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POLITICAL CRISIS, MEDIA AND EMOTIONS

Abstract

Macedonia will remember 2015 as a year of long-term political crisis. It was a year of intensive activity against the Government. There were “opposition bombs”, disclosed incriminating phone calls, strikes in education, mass protests, camping in front of the Government and the Assembly, a police action against the terrorists in Kumanovo, migrant crisis The understanding of the start and the end points of the crisis largely depends on the individual perception created as a result of the personal experience and the experience mediated through offline networks, online networks and media.

Apart from the diversity of the events in the surroundings there is also a difference in the style of processing or living one’s own emotions (feeling them, expressing them, understanding them). This research focusses on how students process emotions provoked by news/media

stories on the events connected to the abovementioned critical political events. Students from the Faculty of Philosophy, University “Ss. Cyril and Methodius” voluntarily accepted to take part in this research.

Two research instruments were used: questionnaire for the evaluation of the media content and their influence on the emotions of the respondent and the Emotional Processing Scale (EPS) regarding the nature of processing emotions. The research design provides quantitative and qualitative analysis.

This study showed that anger, fear and rage are dominantly provoked by negative emotions which are unprocessed or there is avoidance of coping with them (the two unhealthy ways of emotional processing).

Keywords: Political crisis, Media and emotions, Emotional processing, Media stress, Emotional processing scale

1. INTRODUCTION

For Macedonia the year of 2015 will be remembered as a year of political crisis of enormous proportions. It was a year of “opposition bombs”¹, disclosed incriminating phone calls, strikes in education, mass protests, camping in front of the Government and the Assembly of the country, a police action against the terrorists in Kumanovo, migrant crisisThe political crisis in this article relates to the period from the releasing of the first “bomb” by the opposition to the signed “Agreement from Przino” between the major political parties with the mediation of the international community.

In this exhaustive list of events, Macedonia faced the challenge to “provide” mutual understanding, coexistence, cooperation and tolerance among its citizens. The media are one of those factors that are extremely important in building these processes. They act as promoters of social cohesion and dialogue between different groups in society and have an impact on the creation of the positions and beliefs of citizens, as well as their perceptions of other social, cultural and political groups and communities (Declaration of the Committee of Ministers on the role of community media in promoting social cohesion and intercultural dialogue *Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 11 February 2009, at the 1048th meeting of Ministers’ Deputies*). The research focus is precisely on the manner in which citizens process emotions from listening to and watching the various content of the articles presented in the Macedonian media.

1.1 Emotions as effects of media exposure

Media research in the 1980s and 1990s continually drew on fundamental research on the psychology of emotion.

Wirth and Schramm, (2005) presented researchers with a background in media psychology (Mangold, 1998, 2000a, 2000b; Mangold, Unz, & Winterhoff-Spurk, 2001; Schwab, 2001; Scudder, 1999; Unz & Schwab, 2003; Unz, Schwab, & Winterhoff-Spurk, 2002; Wirth, Schramm, & Böcking, 2004) and pointed that those researchers refer to the Scherer’s Cognitive-Appraisal Theory.

Researches in the domain of media showed that the development of emotions during media reception does not differ fundamentally from everyday situations *not* influenced by media (Scherer, 1998). The result of this multi-step appraisal process produces specific response patterns (physiological responses, motor

¹ The political opposition in Macedonia publicly announced wiretapped telephone conversations of politicians from home and abroad and called them “bombs” that would “crash” the country’s government.

expression, action tendencies, and feelings) or specific media emotions. A politician's proposition does not itself have to be articulated angrily, but can nevertheless evoke or induce anger on the basis of the evaluation by the recipient, according to his/her own goals and values. In this kind of emotional processes we are talking of emotion induction. A second prototypical class of emotional processes during media reception is emotional contagion. Here, the recipient only perceives the emotional expressive behaviour of a media person and imitates it without understanding in detail how the emotional expression of the media person may have developed. The processes underlying this motor imitation of emotional expressive behaviour (e.g., automatic laughter as a response to the laughter of a media person) are not yet fully explained (Scherer, 1998). A third category is *empathy* or *empathic sympathy* with the media person. Here, the recipient him/herself is not affected by the event that evokes the media person's emotion (Wirth & Schramm 2005).

Empathy has become an important construction in mass communication research. Empathy is a complex concept with affective, as well as cognitive components (Wirth & Schramm 2005). Cognitive empathy is the understanding of other persons and the rational reconstruction of another person's feelings in the sense of taking over that person's perspective. Affective empathy, in contrast, is a relatively "primitive" process of sympathizing with other individuals. Affective empathy occurs when, for example, the recipients sense more or less the same emotions they have observed in a media figure.

1.2 Model of 'Emotional processing'

Rachman (1980, according to Baker et al 2007) presented the concept of emotional processing. He wrote "emotional processing is regarded as a process whereby emotional disturbances are absorbed, and decline to the extent that other experiences and behaviour can proceed without disruption". If emotional disturbances are not absorbed, then quite diverse emotional problems may ensue. (1980, according to Baker et al 2007).

This is the model on which the item selection for the emotional processing scale was initially based. It was published in an article "An emotional processing model for counselling and psychotherapy: a way forward" (Baker et al 2007). It is a system based model in which a negative emotional event is seen as a central phase and the expression of emotions is seen as an output.

Elements of emotional processing are: *Input Event* (emotions start with an event), *Emotional Experience* (the meaning attributed to an event determines the type of emotion experienced), *Emotional Expression* (this describes how

the individual gives bodily expression, verbal or motor expression, to emotional experiences), *Labelling* (automatically and usually unconsciously, individuals feel an emotion as a psychological whole and ‘label’ the psychological state), *Linkage* (linking emotions felt by an individual to causal events may again be consciously or unconsciously achieved), *Awareness* (this describes the extent to which an individual is consciously aware of their emotions, or the physical sensations that make up the felt emotion) and *Blocks in the System* (different problems may occur if there is some kind of deficit or blockage in the system).

2. RESEARCH

2.1. Hypothesis

The general hypothesis predicted that *informing by the media is connected with the person’s emotions*, so that it can be stated that:

- I. The diverse manner of informing about events is connected with the emotions of the person;
- II. The intensity of media exposure is connected with the emotions of the person;
- III. The intensity of respondent’s activity in the media sphere is connected with the person’s emotions.
- IV. The attitudes toward media professionalism (media ethics, media objectivity, civic journalism and freedom of media) is connected with emotions.

2.2 Sample

The convenience sample consisted of 88 students from the Faculty of Philosophy, University “Ss. Cyril and Methodius” in Skopje, who voluntarily accepted to take part in this research, from the second and third year of study, between 20-23 years of age.

2.3 Instruments

Emotional Processing Scale (EPS): This version of the scale has 25 items. Each 5 of them are organized in one of the following dimensions: Suppression (excessive emotional control), Signs of Unprocessed Emotion (intrusive and persistent emotional experience; the results of poor emotional processing), Unregulated Emotion (inability to control emotion), Avoidance (evading emotional triggers),

and Impoverished Emotional Experience (poor emotional intelligence, emotionally unaware).

Concerning the goal and problem of this research, an original questionnaire has been created. This questionnaire consisted of the following elements: a) Recall of the memory (the introduction in the questionnaire contained key information for the period of interest), b) direct/mediated information about the political events; c) Media exposure (frequency of exposure on media in the critical period), d) Media activity (intensity and type of personal activity in the media sphere during the critical events), e) Media professionalism (perception of the respondents about how the media in Macedonia were ethic, objective, free and have civil dimension while reporting on critical events during the designated period); f) Media capacity to direct respondent's tendencies (towards themselves or towards others); g) Type and intensity of the evoked emotions regarding media reporting about critical events; h) Emotional processing. The questionnaire was completed by the students in paper form.

2.4 Time of memory recall

Students have been asked to recall their memories about the aforementioned period of the political crisis. Memory recall was performed in the introductory part of the questionnaire. Namely, based on the media published articles (source: www.utrinski.mk; www.time.mk /09.02.2015-02.06.201/) the following short description of this period was presented to the students:

On 9 February 2015 the opposition announced the first “bomb” which aimed to disclose the “malversation and crime” of the Government. The announcement of bombs lasted for several months. Meanwhile, the following events happened:

21 February 2015: Establishment of high school plenum which continued its activities until the end of the school year; 9 May 2015, a police action to destroy the armed terrorist group in the Kumanovo settlement “Divlje naselje”; 16 May 2015: The opposition camp called “Camp of Liberty” was settled in front of the Government. The camp was created and there were activities for two months; 19 May: Camp of supporters of the Government was settled in front of the Assembly. The camp was created and there were activities for two months; 2 June 2015: Agreement signed by the leaders of four political parties Gruevski, Zaev, Ahmeti and Thaci, and mediated by the Commissioner Hahn in the presence of the US Ambassador Bailey and the EU Ambassador Orav.

2.5 Time of conducting the research

Research has been conducted four month after the last critical event and it started at the beginning of November 2015 and lasted until the middle of the same month.

3. RESULTS

All the significant relations based on testing the hypothesis are presented in the Table No.1.

Table 1 Significant relations between variables

	Media capacity to direct personal tendencies	Valence of evoked emotions	Types of evoked emotions	Ways of emotional processing
Diverse way of informing about the political events	No relation	No relation	<p><u>Non-categorized</u> Direct observation and participation is connected with: Anger($X^2=12,291$, $p<0,01$) and Rage($X^2=9,967$, $p<0,05$) Direct contacts (offline social networks) is connected with emotion Joy($X^2=12,646$, $p<0,01$) and Malice($X^2=11,569$, $p<0,01$)</p>	<p><u>Non-categorized</u> Direct observation and participation: Unprocessed($Z=2,078$, $p<0,05$) <u>Categorized:</u> Unregulated ($F=2,504$, $p<0,05$).</p>
Different intensity of media exposure	<p>Watching TV($X^2=13,680$$p<0,01$); Online Social networks ($X^2=9,414$$p<0,01$) .</p>	<p>Watching TV($X^2=19,382$$p<0,01$); Online media ($X^2=7,819$ $p<0,05$).</p>	<p>Watching TV: Anger ($X^2=9,137$, $p<0,05$), Rage ($X^2=11,162$, $p<0,05$)and Woe($X^2=8,139$ $p<0,05$); Online media: Rage $X^2=14,861$$p<0,01$); and Contempt ($X^2=10,165$$p<0,05$); Online Social networks: Contempt ($X^2=8,034$$p<0,05$).</p>	<p>Watching TV: Unprocessed ($Z=-4,251$, $p<0,01$) Unregulated ($Z=-2,378$, $p<0,05$) Impoverished ($Z=-3,406$, $p<0,01$) Sum EPQ ($Z=-2,957$, $p<0,01$); Online media: Unprocessed ($Z=-2,243$, $p<0,05$); Social networks: Unprocessed ($Z=-3,058$, $p<0,01$), Impoverished($Z=-2,469$, $p<0,05$), Sum EPQ ($Z=-2,483$, $p<0,05$).</p>

<i>Different intensity of personals activity in media sphere</i>	No relation	($X^2=48,341, p<0,01$)	Woe ($X^2=37,691, p<0,01$); Contempt ($X^2=22,794, p<0,01$).	Unprocessed ($F=3,865, p<0,01$)
Attitudes toward media ethics, media objectiveness, civil journalism and media liberty	No relation	Objectivity ($X^2=13,420, p<0,01$)	Non - objectivity: Anger ($X^2=15,501, p<0,05$); Woe ($X^2=24,457, p<0,01$); Ethics: Joy ($X^2=15,570, p<0,0$); Non civil: Fear ($X^2=24,015, p<0,01$); Civil: Love ($X^2=14,741, p<0,05$); Joy ($X^2=13,722, p<0,05$); Non liberal: Fear ($X^2=13,248, p<0,05$).	Objectivity: Unregulated Kruskal Wallis test ($X^2=6,209, p<0,05$)

TESTING OF THE FIRST HYPOTHESIS

The first hypothesis predicted that the diverse manner of informing on the events is connected with the emotions of the person. The testing of the first hypothesis shows that:

-Informing on the political events by direct observation and participation is connected with: emotions like Anger ($X^2=12,291, p<0,01$) and Rage ($X^2=9,967, p<0,05$), and more frequently unprocessed and unregulated manner of emotional processing,

-Informing through direct contacts (offline social networks) is connected with the emotion Joy ($X^2=12,646; p<0.01$) and Malice ($X^2=11,569; p<0.01$). Informing about political events through offline social networks (direct contacts) means feeling joy and malice more frequently.

-The diverse manner of informing on the events is not connected with person's tendencies (towards themselves or towards others) and is not connected with the valence of the emotions.

These data partially confirmed the first hypothesis which predicts that the diverse manner of informing on the events is connected with respondent's emotions, which mean that the manner of informing is important for the type of emotions and the manner of their processing, but not important with reference to person's tendencies and valence of the emotions. The manners which make difference on person's emotions are informing about political events through direct observation/participation and direct contacts with other people. Direct observation/ participation means unwanted feelings, such as: anger and rage (both negative feelings) more repeatedly and more uncontrollably; direct contacts (offline social networking) means having negative, but also positive emotions.

TESTING OF THE SECOND HYPOTHESIS

The second hypothesis predicted that intensity of informing by the media is connected with person's emotions, so negative emotions will be more evoked by more intense exposure on media coverage.

Testing of the second hypothesis shows that:

-watching TV is connected with person's tendencies towards others (respondents have tendencies to share, to argue, to communicate); negative valence of the emotions; experiencing anger, rage and sadness more frequently; unprocessed, unregulated and impoverished way of emotional processing.

-informing by online media means more negative unprocessed emotions, such as: rage and contempt.

-informing by online social networks means directing the person's tendencies towards others, experiencing contempt more frequently and unprocessed and impoverished manner of emotional processing.

These data fully confirmed the second hypothesis that predicted that intensity of informing by the media is connected with person's emotions, so negative emotions like anger, rage, sadness and contempt will be more evoked by more intense TV exposure, online media and online social networks. Intense media exposure will be connected with reporting about unwanted feelings, repeatedly experiencing the same emotion over the time, difficulty to control verbal behaviour, overreacting on what people said or did, and sometimes being unable to work overwhelmed of emotions or sickness.

TESTING OF THE THIRD HYPOTHESIS

The third hypothesis predicted that **Intensity of personal activity in the media sphere is connected with person's emotions** so negative emotions will be more evoked by more intense activity in the media sphere.

The testing of the third hypothesis shows that:

-Activity in the media space is connected with more negative than neutral emotions;

-Activity in the media space is more frequently connected with the emotions sadness and contempt;

-Activity in the media space is connected with repeated experiencing of the same emotion over the time.

These data fully confirmed the third hypothesis.

TESTING OF THE FOURTH HYPOTHESIS

The fourth hypothesis predicted that attitudes toward media professionalism (media ethics, media objectivity, civic media and freedom of media) is connected with person's emotions, so negative emotions will be more evoked by more negative attitudes towards media professionalism.

The study showed these significant correlations:

- ✓ Attitudes toward media objectivity are related to lack of emotions;
- ✓ Attitudes toward media non-objectivity are related to more negative emotions, experiencing anger and sadness more frequently and unregulated emotional processing (difficulty to control the emotions);
- ✓ Attitudes toward media ethics are related to experiencing joy more frequently;
- ✓ Attitudes toward civic media are related to experiencing love and joy more frequently;
- ✓ Attitudes toward non-civic media are related to experiencing fear more frequently;
- ✓ Attitudes toward no freedom in media are related to experiencing fear more frequently.

These data confirmed the fourth hypothesis.

4. DISCUSSION

The research question was: “Is there any connection between nature/intensity of media exposure and quality/nature/type of evoked emotions and their further processing?” This question was a result of the political circumstances which started from 9 February 2015 when the first “opposition bomb was activated” and ended 2 June 2015 with the signed agreement between the leaders of the four main political parties (Macedonian, Albanian, opposition and position) mediated by relevant international actors.

Research was conducted in November, four months after the last critical event and it included 88 students. The questionnaire was completed by students during their regular classes. This research was based on, and it supported the framework of cognitive appraisal theories, which highlighted the cognitive judgments or personal interpretation of situations and noted that appraisal of a situation causes an emotional, or affective response (Wirth & Schramm 2005).

As this research was based on the events that have already been completed, it is in the range of studies about the relation between emotion and memory and it can be classified in the group of studies based on the recall of one’s own emotional (media-mediated) experiences (Wirth & Schramm 2005).

The fear was the most dominant emotion provoked by the media mediated method of informing about the critical political events. Emotional responses to news coverage of negative events do not happen in a vacuum. There is nothing to doubt that the events that cause destabilization of national security will lead to the emergence of unpleasant and negative emotions among citizens. Findings of this study showed that those respondents who took active participation in critical events experienced anger and rage and demonstrated unprocessed and unregulated manner of coping with emotions.

We live in mediated world and the way media represent the reality can be a relevant factor for emotional experience of events that occur in the real world. Emotional responses on television news exposure leads to the increase of negative emotions (anger, rage and sadness) and unprocessed, unregulated and impoverished way of emotional processing. The results show that those emotions were dominant among the respondents.

The presence on social networks in the critical period leads to the emergence of negative emotions (rage, contempt). It directed the tendencies toward others and stimulated unprocessed and impoverished way of emotional processing.

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