main news programmes, national dailies, radio station news provide information that is...” Possible answers: accurate and complete, accurate but incomplete, inaccurate, I do not follow them, I do not know.”

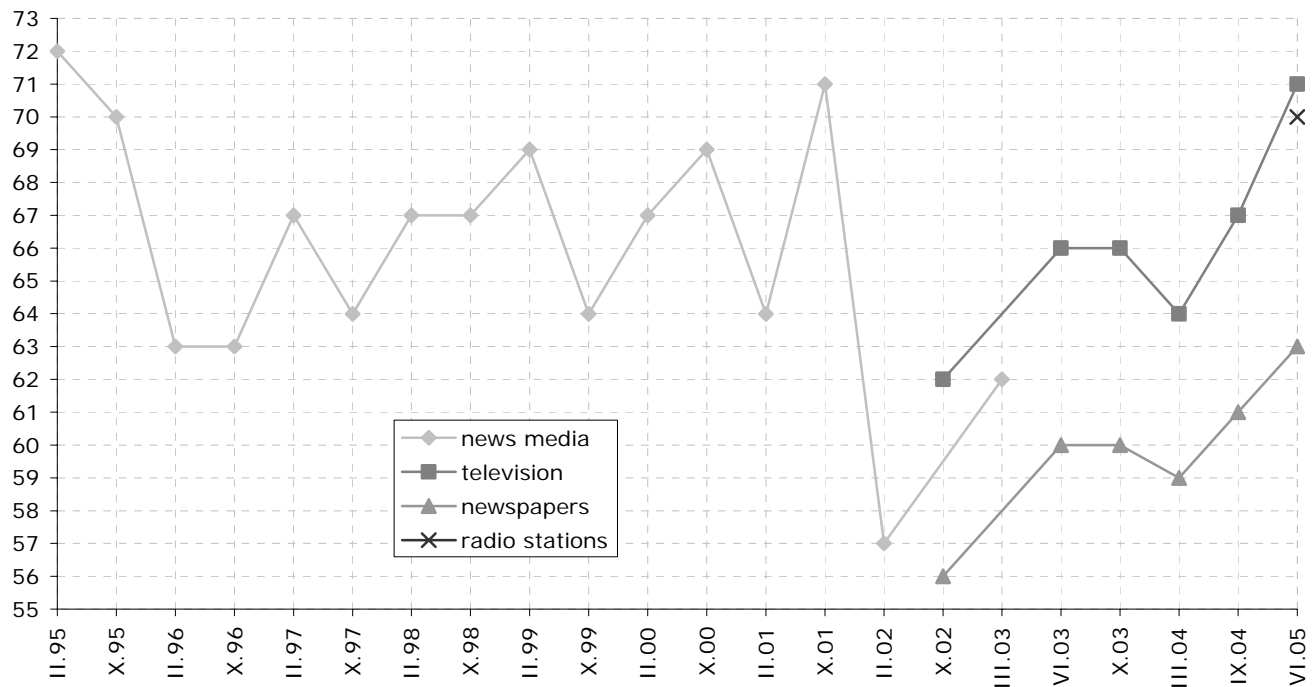
³ Wording of the question: “Which news programmes do you watch regularly?” (Open question with three possible answers)

⁴ Wording of the question: “How many days a week do you usually watch the television news?”

⁵ Wording of the question: “Do you think that the television news programme that you regularly watch completely leaves out important events or informs only about important events?”

Just a few months earlier – on the turn of the years 2000 and 2001 – the Czech television experienced a crisis as well, when the employees disagreed with the new director Jiří Hodač appointed by the Czech television board. In the course of this crisis, however, the trust in the media increased. We can look for an explanation in the CVVM research results from February 2001. According to the survey, one quarter of the questioned believed that the cause of the crisis in the Czech Television was an attempt of political parties to gain control over the television, one tenth of the respondents saw the cause in the way the Czech Television board appointed the director Hodač and another tenth of the questioned regard the struggle for high paid jobs as the cause of the crisis. 47 % of the questioned agreed with the advancement of the Czech Television employees and 38 % were against it. When asked whether they agreed with the advancement of the management led by Hodač, the difference was even more striking: 17 % of respondents agreed and 54 % disagreed. According to this research, the public was rather in favour of the revolting employees of the television, who were embodied on the screen, in the air and on the newspaper pages primarily by reporters camping in the central newsroom of the television – the so-called Control Room. The sympathies that the protesting employees aroused in the public and the wave of various petitions and hastily organized communities for the support of opponents of Hodač could explain the increase of trust in media in the period in question.

Diagram 1: Trust in media, television, newspapers and radio stations (in %)



Source: selected IVVM and CVVM research, 1995-2005.

Note: The Diagram contains the sum of answers “rather trust” and “definitely trusts”, the total of 100 % is completed by the sum of answers “rather mistrusts”, “definitely mistrusts” and “doesn’t know”.

After replacing news media by newspaper and television it turned out that in long term, television is more important for respondents than newspapers. During the period under survey, the difference oscillated in the range of 5 to 8 %. One of the reasons could be the genre variability of newspaper titles from tabloids, politically engaged papers to the so-called “respectable” press. Television as a medium can make a more compact impression, in spite of some differences in the programme composition. The hypothesis is supported by the results from other CVVM researches that surveyed opinions on accuracy and completeness of information provided by selected media. However, we must keep in mind that in case of television channels, respondents judged only main news programmes of the national stations, while the newspapers were assessed as a whole. In Tables 1 and 2 we can see that in the assessment of accuracy and inaccuracy of information of the presented media, the questioned set apart the news programmes of Nova television and Blesk daily. While 12 % of respondents regard the information of the Television news (Nova) identically in both researches, 28 % found the information from Blesk as inaccurate in 2004 and 40 % in 2005. In comparison with other entries it is an unprecedentedly high number.

It is essential for every medium that the receiver perceives their information as trustworthy [Burton, Jiráček 2001]. The attempt to strengthen this authority appears in the choice of themes, in the adaptation of the news or in the stress of their authenticity or “exclusiveness.” “Sensationalist journalism is oriented primarily on negativity, simplicity, celebrities and closeness. This way the media create an impression that they are an authority, which can easily and transparently explain the world (and that the world is interpretable by the means of offstage information, rumours from private life and various deviations.). On the contrary, media that try to assert themselves in a different than sensational way concentrate on relevance, up-to-datedness and veracity of their news.” [ibid.: 249] News programmes generally try to strengthen their trustworthiness by employing “experts.” Radio and television stations often stress the lifelikeness and authenticity of their news.

Table 1: Assessment of accuracy and completeness of information provided by media (2004) (in %)

	Accurate and complete	Accurate but incomplete	Inaccurate	Doesn't follow	Accurate/Inaccurate
Main news programme - ČT 1 – Události	34	46	2	9	80/2
Main news programme - PRIMA – Deník	15	43	3	24	58/3
Main news programme - NOVA - Televizní noviny	17	53	12	8	70/12
MF DNES	24	30	4	30	54/4
Lidové noviny	12	22	4	43	34/4
Hospodářské noviny	15	18	2	46	33/2
Právo	13	24	5	40	37/5
Blesk	4	26	28	30	30/28
News programme - Čro1-Radiožurnál	24	21	1	39	45/1
News programme – Impuls	11	26	2	43	37/2
News programme - Frekvence 1	13	30	2	38	43/2

Source: Our Society (Naše společnost) survey, June 2004.

Note: The total of 100 % in lines is completed by answers „doesn't know“.

Table 2: Assessment of accuracy and completeness of information provided by media (2005) (in %)

	Accurate and complete	Accurate but incomplete	Inaccurate	Doesn't follow	Accurate/ Inaccurate
Main news programme - ČT 1 – Události	44	44	2	6	88/2
Main news programme - PRIMA – Deník	24	47	3	20	71/3
Main news programme - NOVA – Televizní noviny	25	50	12	8	75/12
MF DNES	32	29	4	28	61/4
Lidové noviny	19	22	3	45	41/3
Hospodářské noviny	20	18	1	49	38/1
Právo	19	24	3	43	43/3
Blesk	3	18	40	30	21/40
News programme - Čro1-Radiožurnál	31	26	1	35	57/1
News programme – Impuls	15	26	2	48	41/2
News programme - Frekvence 1	19	29	2	41	48/2

Source: Our Society (Naše společnost) programme, June 2005.

Note: The total of 100 % in lines is completed by answers „doesn't know“.

Another difference between television and newspapers is in the number of people, who follow them. There are significantly more TV viewers than newspaper readers: nowadays, no other media can equal television as far as popularity, breadth and political significance is concerned [McQuail 1999: 39]. It is possible, that people, who do not read newspapers, frequently claim that they do not trust them. Specialized forms of commentary programmes that offer not only legal counselling, but also directly engage in solving individual people's problems (Občanské judo, Černé ovce, Proti srsti), and programmes that reveal various political or corruption scandals etc. (Reportéři ČT, Na vlastní oči), can contribute to the general trust in television. In these programmes, television presents itself as an advocate of justice and a tool for controlling politicians⁶. As we have already said, this may positively affect trust in television. National televisions provide significantly more space to commentary programmes than daily newspapers. The difference between news and commentary content of the media is evident – news programmes primarily inform and define, commentary programmes provide commentaries.

⁶ Media function as a source of information not only for the citizens, who use them to learn about political events (in this connection media are perceived as carriers, co-creators and expression of public opinion), but also for the politicians, who use them to watch other politicians, to find out about the needs of the citizens [Schulz 2004: 11n.] or to react to events presented in the media [Sartori 2001: 154]. Politics does not depend on media, but it is formed through their mutual interaction [Řířhová, Jirářk 2000: 17].

“Whereas in news programmes we expect neutral approach to data and expression, commentary programmes cannot do without personal stand and individual expression in the use of language and stylistic means.” [Osvaldová 2001: 14n.]

70 % of respondent trust the radio stations included in the research for the first time (and so far for the last time) in June 2005. To trace the trend in trust in radio stations and confirm such a high figure we would need to analyse long-term data.

Trust in media does not depend on basic socio-demographic characteristics. It means that proportional distribution of those who trust and those who mistrust is likewise in all groups with no without regard to age or education and it does not differ according to the subjectively declared living standard of the questioned nor according to sex, region or size of the place of residence.

The June survey focuses, among others, on the choice of news programmes.⁷ Participants of the research most frequently watched the main news programmes of Nova TV and of the Czech Television. When asked which news programmes they watched regularly, 61 % of respondents answered that they watched *Televizní noviny* of Nova TV and 56 % of respondents *Události* of the Czech television. Roughly one third of the respondents regularly watch *Zpravodajský deník* of Prima television.⁸ In case of other programmes the numbers of respondents were too small to provide a sufficient informational value. They serve rather as an overview of the programmes that the respondents remembered in connection with this question (see Table 3).

⁷ The questioned mentioned commentary programmes apart from news programmes.

⁸ Order of viewer rate of main news broadcasting, expressed by respondents in the course of June CVVM survey complies with the results of a long-term survey of television viewer rate, which is executed for the Association of television organizations by Mediaresearch company [compare www.ato.cz and www.mediaresearch.cz]. Due to the diametrically different method of the two continuous surveys it is not possible to compare their specific data about viewer rate.

Table 3: Viewer rate of news and commentary programmes (in %)

Programme	abs.	%
Televizní noviny – Nova	647	61
Události – ČT 1	598	56
Zpravodajský deník – Prima	292	27
Obč. judo, Na vl. oči, Proti srsti, Černé ovce	130	12
Sedmička, Otázky, Nedělní partie	109	10
Události, komentáře, Právě teď	67	6
Střepiny, Bez obalu	50	5
Regional news programmes, news from the regions	47	5
Večerníky, Večerník z Čech, Jihomoravský...	29	3
Sports news, sport	29	3
Kotel	28	3
Entertaining programmes, infotainment	19	2
ČT 24	16	1
ČT2 – news	11	1
Morning block - Snídaně s NOVOU, Dobré ráno	10	1
Foreign news programmes – CNN, Euronews	9	1
Weather	8	1
Non-existing programmes - 21, Na hraně, Aktuální	8	1
Political debates – in general	4	0
News programmes – in general	81	8
Other programmes	56	5
Nothing	82	8
Doesn't know	3	0

Source: Our society survey, June 2005.

Note: Every respondent could mention up to three possibilities, percentage sum therefore adds up to 300%. The total of 300 % is completed by unused possibilities of answer.

Positive assessment of television is probably supported by the fact that more than half of the questioned believe that the news programmes that they regularly follow inform about important events. 51 % of respondents placed closer to the claim that programmes inform about important event. One tenth of the questioned placed closer to the claim that the programmes completely leave out important events. One fifth of respondents placed their answer directly in the centre of the scale, which might mean that it depends how and it depends which, etc. One fifth could not give their opinion on the question and chose the answer doesn't know (see Table 4).

Table 4: Respondents' assessment of watched news programmes (in %)

1 = completely leave out important events	2	3	4	5	6	7 = inform only about important events	Doesn't know
1	2	7	19	24	18	9	20

Source: Our Society survey, June 2005.

From the following Table 5 we can conclude that one third of the questioned usually watch the television news every day. Only an insignificant number of people of 3 % do not watch television news at all.

Table 5: Frequency of watching television news (in %)

Number of days	%
0	3
1	2
2	6
3	11
4	14
5	18
6	11
7	33

Note: The total of 100 % is completed by answers “doesn’t know”.

Source: Our Society survey, June 2005.

In case of the last mentioned question there appeared a strong dependence between the frequency of watching news and the age of the viewer. Majority of the members of the youngest age category from 15 to 19 years either do not watch the news at all, or they watch it once or three times a week at a maximum. People over 45 years of age watch the news most frequently.

Finally we can state that even though the data from the continuous public opinion polls do not help to comprehend or reveal the deeper connection between the selected phenomena (they do not describe for example the shaping of trust in media – we would need a different type of survey), they can (like a litmus paper of the public opinion) contribute to establishing hypotheses for more detailed sociological surveys.

Literature

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