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## PEOPLE'S CHOICE OF THE BEST SOURCE OF INFORMATION

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It was in the nineteenth century when the name "seventh power" for the press emerged. In 1815, after defeating Napoleon, The Sacred Alliance of the Tzar, Bizmark, Habsburgs and Bourbons shared the Continent. Their treaty worked fairly for one hundred years, till the square catastrophe of the World War I. Of course, there were small collision, but in principle crowned heads held together united in wild fight against their common enemy: a selfconscious citizen, whose voice the press was.

Reaching victory, the press found out that at the same moment it was no longer the only sovereign in its realm. Radio, film and finally TV were trying to win the favour of the people, creating a big challenge for the press. Since that time this continent has been shared, too. But there is no treaty and the boundaries are not so obvious. It is difficult to say without research which stratum, social or economic, prefers which medium under which circumstances.

Usually, to answer the question on people's choice of the most important medium, students of mass communication ask respondents: "If you heard a war suddenly broke out, which source of information would you contact first?" We were fortunate enough not to have to pose any hypothetical questions: our survey proceeded in such an agitated time that people were forced to make their choices.

The present study was compiled on the basis of data that had been collected under favourable circumstances. In April 1968 a series of questions was presented to a sample considered as representative for the whole Republic — by a well run-in network of interviewers.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The basic set of the investigation carried out in April 1968 was the adult population of the Czechoslovak Republic. The sample was prepared by quota sampling according to the census in 1961. The quota were calculated so as to cover the whole studied territory in a regular way; to represent proportionally all sizes of communities, men and women, people of all ages and professions. In this way a panel was obtained in 1966 which was quite representative. Our analysis, being based on the fifth research of the same panel, displays some changes in the population structure when compared with that of 1961, and also a slight impairing of the representativeness due to the panel getting old; there are somewhat fewer people above sixty and slightly more "white collars" than would be strictly proportional. Also the relative amount of people with higher education has been rather often found to have increased. The investigation in April 1968 was carried out on the whole Czechoslovak territory. However, only the answers of 1563 respondents living in Bohemia and Moravia were subjected to the secondary analysis.

The answers served as a basis for a serial TV programme "Opinion Against Opinion", prepared by a broader research team. The expert interest of some team members caused the investigation to be enriched by a couple of questions concerning communication preference and the types of communication structures.

The Czechoslovak television fully realized the significance of the data collected and asked for a secondary analysis which was carried out in autumn 1968. The value of the primary information was increased quite remarkably by the unexpected political development.

The above mentioned combination of favourable conditions should not, however, conceal the fact that the secondary analysis was also limited by the circumstances under which it was being undertaken. The network of interviewers was designed and run in with the aim of getting answers to a small number of simple check answers. For that reason also the analysis of the dominant communication orientation was based on a single indicator, not on a battery of questions as would have been desirable. The time and financial funds were limited, too, and consequently all possibilities supplied by the collected materials could not be fully used in the secondary analysis either.

The dominant communication orientation of the respondent was sought for by the question: "What has lately been your source of the most interesting items of news and comments?"<sup>2</sup> The distribution of answers shows the TV to be a superpower among mass media; it is followed by the press, i. e. newspapers. Remaining in the third place, the radio has lost its former popularity. The distribution of answers in the adult Czechoslovak population is as follows<sup>3</sup>:

*Table I.*

| Source of most interesting news and comments | CSSR         | Czech Countries | Slovakia    |
|--|--------------|-----------------|-------------|
| TV   | 43 %         | 46 %            | 37 %        |
| Newspapers                                   | 31           | 30              | 33          |
| Radio  | 20           | 19              | 21          |
| Friends                                      | 5            | 4               | 8           |
| Other answer                                 | 1            | 1               | 1           |
| Total  | 100 % (2183) | 100 % (1542)    | 100 % (641) |

<sup>2</sup> This question was asked as the fourth of fifteen questions followed by eight questions concerning the respondent's person.

The difference between the West and the East of the Republic was influenced particularly by two facts. The media themselves to which the dominant orientation was turned have not identical contents. The newspapers in Slovakia differ from those in the Czech countries, the broadcasting stations have special programmes for Slovakia and the TV programmes for the two parts of the Republic overlap only partially. Nor is the spread or accessibility of TV in the Czech countries equal to that in Slovakia. Another distinctive factor is the population: the social structure and stratification, the degree of urbanization and industrialization differ very markedly from one another in the two complexes that have been studied.<sup>4</sup> The influence of these factors and of further differences in the two national cultures causes different distributions of preferences as to information sources: in the Czech countries the TV dominance is by far more marked than in Slovakia, where it is only little ahead of the newspapers; in Slovakia the more intimate "face to face" communication, i. e. the communication which does not come through any mass media, makes itself far more valid. These findings only support the sociological observation which states that the move from the classical society to the industrial one has not reached identical stages in the two parts of the Republic.

This circumstance induced the authors to decide to subject only data from Czech countries to a further analysis and, with view to the lack of time and economic funds, to renounce the comparison with Slovakia which would certainly be attractive. Consequently further results apply to the sample for Czech countries only.

#### The Influence of Demographic Factors upon the Dominant Orientation

The respondent's sex has been found to have a marked connection with the studied dominant orientation. The percentage of those preferring the TV as an information source appears to be almost equal; 45 per cent with men and 47 per cent with women. However, a substantial difference between the sexes shows as to the medium which is in competition with TV more often. Provided they do not prefer the television, men are much more frequently oriented towards the press (37 per cent as against 23,5 per cent with women) whereas women towards face to face contacts (6 per cent as against 2 per cent with men).

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<sup>3</sup> The distribution of questions was somewhat affected by the fact that the investigation was carried through by the television network of interviewers; this circumstance affected the results in favour of the TV. But even if we take into consideration a certain overestimation of the TV, there is no doubt the TV was the most important communication channel for news and comments. After all, this fact has also been proved by a comparable research carried out by the network of interviewers of the Czechoslovak Radio, and by the results of other studies, e. g. by the research of the communication structure of three local communities in Moravia which was undertaken by the authors in May 1968. 42 % of the observed population were found to watch the evening TV programme three or more times a week.

<sup>4</sup> This fact is also documented, along with numerous statistic, demographic and economic data, by first national sociological investigations, especially by the mobility and social stratification research in Czechoslovakia which is being carried out by the team of Pavel Machonin.

The most influential factor affecting the dominant orientation proved to be *education*; the higher the education of an individual, the less frequently his dominant orientation is directed toward TV; even so markedly that the television loses its priority with the most educated stratum.

**Table II. Preferences of Communication Media by Sex and Education**

|   | Education  |            |            |
|---|------------|------------|------------|
|   | compulsory | secondary  | university |
| Percentage preferring TV <sup>1)</sup>    |            |            |            |
| Men                                       | 47 % (462) | 41 % (236) | 44 % (57)  |
| Women                                     | 49 (535)   | 44 (232)   | 33 (24)    |
| Men and Women                             | 48 (997)   | 42 (468)   | 41 (81)    |
| Percentage preferring press <sup>2)</sup> |            |            |            |
| Men                                       | 33 %       | 46 %       | 42 %       |
| Women                                     | 20         | 29         | 46         |
| Men and Women                             | 26         | 37         | 43         |
| Percentage preferring radio <sup>2)</sup> |            |            |            |
| Men                                       | 18 %       | 13 %       | 12 %       |
| Women                                     | 23         | 24         | 12         |
| Men and Women                             | 21         | 18         | 12         |

1) Statistically non significant,  $p > .05$  %.

2) Statistically significant,  $p > .01$  %.

The facts shown in these tables can be explained as follows: The orientation of the more educated strata towards the press is traditional. It is connected with the professional habit of working with the written word and with a more outspokenly developed conceptual thought.<sup>5</sup> Unless the deepest structures of our civilization are changed, we may take the influence of this factor to be permanent and invariable in spite of any programme changes in mass media.

At the same time a sign of a certain evaluation may be observed in the tables: The TV appears to be a relatively uninteresting source of information for the more educated in the population; *vice versa* the press is a relatively uninteresting source of information for the less educated. For people who have reached

<sup>5</sup> T. W. Adorno: "Prolog k televizi"; *Divadlo* 1968/3.

Marshall MacLuhan: *Understanding Media*; Boston 1965.

a higher level of education the TV is obviously less comprehensive as to information than the press; it serves rather for relaxation and has a lower prestige in their eyes.

A very essential finding seems to be the circumstance that *women are far more affected by their degree of education than men*. Though we are well aware of the fact that data concerning people with university education are backed up by a relatively small part of the sample and, consequently, are burdened with a considerable sample error, hypothetically at least we should try to explain the differences of orientation between the sexes toward the TV on the one hand and the press on the other hand:

Education is passed on along with certain cultural patterns including also a system of access to the source of information. Such people who do not accept the status of those fully educated as a normal thing endeavour more markedly to materialize and demonstrate it. This is the case of women. On the contrary, men with university education do not think their status to be threatened by anything and consequently violate the traditional cultural patterns of educated people more easily or admit their violation without any hindrance.

There are two further and rather simpler explanations. University educated men have usually positions complying with their professional qualifications and find a full intellectual satisfaction in their profession. In their leisure time they prefer less exacting sources of information. Highly educated women rather frequently occupy employments which do not correspond to their professional qualifications and that is why they like reading during their leisure time. Moreover their household duties sometimes coincide exactly with the time of the TV news — the Czechoslovak television has but one programme — which fact may serve as yet another reason of their preference for the press.

The influence of *age* upon the dominant communication orientation appears to be far less conspicuous than that of sex and education. The television as a dominant information source is given preference especially by middle aged people, the press rather by younger people, who have also reached a higher educational level, the radio is preferred by older people in a slightly over-average way.

Table III. Preferences of Communication  
Media by Age

| Age group | Preferred source of information |       |      |         | Total (N)   |
|-----------|---------------------------------|-------|------|---------|-------------|
|           | Press                           | Radio | TV   | Friends |             |
| 18—29     | 32 %                            | 19 %  | 45 % | 4 %     | 100 % (351) |
| 30—39     | 35                              | 12    | 50   | 3       | 100 % (285) |
| 40—49     | 31                              | 16    | 51   | 2       | 100 % (299) |
| 50—59     | 26                              | 22    | 46   | 6       | 100 % (377) |
| 60—       | 31                              | 29    | 35   | 5       | 100 % (237) |

Statistically significant,  $p < .001$ .

The classification of our population according to *occupational groups* is unusually difficult. The concepts and criteria which are being used by the contemporary Western sociology cannot be applied because of a markedly different structure of our society and because of the fact that some concepts have been ideologized and deprived of any contents. Even such a basic and currently used term as the "worker" has not been clearly defined. Moreover, in some of the professional categories the distribution according to other demographic variables (such as age, sex and education) is so heterogenous that their influence may cause a spurious correlation.

We have applied a modification of the official classification of our population — workers, peasants, other employees, economically unactive groups — though we are well aware of a certain arbitrariness of our categorization.

*Table IV. Preferences of Communication Media by Occupation*

| Occupational category                 | Preferred source of information |       |      |         | Total (N)   |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------|------|---------|-------------|
|                                       | Press                           | Radio | TV   | Friends |             |
| Worker                                | 29 %                            | 17 %  | 51 % | 3 %     | 100 % (558) |
| Peasant                               | 30                              | 20    | 48   | 2       | 100 % (152) |
| Administrative (organizational) staff | 39                              | 18    | 37   | 6       | 100 % (162) |
| Engineer                              | 49                              | 10    | 41   | 0       | 100 % (113) |
| Public Services                       | 28                              | 21    | 47   | 4       | 100 % (110) |
| Household                             | 22                              | 26    | 46   | 6       | 100 % (198) |
| Retired                               | 27                              | 25    | 40   | 8       | 100 % (241) |

Statistically significant,  $p < .001$ .

The most marked feature of *Table IV* is the prevailing orientation to the press — as opposed to TV — in both the engineers and the organizational staff. The classification of the third degree in *Table V* shows some interesting differences between men and women in the categories of workers, peasants and engineers.

We were quite surprised at rather small changes in the dominance of communication sources when taken as a function of *the size of a community*. In big cities newspapers are slightly more preferred whereas in smaller villages it is the TV. Some interesting fluctuation, however, may be observed when classifications of the third degree are carried out. When considering the size of a community in relation with the employment the sample disintegrates into so many subgroups that merely conclusions for workers and perhaps also housewives and retired people may be regarded as somewhat more reliable. The workers give preference to the TV in towns with 20—50 thousand inhabitants (57 per cent) most often in villages of about 1000—5000 inhabitants, the least often (40 per cent) elsewhere; the preference of the television fluctuates between 54 per cent (cities) and 51 per cent. Towns of 20—50 thousand inhabitants are

Table V. Preferences of Communication Media  
by Occupation and Sex

| Occupational Work |       | Preferred source of information |       |      |         |             |
|-------------------|-------|---------------------------------|-------|------|---------|-------------|
|                   |       | Press                           | Radio | TV   | Friends | Total (N)   |
| Worker            | Man   | 33 %                            | 13 %  | 52 % | 2 %     | 100 % (333) |
|                   | Woman | 23                              | 23    | 50   | 4       | 100 % (225) |
| Peasant           | Man   | 35                              | 22    | 42   | 1       | 100 % (78)  |
|                   | Woman | 26                              | 17    | 54   | 3       | 100 % (74)  |
| Engineer          | Man   | 49                              | 11    | 39   | 1       | 100 % (140) |
|                   | Woman | 33                              | 19    | 43   | 5       | 100 % (104) |

interesting in other ways too: there the housewives prefer the TV least of all (only 31 per cent against 60 per cent in the country) whereas the retired people most of all (48 per cent against 29 per cent in the country).

Table VI. Dominant Orientation as to Source  
of Information by Size of Community

| Size of community<br>in thousands of inhabitants | Preferred source of information |       |      |         | Total (N)   |
|--|---------------------------------|-------|------|---------|-------------|
|  | Press                           | Radio | TV   | Friends |             |
| People with compulsory education                 |                                 |       |      |         |             |
| -1   | 26 %                            | 21 %  | 49 % | 4 %     | 100 % (298) |
| 1-5  | 25                              | 22    | 49   | 4       | 100 % (291) |
| 5-20   | 29                              | 20    | 46   | 5       | 100 % (117) |
| 20-100   | 30                              | 25    | 40   | 5       | 100 % (156) |
| 100-   | 23                              | 13    | 54   | 10      | 100 % (117) |
| People with higher than elementary education     |                                 |       |      |         |             |
| -1   | 38                              | 14    | 47   | 1       | 100 % (86)  |
| 1-5  | 40                              | 14    | 44   | 2       | 100 % (110) |
| 5-20   | 36                              | 18    | 44   | 1       | 100 % (80)  |
| 20-100   | 33                              | 21    | 44   | 2       | 100 % (123) |
| 100-   | 42                              | 18    | 36   | 4       | 100 % (129) |

Statistically non significant,  $p > .05$ .

As illustrated by *Table VI*, people with compulsory education prefer TV most of all in cities (54 per cent), least of all in towns of 20—100 thousand inhabitants where again the orientation to the radio increases to 25 per cent and to the press to 30 per cent. On the other hand people with secondary education in cities prefer the press (40 per cent) while the TV remains in the second place (38 per cent). These conclusions represent but partial notions out of the total reality which appears to be really remarkable: the structure of preferences according to education is the most varied in cities (the Tschuprow's coefficient of contingency  $K = .17$ ) the least so in towns of about 20—100 thousand inhabitants ( $K = .08$ ). In other places the degree of relation between the preference of a certain information source and education is very close and remains identical for all other categories of communities, i. e.  $K = .12$ .

*Table VI* can be interpreted from a somewhat different viewpoint; then it gives the following conclusions: in villages a little more than one fifth of those who prefer the TV as a source of information are people with secondary or university educations; in towns their ratio increases almost to one half (47 per cent); it drops again (43 per cent) in the cities.

As the last of the personal characteristics of our set of respondents let us consider their membership in political parties which — in Czechoslovakia in April 1968 — is practically identical with the membership in the Communist Party. An important and rather surprising result seems to be the identity of preferences for TV on the part of both the members and non-members (45 per cent and 46 per cent). Nevertheless a difference is shown in their respective relations to the radio and the newspapers. Political party members prefer more frequently the newspapers (the press 37 per cent, radio 16 per cent, friends 2 per cent) whereas the non-members the radio (the press 28 per cent, radio 21 per cent, friends 5 per cent).

An interesting picture is obtained when preferences by men and women are compared in combination with political party membership and work in public organizations. Party members who are at the same time committee members of some public organization prefer the TV in a far more marked way than non-members (50 per cent as to 44 per cent); on the contrary, the party members with no "public function" less frequently (40 per cent). The radio dominates only with 9 per cent in the party members with public functions but with 22 per cent in those who are "functionless". These interesting facts cannot be reliably explained on the basis of our data. In party members with public functions the amount of their work, their education and age may play a certain role. Another factor might be a stronger traditionalism of the party members without functions which follows from lesser contacts with social life and the habit of listening to the radio as a source of information, because it is favoured thanks to frequent programmes of popular music.

The lack of leisure time and the lack of education seem to explain as the main factors why women-political party members who are at the same time active in other public organizations, show an increased interest in the press (41 per cent) as compared with the TV (38 per cent). Women who are no party members, but are socially active show little difference when compared with women-party members "without any function": the preference of television has reached here the relation frequencies of 51 per cent and 48 per cent; the press is chosen equally (in 25 per cent), the radio as well (in 24 per cent). On the

other hand, in women who are no party members and have no public function the dominance of TV has raised to 47 per cent, of press to 21 per cent, only the choice of the radio remains unchanged — 24 per cent. Friends, however, are given as sources of information with 8 per cent as compared with 2 per cent in case of other women.

### Dominant orientation and political attitudes

As we have already pointed out, the materials used in the secondary analysis for the present paper, had served as the basis of a publicistic serial in the TV. The latter had an outspoken political tendency. Consequently its dominant communicative orientation can be also followed with respect to the variables which express political attitudes of the respondents. Let us present three observations at least.

People who think good and honest politicians to be more essential for the welfare of the state than a good constitution and just laws are to a greater extent oriented to the press, whereas people with the opposite opinion rather prefer TV:

*Table VII.*

| It is most important for the state to have | Preferred source of information |       |      |         | Total (N)   |
|--|---------------------------------|-------|------|---------|-------------|
|  | Press                           | Radio | TV   | Friends |             |
| good and honest politicians                | 34 %                            | 19 %  | 45 % | 2 %     | 100 % (929) |
| a good constitution and just laws          | 27                              | 18    | 52   | 3       | 100 % (434) |
| other reply                                | 20                              | 27    | 38   | 15      | 100 % (188) |

Statistically significant,  $p < .001$ .

Among the questions asked in the interview was also the following: "Do you agree, on the whole, with the present policy of the Czechoslovak Communist Party?" It has been found that the wording of this question was not unambiguous. From some respondents' answers we may assume that the question was apparently understood rather as a confrontation of the Communist and Non-communist policies; other respondents comprehended it only as a question concerning attitudes to some measures which were topical just in the period of the public opinion poll. Moreover, in April 1968 the "contemporary policy of the Czechoslovak Communist Party" was no unequivocal concept that would have been interpreted by all people in the same way. Finally, and this might be the most substantial aspect, the question does not discern those who were dissatisfied, because they thought the policy of the Czechoslovak Communist Party to be too dynamic, too progressive, from those who considered it, on the contrary, to be rather conservative, not dynamic nor vigorous enough. In spite of these qualifications, it may be stated that those who expressed their strong consent with the policy of the Czechoslovak Communist Party in April 1968 were more clearly oriented towards the television in their choices of the preferred information source.

Table VIII

| The present policy of the CP<br>can be agreed with | Preferred source of information |       |      |         |              |
|--|---------------------------------|-------|------|---------|--------------|
|  | Press                           | Radio | TV   | Friends |              |
| quite agree  | 33 %                            | 15 %  | 51 % | 1 %     | 100 % (506)  |
| partly agree                                       | 31                              | 22    | 44   | 3       | 100 % (631)  |
| partly disagree                                    | 35                              | 19    | 41   | 5       | 100 % (165)  |
| quite disagree                                     | 42                              | 12    | 46   | 0       | 100 % (198)  |
| other reply  | 19                              | 23    | 43   | 15      | 100 % (1548) |

Statistically significant on the level of 0,1 %.

There were several questions in the interview determining directly or indirectly the degree of the respondents' interest in politics. Although there are some deviations, the answers to these questions agree remarkably. In order to obtain a total view, we tried to construct an artificial variable which — with respect to the possibilities offered by the collected data — must have been rather arbitrary. We made use of the programme available at the Computer Centre at the College of Technology in Brno which enabled us to combine classes with the application of conjunction, disjunction, negation and code size comparison.

To construct a scale we used the following questions: "Do you follow political news in the press, the radio or the TV?" "Have you two — three acquaintances or a larger stable circle of people whom you occasionally meet, and exchange opinions with, as to interesting news from our public life?" and finally: "Would you be interested in detailed biographies of some of our leading politicians?"

Table IX

| Degree of interest<br>in politics | Listening to news | Circle of people<br>with whom they<br>talk politics | Wish to read<br>the biography<br>of some politician |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|---|---|
| 1                                 | always            | exists  | yes   |
| 2                                 | often at least    | exists  | no  |
| 3                                 | often at least    | none  | yes   |
| 4                                 | quite often       | exists  | yes   |
| 5                                 | often at least    | none  | no  |
| 6                                 | occasionally      | exists  | yes   |
| 7                                 | occasionally      | none  | yes   |
| 8                                 | occasionally      | exists  | no  |
| 9                                 | occasionally      | none  | no  |

It has turned out that these indicators can serve as a basis for the construction of an approximately ranked scale. The very arrangement of the combinations of variants in answers appears to be quite interesting (see Table IX).

The scale which had been thus constructed was confronted with other questions. The concurrence of the artificial scale of the interest in politics, on one hand, the choice of newspapers as the main source of news and comments on politics, on the other hand, is very satisfactory. With the decreasing intensity of interest from the maximum to the minimum the preference of the press decreases almost regularly: 37 per cent, 37 per cent, 34 per cent, 34 per cent, 26 per cent, 30 per cent, 23 per cent, 21 per cent, 14 per cent. This series of members is also an indirect proof of the adequacy of the scale indicating the intensity of interest in politics. The preference of the television as a source of political information, however, is not in connection with the intensity of interest in politics, but appears to be markedly affected by the existence of a circle of acquaintances; those who lack a regular circle of friends with whom they could exchange political opinions now and then, prefer the TV more frequently than the others. People without any interest in politics are more frequently oriented to friends than the others — for the last degrees of the scale it makes 17 per cent with women and 14 per cent with men. All the above facts can be confirmed by the 3rd degree classification according to sex and education. There is a certain sign, however, that a higher educational level limits the range of validity of this assertion to a certain extent.

#### NEJLEPSÍ ZDROJ INFORMACÍ

Studie analyzuje data, týkající se volby zdrojů informací v televizním panelu z obyvatel Cech a Moravy. Zdroje informací jsou televize, rozhlas, noviny a přátelé. Analýza volby je provedena vzhledem k pohlaví, věku, vzdělání, zaměstnání a velikosti komunity. V závěru studie je zkoumána preference zdrojů informací vzhledem k některým rysům sociálního habitu.

