

## The Role of Media in Times of Crisis

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The article deals with media during a crisis situation. The first part of the article defines media and includes their division. Furthermore, the selected media is closely specified and their role in times of crisis is defined. The public awareness in times of crisis situations is dealt with in the second part of the article. The lack of awareness of mayors in the incident of the active shooter attack in Uherský Brod is depicted. The recommendation that particularly refers to citizens' rights in the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms forms part of the article. The article appeals to the activity of a specialized institute for crisis management.

### Introduction

Nowadays, mass media are widely discussed due to the impact on the functioning of the social function of the population in the Czech Republic and around the world in both positive and negative ways. The task of the media is to provide comprehensive information on the situation during emergencies that already happened or is imminent. Therefore, the task of mass media is to inform the citizens as fast as they can. Thus, the media have a key role in crisis communication besides the intervening rescue services (IRS). They also have an important role in enhancing solidarity and cohesion. [1]

### 1. Mass media

Mass media or even media are an inseparable part in everyday life. According to Hans Hiebel, the media can be defined as: "Mass media are materially-mechanical or energy (electrical, electromagnetic, electronic, optoelectronic) mediums and data providers or information units, and mechanical and electrical methods for its processing in terms of three basic phenomena (storage, convey and process)." [2]

#### 1.1 Printed and electronic media

In this article, we can divide the media in relation to crisis to printed and electronic. Among the printed media belongs in particular dailies, social and professional magazines which provides regular news and current affairs. The electronic media consists of television and radio stations, and the Internet. All these media have a wide target group. [3]

### 1.1.1 Press

In terms of journalism, newspapers are the essential medium. Their main purpose is to convey current news. The main disadvantages are the impossibility of direct mediation of sound or auditory perception and actuality of articles is slower (usually the next day). On the other hand, they can provide more detail information on the situation, interviews with experts etc. Among the most famous dailies providing objective facts about emergency or crisis situations include MF DNES, Lidove noviny, Právo, Deník (regional news) etc. [4]

### 1.1.2 Radio

Radio is considered as one of the oldest electronic media. The advantage of radio news is the fast announcement of the current news and availability (car, work, ...). In the Czech Republic, approximately 5.5 million inhabitants a day listen to the radio; that is more than a half of the population. Those are the main reasons why the radio is the most suitable me-dium during a crisis. Another advantage is the immediate audience feedback (e.g. calling the studio). The only disadvantage is that the audience can overhear the information. [4] Český rozhlas 1 - Radiožurnál is the well-known public radio stations. This station pro-vides the fastest information service about situations that occurred in the Czech Republic or in the world. In case of crises, the Český rozhlas gets verified and true information from the place of event and also interviews with experts on the subject. Nowadays, the most listened private radio is Radio Impuls. The task of such radio is rather to inform about cri-sis and other threats. [5]

### 1.1.3 Television

The television news are, in terms of providing information on emergencies and crisis, the most viewed in television broadcasting that usually goes between 7 and 8 p.m.. The most viewed news goes on TV Nova (Televizní noviny), followed by ČT1 and ČT24 (Události), FTV Prima (TV Prima) and the last is TV Barrandov (Naše zprávy). Televizní noviny on TV Nova depicts negative news (accidents, disasters, ...) more frequently than positive news. They contribute to the fact that people feel much more fear than it is necessary. [6]

Director of TV news is trying to evoke emotions of the audience with new information. It uses moving images, sounds, and spoken words. Television news is short, brief and con-tains accurate information on the crisis that occurred in certain time usually in last 24 hours. In case of emergency, information is always broadcast first and the editors reserve 20 to 30 minutes to this news. Authors of television broadcast are always trying to attract the viewers the most recent headline of the news. In case of emergency; for example, shooting in Uherský Brod, the headline was constantly showed to the viewers during the broadcast and in following days, they still return to this news. [7] The following figure shows the ratings of the main news on the day of active shooter attack in Uherský Brod (Czech Republic)

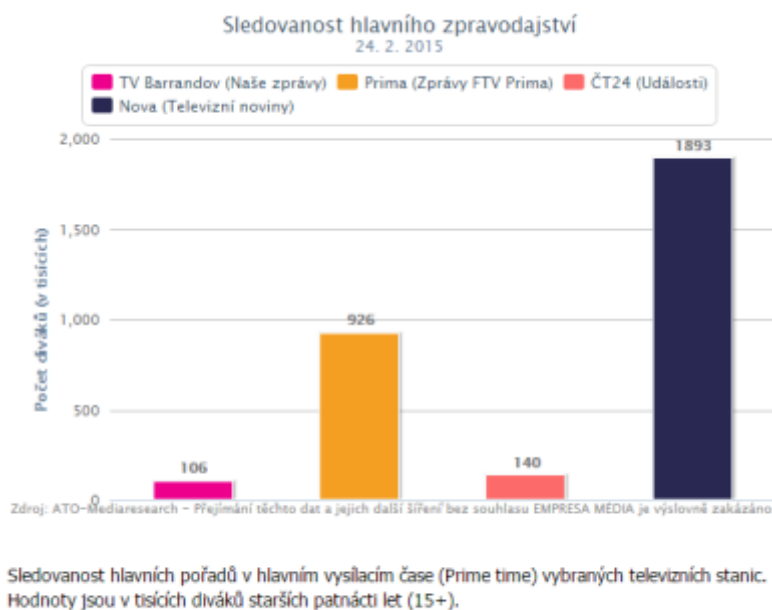


Fig. 1: Ratings of the main news on the day of emergency situation [8]

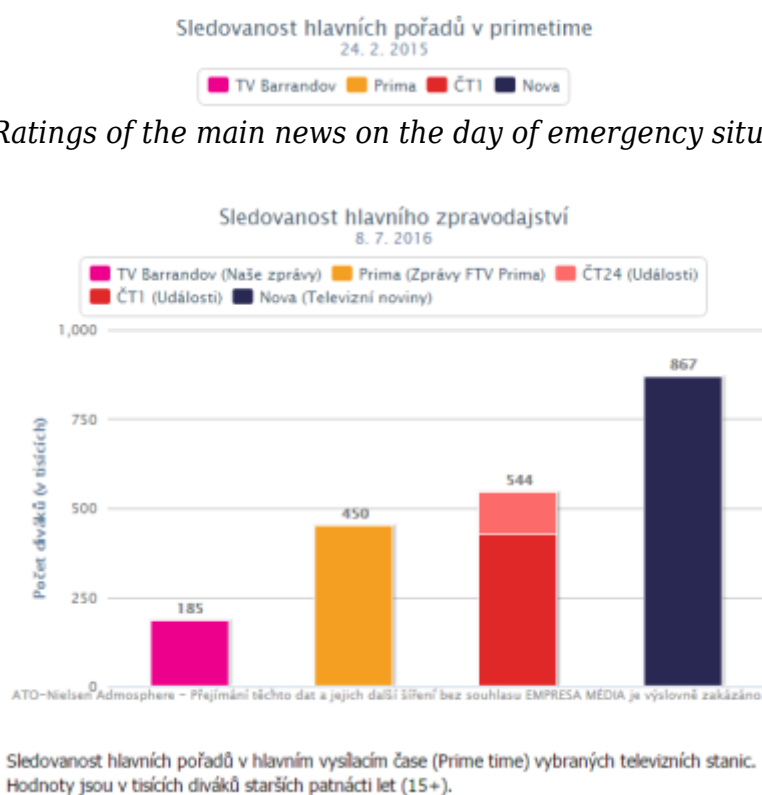


Fig. 2: Ratings of the main news on the day of without emergency situation [9]

As can be seen in these two figures, the highest ratings has Televizní noviny on TV Nova and on the day of shooting in Uherský Brod, the ratings were about 1 million higher than on an ordinary day.

### 1.1.4 Internet

The Internet is the fastest and worldwide used medium in present time. It uses the main elements of communication (text, image, and video) and connects them to the commutation medium. TV stations organize chats on the Internet during the emergency broadcasts. Newspaper also refers to the Internet for more information where the users can discuss about the news in forums. [4] The advantage is possibility to read the older news; however, the disadvantage is the dis-closure of misleading

information and unavailability of the Internet. The one of the most read Czech news server is novinky.cz. [10]

## **2. Informtion of the public during emmergency**

One of the rights of a citizen is to be informed about events that are happening in their neighborhood and the Czech Republic. If the citizens are informed about current crisis, it may save their lives, health, and property, even the environment. In order to notice the citi-zens with credible information, it must be released by the mayor of the town, the president of the region or the Fire and Rescue Brigade. During a crisis, media also gets to the site of the event where they gathering information. Public media are generally trying to public confirmed information. These include press releases from the event sites. On the contrary, private media are always trying to offer something more. They are even willing to pay eyewitnesses to obtain videos, photos, and information that are not confirmed yet.

### **2.1 Informing the mayors during emergency situations**

In case of crisis situation such as flood, fire, etc., the mayor is promptly informed about this situation through SMS message and e-mail. The example can be a tragedy that happened in Uherský Brod in 2015 where a shooter killed seven people and then committed suicide in restaurant Družba. This incident showed the lack in the process of informing. The citizens in the Czech Republic and then in the world already knew about the situation through the media; however, the mayor of the city received this information from his assistant whose husband went to this restaurant. This proves that media can be very fast and even faster than police of the Czech Republic.

Due to this problem, the chief of the Association of Regions of the Czech Republic, chief of the Union of Municipalities of the Czech Republic, the Minister of the Interior, the po-lice president and CEO of the Fire Rescue Service of the Czech Republic signed a memo-randum. This document covers the cooperation on informing about crisis situations (floods, fire) but also already mentioned active shooter to the representatives of municipalities and regions. Czech Police should dispatch a police officer to inform the mayor about the event that occurred. [11] In each crisis staff, the crisis communication center should be the only ones who provide communication with public.

Crisis communication center should act permanently and ensure regular communication with media. In addition to the communication information to media, it is also important to inform the general public; not only to imminent neighborhood. Another important activity of these centers should be gathering, and evaluating information about the situation and furthermore to minimize the risk of disinformation leaks. Integral part of each center should be a manager who leads the team. The manager is also an organizer and a member of the crisis staff. Another member of the crisis staff should be a deputy manager who is also a journalist and spokesperson. The last members are photog-rapher/cameraman, and administrative staff.

The center should be operating before, during and after the crisis situation. The goal of the center is to create a smoothly functioning information channel; starting with

gathering, sorting and evaluating information before the crisis. During the crisis, it is important to convince the public that the center is the only official source of information. In this phase, the right timing is also important. The last phase is the aftermath of the crisis which re-quires the official statement.

## Recommendation

According to Article 17 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms, all citizens of the Czech Republic have the right to access to information. This information should truth-ful and credible. Citizens have the right on timely and complete information especially during crisis. Therefore, there should be specialized department providing statements to the general public or media. It will also participate in the exchange of information, internal communication, and gathering and evaluating information. This prevents disruption of ap-plied measures and minimizes panicking. At the same time, this ensures undisturbed work-place for expert teams of crisis management. The crisis communication center should also regularly communicate with media. All com-munications with media during crisis should always be proper and fair. The members of the center should always be helpful, and competent with professional distance to journal-ists. [3]

## Conclusion

As mentioned in the introduction, the main task of mass media is to convey information to the citizens as quickly as possible. The journalist should publish only information that is confirmed, and must respect the truth, defend freedom of the press and other media. Fur-thermore, the journalist cannot use presumption as a proven fact or changing story. The last point is a obligation of journalists not to use unfair practices to obtain information, photo-graphs, documents or to exploit the good faith. [7]

This article pointed out on the important role of the media in case of crisis. The paper was divided up into two main chapters. The first discusses particularly media, its classification and role in crisis situations. The article also includes ratings of television news on regular day and day when there is a crisis. The second part deals with informing of the public in emergency situations. In this part is an example of informing the mayor of Uherský Brod during attack of active shooter. The article is concluded with recommendations for improvement in the situation.

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