

Mass Media in Leisure Time of Conscripts

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SUMMARY

In this paper, based on the data on the structure of the leisure time, which imply the pattern of the typical Croatian Army (CA) private ("privates" are the conscripts during their completion of their military service), the relationship of the privates to the mass media are analysed. Research was conducted in the year 2000 and was based on the sample of n=1,259 privates. The frequencies of reading the newspapers (daily news), listening to the radio and watching the TV-program were investigated. There is a low percentage of privates who never read newspapers (7.5%); there is a high percentage of them who never watch television (45.7%), and there is 19.6% of privates who listen to the radio on the daily basis. The common investigation shows that mass media have a very important impact on the leisure within the whole of the young population. So, the inclination of the youth to the mass media is obvious, but it is simply impossible to transfer that inclination to reality within the barracks, owing to the modest means the army disposes with and the particularity of the life and the working conditions in an army unit.

Key words: mass media, leisure time, socialization, conditions, conscripts

Introduction

The term "mass media" refers to mass communication that is significant in its universality, great popularity and public character. "In the process of mass communication are produced 1) contents that are primarily intended for short-term use (for example, news, entertainment), 2) in formal organizations by using the high technology, and with 3) different techniques (media), 4) at least potentially offered

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to the great number of people (dispersed audience), unknown to the communicator, and 5) publicly, without restricting access, on a 6) one-sided (the communicator and the receiver cannot switch positions, relation between them is asymmetric in the advantage of the communicator) and 7) mediated way (without direct feedback), 8) with certain periodicity of the production, but 9) continuous” (Kunczik and Zipfel, 1998: 25). According to these criteria, in the means of mass communication we can count in the media that are present for a long time and well known to us, like journalism, radio and television.

The mass media role is changing with the progress of society. “Media that once reported about the reality – or twisted it – became the reality” (Brown according to Poler-Kovačić, 2005: 10). On the present level of scientific, technical and social progress, the mass media should enable not only informing but also two-way communication. Besides technical and technological development of mass media, “public informing and communication also depends on the appropriate use of these means, readiness and professional education of people working in processes of information and communication, as well as on the readiness and preparedness of the public to use these technical means and contents of public informing and communication” (Vujević, 2001: 144).

Denis McQuail gave possible uses and types of satisfaction that users experience with the mass media: “information; personal validation; involvement and social interactivity; entertainment” (McQuail, according to Inglis, 1997: 142). The significance of mass media is in the fact that through them the individual becomes very quickly informed about events in the near and far surroundings, and subsequently they influence the formation of attitudes towards different aspects of life and work. Furthermore, they are making possible the use of various contents: information, sports, culture and entertainment, education, to name a few. Besides, we can expect from radio and television to entertain the public. Various media play an important role in daily lives of people because of their availability and the habits that people adopted by using them. Among contents that are daily available to young people are newspaper articles, and radio and television shows.

Because the research project named “Leisure time of young people under conditions of mandatory military service” (Čerina, 2004) did not specify the mass media usage, the purpose of this research is to analyze the mass media usage in the context of living and working conditions of conscripts.

Life in the military

It is possible that in certain periods of our lives we will face ourselves with the situation when the activity that we participate in starts to influence significantly our leisure time. Among the activities that directly influence the way we spend our leisure time is the military activity. First experiences in this activity are gained during mandatory military service.

Military service in most countries does not reflect the wishes of the individual, but the right and obligation imposed by the government laws. “In a democratic society citizens have the option to change that obligation through their elected repre-

sentatives: for example, to stop the mandatory military service and make it entirely voluntary – the way the United States did it, to change the length of the mandatory service, or to change the obligation in a way that requires all men to become members of territorial defense units, as is the case in Switzerland” (Gugić and Matika, 1998: 11).

In Croatia, as in most European countries, military service is mandatory for all healthy men who have the option to choose either military or civilian service, that differ in the length of the required service time. In the future, one can expect that most European Union countries will have only professional militaries. With the disappearance of the Cold War division and by uniting the European countries into a single union, attitudes towards the organization of the military have significantly changed, and hence there is a tendency of creating small and well equipped professional militaries.¹ Despite the fact that the military spending budget in the years 1999 and 2000 was much greater in Croatia than in the European Union countries, there was not enough money for reforms and modernization of the Croatian military.² The structure of the military budget was very unfavorable, because about 70% of the funds were allocated for personnel salaries, and the rest of the budget was spent on covering other expenditures, one of which was the mandatory military service. “Favorable structure of the budget is the one in which about 50% of the funds go to personnel related expenditures, 30% of the funds are intended for other expenditures and the remaining 20% of the funds are allocated for development” (Jonjić, 2000: 4). The armed forces of the Republic of Croatia have been reduced in personnel size from 44,000 personnel in the year 2000 to 23,000 personnel in the present. More than 18,000 personnel in the present number are active military duty personnel. “The number of conscripts, accordingly to the reduction in the length of mandatory service time, was 13,000 in the year 2001, and that year the prediction was that there would be 8,000 conscripts annually between the years 2002 and 2010” (Pintarić, 2001: 6).

In Croatia, the military service is mandatory for all men who meet the recruitment standards and the service lasts for six months. “It begins with the departure of young men towards Conscript training centers and on the day when they arrive to training centers and become Croatian soldiers they start serving their time” (Kovačević, 1994: 32). Thus, the mandatory military service period starts with the day when the conscripts enter the military base³ and become privates.

By entering the base⁴ the private becomes the member of the learning group in the assigned military unit. In the beginning he is just a formal member of the group, and after the initial adjustment period he becomes an active member, who makes connections with his surroundings. Leisure activities, including mass media usages, can become important means of socialization, especially in this period of the private’s life. Through these activities, privates faster realize social contacts and real communication relations. Firm relations among members of the group provide better task accomplishments in all military duties. That firm unity is the main condition for success of the training. Military unit composed of individuals soon becomes the undividable whole, with strong unity as its main characteristic. From the first day in the unit, privates begin socialization process. They change familiar surroundings of their family to entirely new and unknown military envi-

ronment. In this process they are creating certain attitudes towards military service, armed forces in general, patriotism and everything else they encounter while living and working in the military. To what extent will these attitudes be positive, greatly depends on conditions for life and work in the military.

In the military unit everything goes by the daily work schedule, including leisure activities; the schedule lists all activities during both day and night, and includes both working and living activities. The daily work schedule describes: wake-up time (reveille), meals, formation time, raising the flag, military training (classes), afternoon rest periods, afternoon classes, leisure activities and bed time (taps). Privates have 1-2 hours available for afternoon rest, and 2-4 hours available for leisure activities. Leisure activities serve as an important factor of the socialization process, especially during the adjustment period, and as a substitute for habits developed prior to entering the military. During the morning, privates are occupied with military training and they have little time to communicate to each other. Only later, during leisure time, they can go to the canteen and completely relaxed talk about different topics – sports, entertainment and culture – that mass media talk about. These topics are “the most interesting topics to young people and they are inevitably the main component of daily communication among young people” (Ilišin, 2002: 273). This is equally true for privates, who are just making their new friendships.

The mass media usage is the activity on which most of the people spend significant portions of free time. Katz and others (according to Fiske and Hartley, 1992: 48) argue that mass media satisfy the following conditions: 1) cognitive requirements: receiving news, gaining knowledge, spreading the understanding; 2) emotional requirements: need for emotional and esthetic experience, love and friendship; 3) personal integrative needs; 4) needs for tension / relaxation: need for escape and recreation. According to research (Košir et al, 1999; Tomić-Koludrović and Leburić, 2001; Ilišin and Radin, 2002; Jergović, 2004), young people are spending significant amount of their leisure time with mass media. That does not necessarily mean that they appreciate reading newspapers, listening to the radio and watching television more than they appreciate other free time activities; it simply means that young people prefer spending their leisure time in this way because they might be unable to spend time with their friends, to play sports, to attend cultural and entertainment events, and so forth.

Methodology of research

The aim of this research was to measure to which extent privates spend their leisure time with mass media and to check whether there is a significant difference in mass media usage between privates and young people in civilian life. The starting hypothesis was that there is a significant difference in the frequency of mass media use between young people who are serving in the military and their civilian peers.

In this research the basic experimental group was composed of privates in the third conscript class of the year 2000. Research was conducted in army training

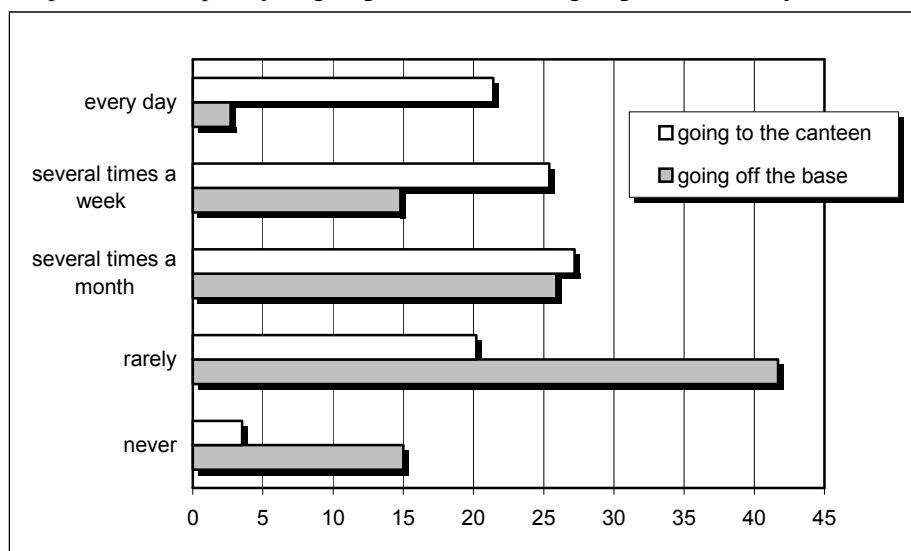
camps across Croatia during the month of October. The sample for research was randomly chosen – privates from each platoon within every subsection of training battalions were alphabetically sorted and then every fifth private was chosen to the total of 20% of privates per each platoon and the final sample of 1,259 privates. Namely, in this experimental sample were included 320 privates from the training center in Sinj, 349 came from Pula, 244 from Požega, and 346 from Koprivnica. The main method used in conducting research was the survey. The survey was conducted simultaneously in all military training units. Leisure time activities were assessed on a 5-point, Likert scale survey with closed type questions and response options “1=never”, “2=rarely”, “3=several times a week”, “4=often”, and “5=every day”.⁵ Variables of the research were grouped in four categories: the frequency (activities that privates participate in their leisure time), wishes (activities that privates would like to participate in), satisfaction (the level of satisfaction with the way and conditions for spending their leisure time), and influence (estimates of the impact that leisure activities have on discipline and the quality of life and work on the military base).

Data processing was based on the analysis of collected data that describes behavior of privates in their leisure time (for example, leaving the base in order to visit the city, going to the canteen, mass media usage, and so on). The descriptive statistics procedure was used in this analysis. Furthermore, the statistical software package, Statistica 5.0, was used for computer processing.

Results and interpretation

In order to create more complete picture about the place that mass media take in leisure time of privates, we will first show data about the frequency of leisure time use outside the base and the frequency of going to the military canteen. On the question how much of their free time privates use to go off the base, the majority of privates (41.6%) answered that they rarely go outside (graph 1). Obtained results direct us to the conclusion that privates rather decide to spend their leisure time on the base because they do not have the option to spend more meaningful time off the base. Limited time periods that privates use to go off the base for a few hours, represent only the way to take a break from daily strains. Concerning the privates' visits to the canteen, one can notice moderately equal spread of answers under the condition that we neglect the small percentage (3.5%) of privates who never visit the canteen (graph 1). One can say that privates gladly go to the canteen, and the frequency of going there depends on the amount of money they have available. Privates go to the canteen because of the social contact – discussion on the different subjects among which are certainly those available in mass media. The military canteen is a very important place for privates as it is a café bar for their civilian peers.

Graph 1: The frequency of going off the base and going to the military canteen.

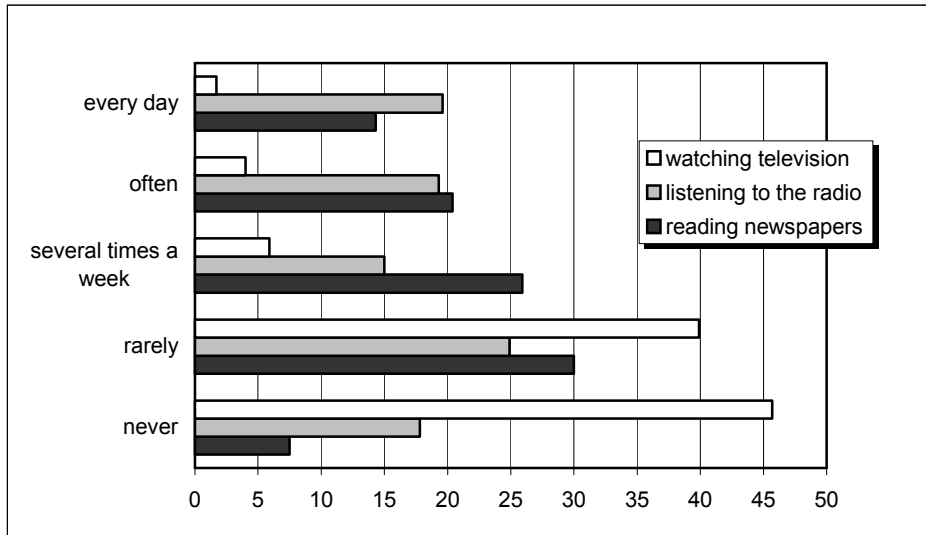


Source: Empirical data from research on leisure time of the privates (Čerina, 2003: 70).

The results of the frequency of public media use (graph 2) show that there is only a small number of privates who never read newspapers (7.5%); there is a great number of privates who never watch television (45.7%), while the greatest frequency in public media use is daily listening to the radio (19.6%).

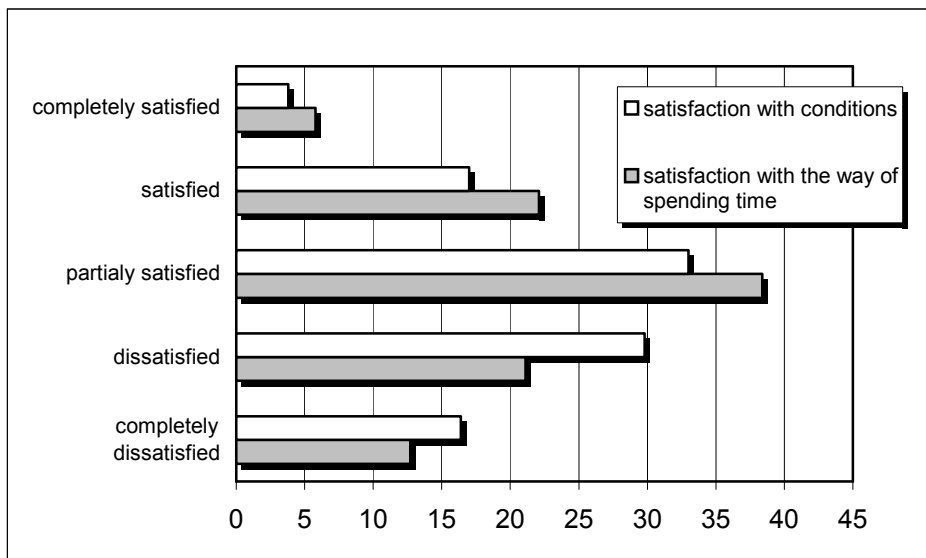
Since in this research we do not have the control group among civilian population we used data from empirical research of interest and leisure time of young people conducted by the Institute of Social Research in 1999 in the Republic of Croatia with the sample of $n=1,700$ young people. The results of this empirical research were published in the book "Young People on the Eve of the Third Millennium" (Editors Ilišin and Radin, 2002).⁶ There are small differences in results for reading newspapers – there are a little bit more occasional readers among privates (55.9% versus 47.3%), while there are somewhat more young people in the civilian population who often read newspapers (46% versus 34.7% among privates); comparison for listening to the radio shows significant differences in results, namely there is 65.2% of civilian young people who often listen to the radio versus 38.9% of privates who involve in the same activity; finally, there are significantly big differences in watching television – almost half of privates do not watch television at all (45.8%), while, on the contrary, there are 70.9% of civilian young people who often watch television.

Graph 2: The frequency of the media use.



Source: Data from research on leisure time of young people under conditions of mandatory military service (Čerina, 2005: 48).

Graph 3: Satisfaction with the way and conditions for spending leisure time.



Source: Empirical data from research on leisure time of privates (Čerina, 2003: 77).

In order to make more complete picture about the place that mass media take in leisure time of privates, we were interested to see how privates rate their satisfaction with the way and available conditions for spending their leisure time. On the graph 3, we can see that privates' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the way they spend their free time follows the normal distribution – it peaks at the partial satisfaction (38.4%), while in the terms of conditions for spending their free time on the base most of the privates are partially satisfied (33%) and dissatisfied (29.8%).

Discussion

This analysis showed that privates spend significantly less time in following the radio and television broadcasts than their civilian peers, while the difference in reading the newspapers between the two groups is insignificant. Privates are reading newspapers in order to find out what is going on in the outside world, but newspapers are available to them only if they buy them themselves. In relation to listening to the radio, privates are able to own their personal radio receiver – that explains the more frequent use of this medium; the radio provides them some form of entertainment and relaxation. Surprising is the fact that privates do not watch much television, even though they used to before they entered the military. Warmth of the family home and almost solitary watching of television were replaced by modest conditions and collective watching. Privates are reluctant to go to the common living-room in which the seats are school benches. The extent to which privates are watching television draws the conclusion that television program is not being watched on a regular basis – privates are probably watching only certain cultural, entertainment and sport shows.

Diminishing participation of privates in following the mass media is probably the result of inadequate conditions and insufficient technological support. By improving these conditions and giving the possibility of unlimited use of mass media, we can give a significant impact on the quality of life and work on the base, and contribute to privates' satisfaction with the military. More frequent usage of mass media would enable better informing, mediated learning, faster and easier communication between privates; it would improve the quality of life; there would be a rise in motivation of privates that would make them become more active participants in free time activities, to name just a few advantages. Privates are an important social group and should be allowed to inform, to learn and to entertain through mass media. They should not be isolated from the public because that can make them feel less significant.

ENDNOTES:

- ¹ Huge standing militaries are ceasing to exist, and the weight is put on the collective security (NATO and European Forces). The ratio of privates is big only in countries that have strong military tradition in privates (Germany, Sweden, Finland and Greece), while the rest of European countries either began the process of professionalization or have already completed it (Dumoulin, 2000: 132).
- ² The military budget share in the national budget of the Republic of Croatia was 4.04% of GDP in 1999 and 3.05% in 2000 when the average military budget of NATO countries was 2.3% of GDP (Jonjić, 2000: 4). By taking into account financial restrictions, the priority is equipping and modernizing the units for international operations, who are standardly trained and manned by the best personnel. In the following decade Armed Forces of the Republic of Croatia will gradually change the mandatory military service from obligatory to voluntary, creating the reserve force smaller in number but much better equipped and qualified to defend the country (Antunović, 2003: 4).
- ³ The term “unit” refers to the part of the military organization with the special task and range of operation. Basic mission of the unit composed of privates serving their obligation is training and education.
- ⁴ The Croatian term for the military base is “vojarna” that was used by homeland defense forces in the World War II, and now it is in official use in the Croatian Military. “Vojarna” or the base consists of buildings and facilities intended for living, education and training.
- ⁵ The questionnaire can be found as the supplement to the unpublished masters work titled “Leisure time of privates” (Čerina, 2003). Among the questions asked were the following ones: How often do you spend your leisure time off base? How often do you visit the military canteen during your leisure time? How often do you read newspapers in your free time? How often do you listen to the radio during your leisure time? How often do you watch television in your leisure time? Are you satisfied with the way of spending your leisure time on base? Are you satisfied with conditions for spending leisure time on base?
- ⁶ In both research projects (Ilišin, 2002, and Čerina, 2003) the surveyed privates had been offered the answering categories beforehand – it did not matter whether the leisure activities were individual or organized for a group. However, we did not use the exact same answering scale throughout the survey, so we can compare the answers only illustratively if we group them in three categories: 1=never, 2=occasionally (rarely and several times a week) and 3=often (often and every day).

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Masovni mediji u slobodnom vremenu ročnika

SAŽETAK

Temeljem podataka o provođenju slobodnog vremena prikupljenih na uzorku ročnika Hrvatske vojske (n=1.259) u 2000. godini, u ovom članku se analizira odnos ročnika prema masovnim medijima. Istražena je učestalost čitanja dnevnih novina, slušanja radija i gledanja televizije. Mali je broj ročnika koji nikada ne čitaju novine (7,5%), a velik broj je onih koji nikada ne gledaju televiziju (45,7%). Svako-dnevno sluša radio 19,6% ročnika. Iako su dosadašnja istraživanja pokazala da masovni mediji zauzimaju visoko mjesto u provođenju slobodnog vremena mladih ročnici znatno manje slobodnog vremena provode koristeći medije. Dakle, navike postoje, ali ih u vojsci zacijelo nije moguće ostvariti u očekivanoj mjeri zbog skromnijih uvjeta kao i posebnosti života i rada u vojnoj postrojbi.

Ključne riječi: masovni mediji, slobodno vrijeme, ročnici