

D. A. TSENOV ACADEMY OF ECONOMICS – SVISHTOV
DEPARTMENT OF STRATEGIC PLANNING

Magdalena Slave Andonovska

**MANAGEMENT OF MEDIA COMMUNICATION FOR
FORMING PUBLIC OPINION IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH
MACEDONIA**

ABSTRACT

of a dissertation for the award of the educational and scientific degree ‘doctor’
in the doctoral programme “Organization and management outside the sphere of
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Scientific Advisors:

Prof. Dr. Lalka Borisova

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mihail Chipriyanov

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All materials related to the defence shall be available upon request at the Department of Academic Studies and Academic Staff Development.

I. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DISSERTATION

1. Relevance of the topic.

In the first place, it shall be borne in mind that the media since the beginning of the country's independence has undergone significant changes, especially with the establishment of private media, which has contributed to real progress regarding the growth of young democracy in the country by the development of free thought, especially thanks to young journalists. This growth, specifically combined with the restructuring of the number of media, form the reference point around which the media image of the country is built, which undoubtedly poses several relevant questions: What is the real power of the participation of the media in the Republic of North Macedonia in forming public opinion? What is the economic competitiveness and power of the media in the country? Does the legislation improve the media or lead to censorship? Why should there be free access to information? To what extent and how should political influence on media and media communication decrease? How should media communication participate in the process of forming media literacy of the public in order to develop critical thinking in it? Of extreme relevance are also questions such as: how the public changes due to the introduction of new technologies, how the crisis of trust in the media reflects the civil discourse, what mechanisms could facilitate the fight against fake news, etc.

2. Research thesis statement.

The leading research thesis is that the institutionally supported and scientifically grounded management of the media and media communications is a key prerequisite of forming public opinion, of the plausibility and truthfulness of media publications in the Republic of North Macedonia and, when supported by a strategic approach, becomes a factor of stability in the future joining and full-scale integration in the EU.

Leading sub-theses: First, in a young democracy, such as the Republic of North Macedonia is, media communications shall favour an open debate on all

issues of public interest through objective and unbiased representation of information with an equal treatment of various opinions and views. Second, the management of media communications in the Republic of North Macedonia (with the active participation of media regulators) has the capacity to develop a convergent media environment, which shall reflect the achievement of higher economic and non-economic effects. Third, the realization of a concept, respectively, a strategy for the development of media communications in the Republic of North Macedonia is a key factor for introducing stability in the process of joining and full-scale integration of the country in the EU by the year 2030.

3. Object and subject of research in the dissertation.

The research object is the media in the Republic of North Macedonia, whereas the research subject – the management of communications by the media for forming a public opinion in the country.

4. Research purpose and tasks.

The aim of the dissertation is to determine the aspects of modeling information and the reflection of the whole media communication on public opinion, respectively, what impact this has on each citizen. What is the detriment or the benefit for society, for the citizens or for the various other participants in the process? As a result of this, measures and mechanisms shall be proposed for change and development, combined with a better regulatory system.

The main objectives are limited to: critical assessment of the concepts and determinants of the communications in a media environment (media communications) among the stakeholders in support of imposing democratic values; analysis of the system of organization and management of media communications in the Republic of North Macedonia, as well as discovering the existing reserves in this respect; empiric research on the influence of the media in forming a public opinion, followed by formulating mechanisms and key strategic initiatives for future development.

5. Methodology of the research.

The research is based on system-differentiating and system-integrating, descriptive, comparative, inductive and deductive, heuristic methods.

A second (meta) analysis has been carried out to analyze information from other, already conducted empirical research studies on the topic.

To study the organizations managing media communications and forming/regulating the media environment in the Republic of North Macedonia (part two), the method of in-depth interview has been implemented.

The gathered data from the own empirical research with a survey method (part three) has been processed by using the SPSS software package, with the functionalities: univariate and bivariate distributions. In formulating alternative strategic decisions and mechanisms for the development of applied methods such as modeling/business modeling, strategic analysis, risk analysis, descriptive methods, etc.

6. Constraints to the dissertation research.

Among the *restricting conditions* of the dissertation, we can outline: time interval of the conducted own research (the last 3-4 years), the empirical research involves Macedonian institutions and organizations (also references to examples from other countries), and a legal and normative framework, relevant as of November 2022.

7. Degree of development of the problem in the scientific literature.

The dissertation is based on research papers by Bulgarian, Macedonian and foreign authors in the field of media communication. Some of the authors that have investigated the research matter are: G. Lozanov, P. Fileva, S. Trpevska, M. Mitsevski, M. Kastels, A. Albarran, Chan-Olmsted, R. Picard and others. Despite the above-mentioned research in the field of media communication, the continuous, dynamic processes we witness today have been bringing changes in modern mass media and media environment. A new approach is needed in the management of media communication and the processes related to it for forming

public opinion in view of European perspectives in the Republic of North Macedonia.

8. Structure of the dissertation.

The dissertation comprises an introduction, argument in three chapters, conclusion, works cited list and appendixes. In compliance with the main objectives of the research, the dissertation argument has been developed using the following structure:

The first part begins by clarifying the role of media communications in the development of society. Emphasis is placed on the relations with society as an integral part of the media, i.e., their significance for building the democratic capacity of the country is assessed. The main determinants of the media are outlined. Special attention is paid to the standards of how the media function in the Republic of North Macedonia, including the introduced principles and reference documents for defending the freedom of expression.

The second part explains the organization and management of the media. How do they function and who manages them? In this respect, we have assessed the specific characteristics of the business management of media organizations and the creation of value in their functioning – we have evaluated the opportunities, respectively, the applicability of the main models of creating value. We have carried out a comprehensive analysis of the activity of the institutions engaged in media communication management.

The third part comprises the results of the empirical research on the impact of media communications on forming public opinion in the Republic of North Macedonia. We have provided graphic representation of the received data and have drawn up analytical assessments. We have outlined important directions for achieving successful media communications. The strategic initiatives have been defined through a proposed new concept of development of media communications in the Republic of North Macedonia.

II. RESUME OF THE DISSERTATION THESIS

INTRODUCTION

The introduction to the dissertation presents its theoretic and empirical relevance. It consistently clarifies the research thesis, the object, the subject, the purpose and the research tasks of the dissertation. It also defines the used methodology.

CHAPTER ONE. THEORETICAL DETERMINANTS OF COMMUNICATION IN MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

1.1. The role of media communications for the development of the society

1.1.1. Evolution of the notion of media – a historical overview

At the beginning, it is emphasized that over the last decades, theoretical thought has stressed in a peculiar way the role of the media for creating and facilitating the public environment, as well as for encouraging the citizens' active participation.

This presupposes building an informed and active civil society, increasing the participation of marginalized groups, nourishing culture and identity, diversity and creativity. The emphasis falls on the capacity of the media in two main directions: first, their contribution for better management and accounting before the people and their participation in the society; and second, engaging the media in the development of culture and identity.

It is without doubt that the scope of the role of the media to serve public interest is wide. Therefore, this is not a static, unchanged concept; neither is it a simple range of various interests or a result of various interests. Its determining and redefinition depend on the changes in society, the development of society and the changes in the media (which occur at a very high rate).

1.1.2. On the media as part of the system of public relations

This part focuses on the fact that public relations contribute to the popularization of public opinion, its interpretation and undoubtedly transformation in a way that is additionally used mostly in the organization or the institution, and later in the wider public. Furthermore, in a wider sense, public relations are communication, a systematically planned process of influence directed towards receiving a positive and benevolent influence, or interactive communication based on open, democratic actions in favour of the organization, the institution, but in the first place, the public.

It is emphasized that public relations are both a science and an art. It is an analysis of the relevant consulting of the management, introducing novelties in the programmes and their realization. As a term, they are a concept, a realization of the created activities and events, which are important to the society. They are a systematic process of communication among the organization, the institution, the citizens, and the public, to improve the image of a certain subject after this better explanation of a specific situation and undoubtedly defense of the civil concept.

Special attention is paid to the fact that public relations are a planned and ongoing process for achieving a constant harmony among organizations, institutions, and media for achieving their goals publicly. Public relations are any form of communication, internal and external, which contributes to achieving the goals of the organization, the state, the government ... for public representation.

Public relations are a complex and hybrid unit based on theories and practices from very many areas such as management, media, communication, and psychology.

Therefore, the main function of public relations is to maintain bilateral communication with the environment, where it is necessary not only to send a message, which shall also be considered completed assignment, but we shall also follow the feedback and the sublimation of public opinion.

1.1.3. Media impact on public opinion – normative aspects

This part makes an assessment of Macedonian legislation in the field and more specifically of two acts which regulate the media sphere: the Audio and Audiovisual Media Services Act and the Media Act. Neither of the two acts, however, defines specifically public interest. The Audio and Audiovisual Media Services Act clearly and explicitly states that the Macedonian Radio and Television as a public operator performs “activity of public interest in the field of broadcasting in the Republic of North Macedonia” (art. 104), which involves “the production and providing of television programmes and services of public interest” (art. 107 and art. 110) by “performing programme duties” (art. 91, 92) and “standards and principles for journalists and editors in the production or providing programmes” (art. 111).

In the context of public interest, we notice the clearly outlined principles which (private) television operators shall follow when they provide television and radio broadcasting (art. 61). They include, among others: nourishing and developing human and moral values and defending the personal life and dignity of the individual, equality of freedoms and rights regardless of gender, race, national, ethnic and social origin, followed by political and religious beliefs, ownership and social status of the individual and the citizen; encouraging a spirit of tolerance, mutual respect and understanding among individuals of diverse ethnic and cultural origin, defense of the identity of the victims of violence, respecting the presumption of innocence, encouraging international understanding and cooperation, the society’s feeling of justice and respect of democratic freedoms, access to programmes of expressing diverse cultures, which are an inseparable part of the society; preserving and nourishing national identity, language culture and home creativity, objective and unbiased presentation of events of equal treatment of diverse views and opinions and granting opportunity for free expression of opinion of the public on certain events and problems; independence and responsibility of editors, journalists, and other authors in creating programmes and establishing editorial policy.

Despite all mentioned regulations, which directly or indirectly concern public interest, the fact that it is not specifically defined in media legislation remains, which, in practice, leaves ground for its “varying interpretations”.

1.2. Media determinants

1.2.1. Media pluralism – conceptual dimensions

This part places the emphasis on media pluralism in its role as one of the main prerequisites for the development of a democratic society. This is not only a goal, but also a means which guarantees the main rights of the citizen such as freedom of expression and freedom of information guaranteed by art. 19 of the Common Declaration of Human Rights, art. 10 of the Convention of Protection of People – Rights and Main Freedoms and art. 11 of the Charter of Main Rights of the European Union. The leading concept of media pluralism comprises several aspects such as diversity of structure of media ownership, diversity of sources of information and content accessible via the media.

A more detailed dissection would reveal six areas of media pluralism such as: main area; cultural pluralism in the media; political pluralism in the media; geographical and local pluralism in the media; pluralism of media ownership and control; and pluralism of the media types and genres.

In summary, the high horizontal and vertical concentration, as well as the high concentration of ownership in the various types of media could influence the editorial independence (due to certain commercial or political interests of media owners) could create obstacles in the field of distribution, as well as cause problems of operative compatibility. This presents a threat to media pluralism not only regarding the supply, but also regarding the distribution and accessibility.

1.2.2. Characteristics of Internet communications and social media

In this part, we make an assessment of Internet communications in the Republic of North Macedonia, as well as in most of the world, which develop at an extremely high rate. Every day, we witness the appearance of new sites and new services offered online, combined with new means via which the content

reaches the users, i.e., the public. The market for content and services appearing every day is more and more mobile, whereas the key factors for this are the easy accessibility to technologies, as well as the good infrastructure for Internet communications.

Attention is also paid to social media. Over the last two decades, social media (especially some social networks) have shown a boom in Internet communication, which is a range of numerous channels of communication, interaction among more people, enterprises, universities, institutions, etc. Social media have the advantage of communication, mainly because they can share diverse content and cooperate at the same time. It would not be exaggerated if we said that “online” communication via social media seriously creates public opinion, i.e., it contributes to initiating certain activities among citizens on various issues. Furthermore, it also contributes to a serious reaction of certain governmental structures and institutions, which, when facing civil activity, are sometimes forced to react almost immediately.

We also acknowledge the significance of additional communication means such as external networks, internal networks; wiki pages; and podcasting. They are part of internet-based communication tools accessible not only to natural persons, but also to public relations specialists.

1.2.3. Forming public opinion – important issues

Initially, we define public opinion as a totality of opinions on a specific important topic in a society where opinions resulting from social hearings are expressed. The degree of diversity, development, and variability of public opinion depends on socio-economic, cultural, and political changes, as well as on the development based on democracy.

It is evident, however, that, as a whole, media literacy is neglected by the institutions, society, and mediators of public opinion, and the commitments in this respect are temporary and insufficient. It is ascertained that the constant worsening of public discourse, where many prominent public figures use

inappropriate language in the society without any consequences. Then we can add the degradation of the educational system and other social factors that form a society which is not capable of debating hardly any issue of social interest. Most of the public falls victim to this propaganda discourse and is unable to fend off the fine forms of manipulation; thus, we can observe critical media content.

1.3. Standards of media functioning in the Republic of North

Macedonia

1.3.1. Benchmarking research on good practices

We begin with the principal understanding that in most countries the public radio and television operators shall broadcast independent, precise, unbiased, balanced, and objective news and information; provide variety in the programme and the presented points of view; broadcast news, cultural and artistic educational programmes, programmes on the minorities, religious, children and entertainment programmes in a certain proportion, etc. Commercial, but not public services, are usually the object of a number of general legal regulations concerning the broadcasting of such a content.

At the other pole is self-regulation. It is an efficient tool in the media sphere, often it is even more efficient than the legally provided frameworks due to their lack of flexibility and adjustability. It plays a significant role in editorial independence and in providing editorial standards. Beginning from the principles of the International Federation of Journalists regarding the status of journalists and journalist ethics – they clearly state that the media shall respect professional and ethical principles of freedom of the press on which the freedom of expression and thinking is based. Consulting the editorial code of the IPSO (Independent Press Standards Organization), an independent regulatory organ in the industry of newspapers and magazines in Great Britain, it explicitly determines that public interest involves, but is not solely limited to: uncovering a crime or a threat of a crime or serious disturbances; protection of social health and safety; protection of the society from delusion by an action or a statement by a natural person or

organization; announcing a failure as a result of justice contributing to issues of public debate, including serious cases of disturbances; unethical behaviour or incompetence of the society.

Therefore, to realize the democratic capacity of every society and state, the role of the media is of utmost importance, which gives an opportunity for public debate on the common wellbeing. The media shall form the public opinion and awake critical society, exposing various undemocratic or illegal actions of the government, the legislation, or the legal authorities, as well as pointing out various phenomena and forms of misuse of political power and violating the guaranteed rights and freedoms of the individual.

1.3.2. Freedom of expression – major principles and reference documents

The starting point for developing the argument in this direction is that the freedom of expression is important not only because every one of us has the right to express his/her opinion, but also because the society in which we live has the right to hear different opinions. In other words, the freedom of expression is proportionate to the degree of democracy of the society and is directly causally and effectively related to the free media, which have not only the right, but also the obligation to provide to citizens real, objective, and diverse information from various sources on topics and issues, which are public in an unbiased and plausible way.

For the successful application of the analysis, we have provided a list of main principles which involve: guaranteeing the right to freedom of expression and information in the media in compliance with the national legislation; not allowing the pursuing of journalists or media due to critical thinking; freedom of the media to broadcast their content in a language of their choice; respecting the confidentiality of journalists' sources of information; not confusing the outstanding right to announce major events of public interest with the right of the society of access to information, etc.

The numerous documents of the Council of Europe related to the functioning of the public media occupy a special place due to the simple reason that these institutions, as a central “connection” in the European media policy, play a key role in achieving a public interest “directly related to the democratic, social, and cultural needs of every household and the necessity of preserving media pluralism.” Another important document is Resolution No. 1 (1994) for the future of public broadcasting and Recommendation of the Council of Europe for guaranteeing the independence of public operators.

CHAPTER TWO. MANAGEMENT OF THE MEDIA IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA

2.1. Organization and management of the media

2.1.1. Functions of the media. Regulation. Self-regulation

The selected approach is that the functions of the media can be described in the context of their social impact: expansion, i.e., a function for expanding and increasing the communication skills; replacement, in relation to the ability of the media to replace social connections or institutions; amalgam of the reality with a media experience; and adjustment to the specific functions of the media.

The functions of the media in a democratic society presuppose an increased interest in informing, in forming the public opinion, in criticizing and controlling. However, there is a growing fear that there are a lot of facts pointing out to a disfunction. The lack of sufficient transparency in the activity of party headquarters, the relatively powerful role of the press services of the governmental structures, the ability of the state to influence the public operators are among the political factors. The dependence of the media on advertisers, the dependence of journalists on the owners of media, the dependence of the media on the print runs and the ratings, are among the main economic factors for a stronger or weaker disfunction of the media in a democratic society.

2.1.2. Media management – key dimensions and concepts

The management of the media, i.e., the process of how it is managed, is at a crossroads between communication and economy. This is not only because of the social response to the functioning of the media, but also because of the interdisciplinary intertwining between strict economic principles and fundamental knowledge in the science of communication. The science of communication itself is a complex range of accumulated knowledge in various social sciences, confirmed by empirical research. We add to this globalization as a relative recent phenomenon, which makes the field of studying media management even more attractive and interesting.

The management of the media is a scientific discipline based on basic knowledge in the field of economic theories aided by the fast-developing communication science. The subject of research is activities related to the organization of media management, business enterprise or specific non-profit legal entity. Social organizations in which such activities are performed are also an object of research to achieve specific economic or ideal goals.

It also brings forward several terminological clarifications. The first one refers to the correct writing of the combination between management and media, when it comes to applying the scientific principles of managing the media organization – media management. The second clarification refers to defining the term – “Management of the Media” or “Media Management”. There are arguments that they are synonymous, i.e., by the meaning of the words. Therefore, management is a synonym of leading, managing, directing, working. The ability to manage means to lead, train, coach, influence and motivate, set goals and control. All this is the object of research in the science of management, but in a more contemporary aspect, as a science of organizational behaviour. Therefore, the synonymous use of the two terms is justified. The third clarification refers to the difference between the management of the media and the management of communications. The management of communication applies the principles of

management in managing the information flow in the internal or external environment of the social organization. The development of this discipline is expected to contribute to improving the managers' skills at various levels of management in performing their roles: informative; communicative; and leadership.

An attempt is made to bring forward the significant differences in the discussed context between the traditional and the new media. We emphasize the efforts of the traditional media to change their business model and manage to preserve their share and sources of funding in the competition with the new media.

As regards media convergence, the traditional and new mergers and the principles of regional management remain universally applicable, flexible, and adjusted to the changes in the environment of the organizations. The challenges of the new (digital) content of various sources spread literally in the net in comparison with the old ones can be met with skills and creativity, as well as with the acknowledgment of the strategic management in the field of media management.

In summary, media management is based on organizational theories and the largest share of research, using the framework of strategic management.

2.1.3. Media organization as an object of management

The main object of media management is media organizations, in which production factors are invested; what is received is results, value added for the user, profit for the entrepreneur, wealth for the society, the people and the state. The economic and social environment of a society is formed by many organizations, including media organizations.

The diversity of media organizations increases and differs according to the subject of activity, i.e., production, preparing and/or broadcasting content. What also increases is the diversity as regards the used platform of transfer of content – newspaper, magazine, radio, television, Internet. What forms is interwoven chains for creating content and value, participating in numerous markets by using to the

maximum extent the existing opportunities and by increasing the effect of the return of the invested resources.

2.1.4. Specific aspects of the business management of the media organization

We express an opinion that media management, respectively, the implementation of scientific principles in the management of media organizations as a field of impact, finds itself between communication and economic science. Not only because of the social response to the functioning of the media, but also because of the interdisciplinary interweaving between strict economic principles and fundamental knowledge in the science of communication. Management in this case shall be discussed as an effective management of the resources in the media organization, which respectively shall be analyzed as an enterprise, as a company, or as part of a value chain.

2.1.5. Applicability of the main models of creating value in media organizations

The emphasis in this part of the research falls on two models of strategic analysis for the creation of value in media organizations: value chain; and value network. Their capacity, respectively, their specific characteristics, are marked on the basis of fragmentary research of the private audiovisual media in the Republic of North Macedonia.

The specific characteristics of the discussed two models for creating value can successfully be applied in private media organizations, by taking into consideration their profile in the first place.

The fragmentary implementation of the model of value chain in private audiovisual media in the Republic of North Macedonia has outlined important directions for their future functioning. In practice, they are prospective directions for their functioning. They can be invested in, and their activities can be optimized. The end result is related to the expectations for maximizing the

generation of value. This is an increased value for media organizations which can serve to increase their competitiveness and their profit.

The most perspective directions for all this are related to the following actions: Developing and realizing projects for the optimization of the internal work organization with an emphasis on the vertical interrelations among the structural units; Realization of projects for improving the internal work environment; Increasing the actions on managing human resources expressed in a more active participation in trainings, thence – enhancing the knowledge, skills, and competences of the sales and PR personnel; Developing and implementing new sales techniques and new sales channels in the distribution of own products and content. Intensifying the contractors' work within the complex of activities on aftersales communication and servicing.

Media management is the effective management of the resources in a media organization, which can be analyzed as an enterprise, as a company, or as part of the value chain.

2.2. Organization for management of media communications

This part of the dissertation analyzes the institutions and organizations relevant to the management of media communications and forming the media environment in the Republic of North Macedonia. It can be claimed that to the largest extent, these are: The Ministry of Information Society and Administration; The Agency for Audio and Audio-Visual Services; The Governmental Communication Service; Industrial organizations represented by the Association of News Presenters in the Republic of North Macedonia and the Association of Journalists of Macedonia; The Macedonian Media Institute; and the Media Ethics Council in the Republic of North Macedonia.

The main research method is an in-depth interview accompanied by an assessment of applicable normative documents and benchmarking assessment.

Media communications in the Republic of North Macedonia are managed by several more significant institutions, which, along with the regular media, form

the media environment. It is expected that their active engagement will improve the whole media communication in the process of imposing democratic values and forming the public opinion in the Republic of North Macedonia in the future.

In the near future, it is realistic to expect even more visible changes towards the media being the guardians of democracy in the society, as well as protectors of human dignity, protection of underage citizens, securing plurality, freedom of expression, etc. What presents a challenge for the Agency for Audio and Audio-Visual Services, as well as for all media regulators in convergent environment is to encourage respecting those values by media operators, but also to determine the mechanisms by which they shall accomplish the goals of media regulation, which are still relevant.

The industrial organization in the Republic of North Macedonia participate actively in the preparation of some legal decisions such as their proposition for changes in the Penal Code for protection of journalists. This action is the result of the fact that over the last several years, we have been able to see the trend of increased violence against journalists, but also the realization by the international public of the necessity to solve this problem. The industrial organizations shall develop a Programme for dealing with the problem, to communicate it to all stakeholders in the media environment and to engage in their successful realization.

CHAPTER THREE. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH ON THE INFLUENC OF THE MEDIA ON FORMING PUBLIC OPINION IN THE REPUBLIS OF NORTH MACEDONIA

3.1. Introduction to the applied scientific research

3.1.1. Aims of the research

One of the leading aims of this applied research is to ascertain the impact of the media on the development of democracy, free thought, information flow,

building bridges among nations and countries. The specific aim of this research is to clarify and assess how the old and the new media influence the forming of public opinion. Today, citizens say without hesitation that they have more trust in the media than in the representatives of the state, political, and economic summit. Is this how they create the truth about themselves? Is there manipulation by the media in creating public trends, and how does this influence the citizens? Another aim of this empirical research is to uncover the mechanisms of the possible manipulations which the media allow in creating a specific affair or situation.

3.1.2. Methodology

The efforts in this research have been directed to “scanning” the media communications and media environment in the Republic of North Macedonia through a series of questions responded to by the corresponding managers, journalists, and media employees. The surveying has been carried out via standardized research. It involves a specially designed questionnaire with specific questions and multiple-choice answers, as well as open questions. The questions themselves initiate the statements of the respondents regarding a problem-based research framework. The research uses a questionnaire card consisting of 23 questions which shall be answered by the corresponding respondents. Due to the practical inability to clarify the values of the researched indicators for all representatives of the general totality, we have planned the choice of a sufficient number of end representatives (sample). We have used controlled distribution of the questionnaire to achieve the goal that the sample shall possess and reflect the main characteristics of the general totality for receiving maximum plausibility of the conclusion of the analysis of the research.

In this research, we have surveyed 40 media from the country selected via the method of random sampling without replacement, namely: 6 (six) national televisions which carry out their activities on the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia via digital terrestrial multiplex; 4 (four) televisions which operate at a state level via an operator of the public electronic communication network and

perform their activity on the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia via a public electronic broadcasting network which does not use a limited resource; 2 (two) televisions at a state level which broadcast on the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia via a satellite; 10 (ten) televisions at a regional level which broadcast programmes via a public operator of electronic broadcasting network which does not use a limited resource; 4 (four) radio stations operating at a state level; 6 (six) radio stations broadcasting at a regional level; 3 (three) print media, i.e., three daily newspapers; 5 (five) electronic media, i.e., portals.

The plausibility of the sample is related to the degree of truthfulness of the gathered information, i.e., to what extent the measurements and the responses of the researched persons are true. The research methodology secures plausibility by addressing the survey to a category of persons involving managers and journalists. The results received from the researched 40 (forty) media which operate on the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia show the current position of the media in the country.

The questionnaire is structured by comprising several important points: We begin by researching the specific aspects of work and the practices in preparing programme content; We study the aspects of external pressure on the media; We have researched the used managerial and editorial approaches; We have also researched relevant problems in defending the freedom of speech and satisfying the public interest, as well as other democratic values.

The data has been processed with SPSS[®] Statistics software. For the purposes of the analysis, we have used the functionalities of univariate and bivariate distributions (cross tables).

3.2. Results of the empirical research – graphic representation and analysis

3.2.1. Research on the specific character of functioning and preparation of media content

The received responses from the respondents gives ground to claim that the media in the Republic of North Macedonia try to show maximum professionalism and to inform the public relatively frequently about the development of the country and the world. The received data shows similarity with other media worldwide. The access of the media to news content is high, which gives them the opportunity for high degree of choice in the editorial policy towards selection.

It turns out that the problem arises mostly regarding internal news because some of the leading institutions in the country circulate it to the media too slowly. This certainly refers to the information and the news which are not favourable to them. The other extreme is political propaganda and the related to it media content which can be accessed on Internet platforms anytime. As the major “stumbling block” for the above results we can mark the existence of unfair competition in the media sector.

There is an extremely high average value of the respondents who have answered positively to the question whether the journalists who work in their media are part of the journalist branch organization. The received data shows that journalists, upon joining such a branch organization, try to improve the working conditions in the media. There is also another argument – journalists should be provided with legal and any other protection. This is above all due to the fact that they are the object of attacks by affected persons (citizens), but also by certain centers of political or economic power. In practice these associations (the Association of News Presenters in the Republic of North Macedonia and the Association of Journalists of Macedonia) provide security and better labour conditions.

1.2.2. Research on the external pressure on the media

The empirical data shows explicitly that the managerial team and the journalists are often put under pressure by media owners, who, for their own personal reasons, try to benefit a certain institution, political formation,

respectively, political leader or another person, who, to a certain extent, exposes the media as unprofessional and puts the journalists in the position of censure.

The received data on the Likert scale is analogous to that mentioned above. There is serious data about substantial pressure on the work of the media and their editorial teams.

The main conclusion which is reached based on the bivariate distributions is that the political pressure on the preparation of news content is most conspicuous in national radio stations, televisions, and daily newspapers, which are circulated nationwide.

Public television enters a critical stage in the process of reform, and it will have to be guaranteed that all key stakeholders are engaged in guaranteeing a higher degree of editorial and institutional autonomy and restrict the political (dominating) influence. The lack of transparency of the owners is especially visible in the online media, whereas the threats related to the possible concentration of media owners and the visible connections among certain politicians and the media still remain relevant issues, which shall be discussed appropriately.

The responses given by the respondents from the corresponding media lead to the conclusions that the mechanisms of impact are usually limited to: pressure on media management which is transferred vertically from the editors to the journalists; employing party-dependent editors, especially in state media; the choice of events and the reluctant presentation of information; telephone calls by certain empowered persons for removing or publishing certain political information are not a rarity either.

Political influence is most conspicuous in the news, but also in economic marketing and the friendly connections of some editors with politicians. The determining factor for this is the editor with his/her subjective views, positions, opinions, and contacts. Influence can be seen in the frequent visits of representatives of one, or, at the most, two political projects, without

representatives of other political parties being invited; then follows the way articles are prepared, the tone of the articles, the arrangement of the news, etc. In addition, the availability or absence of information on certain topics and events, the tone of the comment/coverage or by presenting information, action, or covering a certain event.

1.2.3. Ascertaining the used managerial and editorial approaches

It often happens that the leading news is not what the editor in chief decides. The largest share of responses is that this is decided by the editorial board. It should be noted that none of the respondents has selected the participation of the media's owner in this process.

To what extent do political events occupy the place of social issues? Almost all representatives of the media reply in the positive, i.e., the daily political issues are far more common than social issues. All this shows that politics remains a major topic in the media, which leaves an impression of a rather polarized society.

Despite the availability of a large number of media which produce content related to the reporting of daily topics; they do not debate issues which are sensitive, insufficiently covered or wrongly interpreted; there is also a lack of critical debate and communication on serious issues.

A clear expression of unfair competition is the pirate channels on cable televisions. There are also negative expressions in regional televisions, which are alleged to have fewer employees, which is below the standards of functioning of a television. These televisions broadcast at a regional level, with their way of functioning and low employment, combined with low advertisement fares; all this causes serious damage to professional television stations. Unfair competition is observed more often among trade televisions and among internet portals. This is evident in the low-quality and cheap frames prepared by people without adequate education for working in the media, in the "copy-paste journalism", and also in the so-called "defamation" portals.

The unfairness in competition is observed in information competition, too, although this sometimes interferes with confidence and does not always respect the journalists' ethic code.

The received results show that positive thinking and the support of the listening and reading audience are especially important for the media; therefore, they try to stimulate them with specific content.

Expressions of political propaganda can be detected mostly during elections, when a specific political party or individual is favored. In such an atmosphere, we can also hear the language of hatred.

1.2.4. Research on the problems of defending the freedom of speech and satisfying public interest and democratic values

The freedom of the media is extremely important not only for strengthening the democracy in the country, but also for the journalists themselves in the process of their work. Therefore, the assessment of freedom of speech is a crucial moment in our empirical research. The received primary data shows that it is endangered.

“Bias” of the media. Political influence can mostly be seen in the news, but also in the economic marketing and friendly connections of some editors with politicians. It depends mostly on the editor and his/her subjective views, positions, opinions, and contacts. Influence can be observed in the frequent visits of one, or, at the most, two political projects. This is probably explained by the situations in which the media also participate due to the broadcasting/publishing of specific information.

Thus, the received data corresponds to the assessments on the next variable in the empirical research – the level of public trust to the media, where there are assessments in the average and positive register on the scale, which is not wholly satisfactory.

The struggle that media literacy shall be part of media content has been going on for a long time. Almost all representatives of the media agree that it should be an inseparable part of their programme. Few respondents think that it

should be presented only in certain programmes or more specialized media content.

Ultimately, it poses the most painful question, i.e., the one that journalists do not want to talk about publicly, but it is of utmost importance, and which seriously damages their work. The question is whether politics seriously harms free journalism. Most of the answers are that it is namely the flirtation of the media owners with specific political elites is the main reason why politics destroys free journalism. It is mostly about applying and developing various forms of financial relationship between media owners and political formations. Some of the responses are that every political elite or government tries to put journalism under their control. Other responses, however, find the fault for this state of the media in the expressions of media clientelism – this is because they are not immunized against political influences, some of them even consciously fall under their influence. Very few of the responses are that there is no negative impact of the political system.

3.3. Strategic initiatives – Concept for developing media communications in the Republic of North Macedonia

In order to summarize, as well as to more clearly define future initiatives to improve media communication to form public opinion in the Republic of North Macedonia, we propose the following Concept, let by the understanding that at a later stage after completing the cycle of strategy planning, it will be approved as a Concept for the development of media communication in the Republic of North Macedonia having the following components:

1. Priorities and goals. Work towards developing media communications in the Republic of North Macedonia to form public opinion shall be organized to complete the following base priorities: Stimulating consistent policy for developing media environment and media communications for sustainable progress in forming the public opinion of the young democracy in the country; Popularizing and imposing good practices and media communication and public

relations standards; Building partnership and trust among stakeholders. The specific goals are limited to: Increasing the level of information of all parties; Preparing functional mechanism for public information; Establishing working models of partnership.

2. Target groups. The proposed concept of media communication is oriented towards several different target groups. They can be classified as direct and indirect.

3. *Activities for achieving the goals.* The activities proposed in the Concept shall have indicative character. They correspond to the established way of work of the stakeholders and target groups so that there is continuity.

The activities on strengthening media pluralism shall have permanent character with measures to achieve public consensus: Improving the work status of journalists and strengthening their independence; Reconsidering the rules of concentration of media ownership; Developing new policies in the field of competition; Reconsidering the texts in the election code and other laws concerning political advertisement; Developing a participatory model of public service; Preparing policies and measures for improving the access of the minorities to media; Developing complete policies for media literacy; Implementing comprehensive measures for dealing with the language of hatred, etc.

On this basis, the action plan for the future strategy for the year 2024 can involve campaigns which are to be completed in compliance with the budget and are to be differentiated on a thematical basis. The inclusion of the stakeholders is guaranteed by the *forum-based approach*.

In their essence, *campaigns* are clarification events containing messages to society. As of this moment, to a large extent, the publicity goal has been achieved, but to a lesser extent – the topic of accounting and anti-corruption. Bearing in mind the goals for sustainability of the results, these traditional target campaigns shall be based on new communication techniques and mechanisms.

4. Key messages of the strategy of media communications. According to the concept goals, we can bring forward two messages: Transparency, accounting, publicity, and anti-corruption activities are of utmost and purposeful necessity for the Republic of North Macedonia at national and regional level; The capacity for transparency and accounting creates opportunities for phased construction of active civil society which shall be a purposeful corrective of media communications in the future.

5. Communication at national and regional level and partnership. The idea is to attract all types of media that have national, regional, and local coverage, incl. the most popular newspapers, as well as periodicals and television channels with high popularity among the target groups. Special focus falls on regional media.

6. *Information and communication means and methods.* The leading principles in the choice of communication techniques and tools for achieving the goals which are to be used in the proposed strategy are limited to the following: readiness for providing information, flexibility, differentiated approach towards target groups, dialogue, accessible form, attracting all types of resources, etc.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of all of the above-mentioned facts, arguments, and alternative decisions, we would think that we have presented sufficient proof in support of the thesis that the institutionally supported and scientifically grounded management of media communications is a key factor in forming public opinion, in securing plausibility and truthfulness of media publications in the Republic of North Macedonia, and when supported by a strategic approach, it becomes a factor of stability for the country's future joining and full-scale integration in the EU.

III. LIST OF THE SCIENTIFIC AND APPLIED CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE DISSERTATION PAPER

First. Via benchmarking research, we have made an assessment of the good practices in the field of media in the Republic of North Macedonia, as a whole, and of various aspects of their functioning, regulation, and management, in particular.

Second. We have carried out empirical research with clear and well-grounded methodology and logical connection with the aims and objectives of the dissertation thesis. The outlined picture of media environment has been analyzed critically by taking into consideration the objective circumstances relevant to media regulation in the Republic of North Macedonia, which, to a large extent, determines the path of developing the capacity of media communications and achieving free competitive media market.

Third. We have proposed a Concept for the development of media communications in the Republic of North Macedonia with defined priorities, specific goals, target groups (direct and indirect) and measures for their inclusion, as well as specific activities for achieving the goals.

IV. PUBLICATIONS ON THE TOPIC OF THE DISSERTATION PAPER

Studies:

1. **Andonovska, M.** Traditional and online media and the audience's attitude towards them. – Annual Almanac “Scientific Research of Doctoral Students” – Edition XIII – 2020, Book 16, p. 235-252, ISSN 1313-6542.

Articles:

1. **Andonovska, M.** Opportunities for development media pluralism in the Republic of N. Macedonia. – Annual Almanac “Scientific Research of Doctoral Students” – Edition XIII – 2021, Book 17, ISSN 1313-6542 (in press).

2. Chipriyanov, M., **Andonovska, M.** Specific character of the media as business organizations and models for analysing the values created by them. – Business management, Issue 1, Year 2022, p. 5-17, ISSN: 0861-6604-Print Edition, ISSN: 2534-8396-Electronic Edition.

* Indexed in SCOPUS

3. Chipriyanov, M., **Andonovska, M.** Opportunities for improvement media pluralism in the Republic of North Macedonia. – e-Journal VFU, Issue 18, Year 2022, p. 971-985, ISSN 1313-7514

V. REFERENCE FOR COMPLIANCE WITH THE NATIONAL REQUIREMENTS UNDER THE RULES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LAW ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ACADEMIC STAFF IN THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA

National requirement for number of points: 30,00

Number of studies, published in non-refereed peer-reviewed journals, or published in edited collective volumes: 1

Number of points for the author: **15,00**

Number of articles, published in non-refereed peer-reviewed journals, or published in edited collective volumes: 2

Number of points for the author: **15,00**

Number of articles and reports, published in refereed peer-reviewed and indexed in the science-based databases scientific journals: 1

Number of points for the author: **15,00**

Total number of points: **45,00**

VI. STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

The dissertation paper in the volume of 240 pp., titled: “Management of media communication for forming public opinion in the Republic of North Macedonia” is own research work of the author. It presents own ideas, text and graphic presentation using figures, tables and formulas in strict compliance with the requirements of the of the Copyright and Related Rights Act, including by properly citing and referencing the sources of information used, including:

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3. The scientific results obtained, described and/or published by other authors are duly and extensively cited in the text and in the bibliography.

Date: 22.02.2023.

Doctoral student:
(Magdalena Andonovska)