

MASS MEDIA COMMUNICATION IN RELATION TO SLOVAK FOOTBALL FROM THE PROSPECTIVE OF DIFFERENT SOCIAL GROUPS

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Introduction

Over the period of more than last two decades, not only sport, but the whole European society had to undergo a very important political and social change. The centralized economy was replaced by the capitalistic economy of a new democratic system. The bigger part of the Eastern Europe including Slovakia had to deal with the arrival of democracy and its open market economics. This brought not only vast opportunities for individuals and companies to enter the area of a relatively free trade and business, but also lots of problems with financing all kinds of institutions, organizations or projects in different areas of interests. Step by step, the influence and the control of the government has been disappearing and many companies or other institutions (organizations) turn into the hands of private owners. One of the typical examples is the area of sport. Before the year 1989, the majority of sports institutions, organizations, clubs or other sports facilities were held and run by the government. But these are not the only aspects that have changed with the arrival of "democracy".

Sport changed more than in just one of its aspects, though. All of a sudden sport, previously one of the most important parts of peoples' day to day lives, began facing a significant competition from many different areas of social activities. If we focus directly on football, we can easily recognize major changes. Free trade of football players between clubs from different countries caused an exodus of the best footballers from Slovakia, especially to western countries with modern economies, where they could earn more money. This reflected in the lower quality of domestic football competitions. Also the government of the country started to decrease the financing of the football stadiums infrastructure development, which meant that the clubs, not owned by the government anymore, had to invest into the stadiums themselves. So, nowadays, more than 20 years later, we are still visiting the same "old" stadiums, which are, as of maybe one exception, far from the modern infrastructure one can see in the western economies and at the moment also in some of our neighbouring countries.

We could say that due to the above mentioned reasons, but not only due to those, the popularity of Slovak football decreased dramatically over the years. To be fair, it's not the football itself, the most popular and worldwide sport of all, but the Slovak football in particular. Even though Slovakia has had huge success at a national level as its national team had qualified for the FIFA World Cup 2010 in South Africa, were the team made its way into the company of last 16 teams of this planet, still it didn't raise the popularity of Slovak football within the society. The football stadiums are almost "empty" during the domestic league matches and also the value of the TV broadcasting rights of the domestic football competitions has dropped very low.

There is one more aspect though which needs to be mentioned. Besides the popularity decrease, we have also experienced the decrease of footballs' image, what comes as a big contrast in comparison to e.g. ice hockey. There are several reasons for this status, but the most significant one is that the people lost the trust in this fascinating game of football, they simply don't believe in Slovak football.

The questions we have been asking over the years are: Why is that? Do people think that it's corrupted or do they think that players are lacking the quality and motivation to play for their teams or their cities? Or is it the mass media, who are presenting only the dark side of the Slovak football? Do the people expect too much from Slovak football as they compare it to other countries or are the media playing the key role in its presentation?

The aim of the research project

Those are the questions that we would like to answer in our research in general, but in this particular project, we have been focusing on the mass media and their role within the society. We would like to find out whether the media are an important factor in creating a public opinion on the game of football in Slovakia.

Tasks:

- Search the way that media inform about Slovak football (positively, truly, etc.)
- Find out whether the mass media are bringing the information to the general public without any influence (independently)
- Getting to know what do people think of mass medias' role in the Slovak football and its possible influence on the general public opinion on football
- Overall media interest on football and sports in general

Methods used for the research project and the groups of survey respondents

For the purpose of collecting the data necessarily required for our research project we used standardized questionnaire, which has been tested during the pre-survey taken on a smaller sample of respondents. The conclusions of the pre-survey lead to the finalization of the questionnaire.

Overall we investigated a sample of 200 survey respondents who are taking a part in a different social group in the Slovak football itself or are representing the general community:

- a) General public
- b) Football fans
- c) Football players
- d) Employees of football clubs (including coaches)
- e) Journalists
- f) Football managers

Key method used for the interpretation of the collected data has been comparison of the different opinions of certain social groups on the overall role of Slovak mass media in relation to Slovak football. In order to retain the respective outcomes and results we used statistical methods for the evaluation of the data.

For the statistical evaluation of the results we used a Chi-square test to see whether the expected dependence of the investigated aspects and factors would prove true. The level of statistical significance for each of the examined cases is indicated in the respective diagrams ($p < 0,10 = 90\%$, $p < 0,05 = 95\%$, $p < 0,01 = 99\%$)

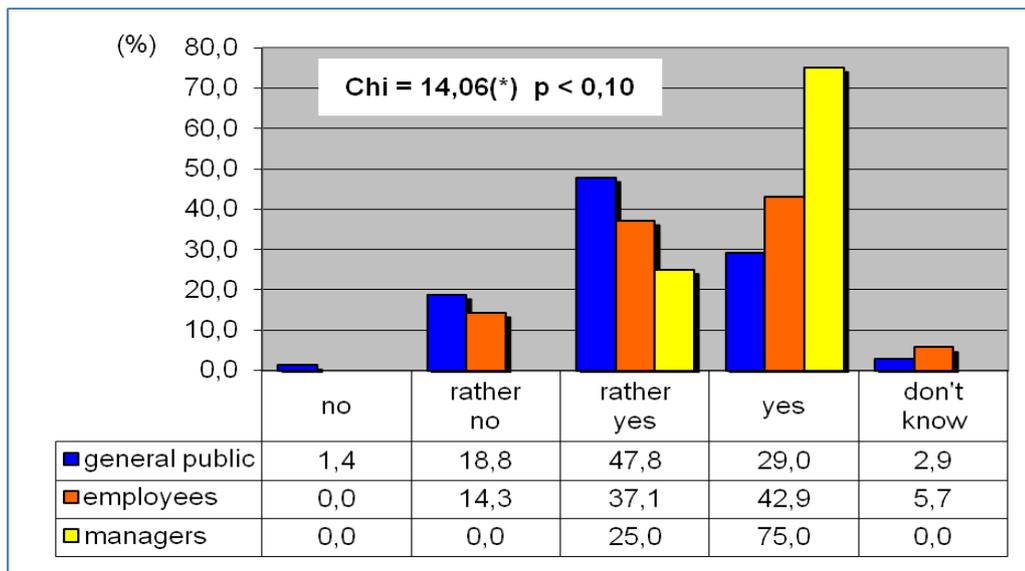
Results and conclusion

At first we were trying to find out whether the mass media have an influence on Slovak public meaning and if the mass media are co-creating the image of Slovak football.

Question asked:

Do mass media have the influence on the social status of football in Slovakia?

Diagram 1



As shown in diagram 1, the 1st survey has been conducted on following three social groups: general public, employees of football clubs and football managers. The results are indicating that in general all of the examined social groups believe that the mass media are participating on a creation of the Slovak football's social status or image. We could consider this statement as a basis for the further investigation.

In next case we were asking the respondents whether they believe that that media are presenting the Slovak football positively. For the better interpretation of the results for our study, we have divided the respondents into different social groups upon preset conditions as indicated in the diagrams 2, 3 and 4 below.

Question:

Do mass media present football in Slovakia positively?

Diagram 2

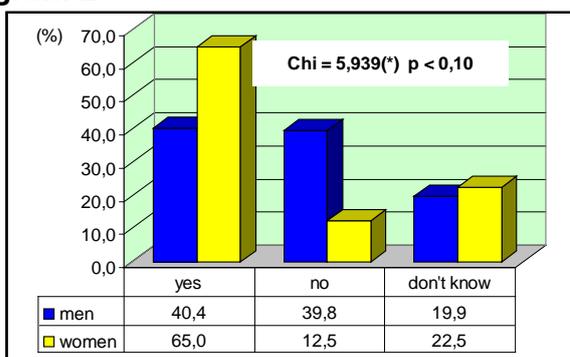
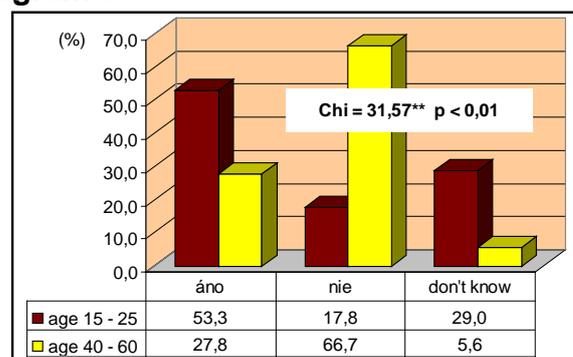


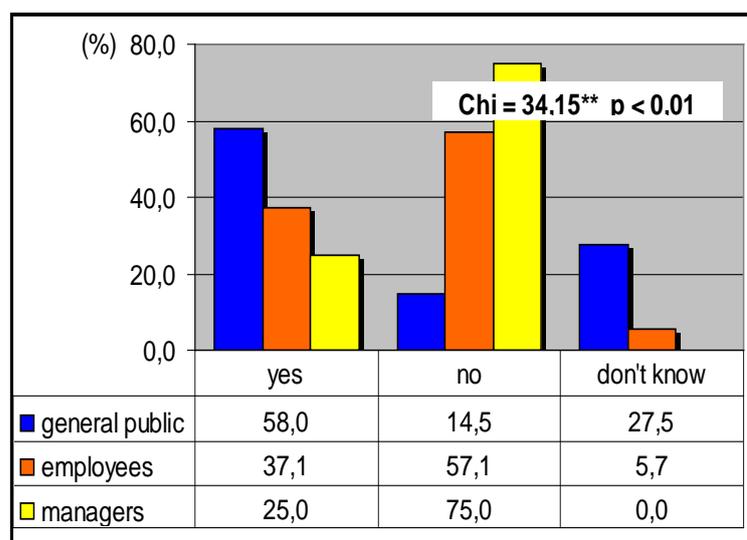
Diagram 3



The diagram 2 is showing us the comparison of the answers between men and women. We can see that women (65%) rather believe that the media are presenting football positively, but approximately same number of men answered either yes (40,4%) or no (39,8%).

More interesting and also more significant ($p < 0,01$) are the results of the comparison shown in diagram 3, where we compared the group of respondents at age ranging from 15 to 25 against the group of respondents at age between 40 and 60. Young people either believe that the media are presenting football positively (53,3%) or they don't have any opinion on this issue (29,0%). Older people on the other hand rather believe that the media are not presenting football positively (66,7%).

Diagram 4



Similar significance has been reached as we divided the survey respondents into these social groups: general public, employees of football clubs and football managers (see the diagram 4). Also in this case we can see a clear difference in people's opinions, as especially football managers (75%), but also employees of football clubs (57,1%) don't consider the presentation of football via mass media in Slovakia as positive, while the general public (58%) believe in the opposite.

Overall, 45, 3% respondents answered yes, 34,3% no and 20,4% didn't know. Even though almost a half of the 200 respondents believe that the media are presenting the football positively, we can proclaim that people directly involved in football or the people older don't think that the media are presenting it positively and the football journalists are showing more of football's negative side.

Final aspect that we focused on was the media's true or false presentation of the game of football played in Slovakia. The respondents were divided into identical social groups as for the previous case and were asked following question:

Do mass media present football in Slovakia truly?

Diagram 5

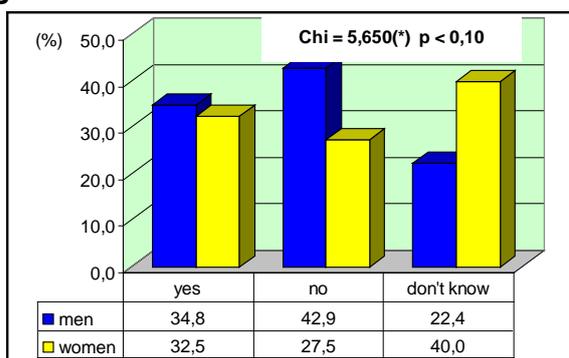
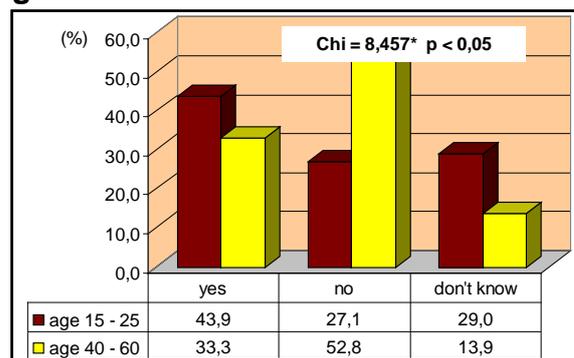


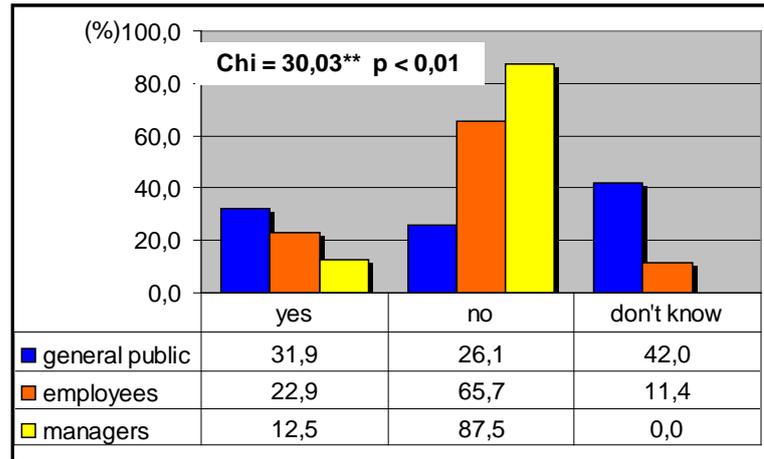
Diagram 6



As we can recognize from the diagram 5, men are more likely (42,9%) thinking that media are not presenting football truly, but women (32,5%), if they do have an opinion on this issue, are believing that the media information in regard to Slovak football are more likely based on the truth.

The results shown in diagram 6 with a higher significant value are indicating that the younger respondents (43, 9%) tend to believe the information presented by the media about Slovak football, but the older people (52,8%) on the other hand are more doubtful.

Diagram 7



Football managers (87,5%) and employees of football clubs (65,7%) believe that media are not presenting the true face of Slovak football. General public, should the respondents have an opinion on this issue, believe that the media information regarding the Slovak football are slightly more likely based on the truth.

Overall, 34,3% respondents answered yes, 39,8% no and 25,9% didn't know.

According to the high significance of respective results indicated above, we could say that in general people, who are working more closely within the football itself (e.g. in the football clubs or football organizations), do strongly believe that the media are not presenting football positively, neither truly, what's in a contrast to the opinion presented by the general public.

Following these conclusions, it is quite clear that media are doing a solid job in informing the general Slovak society about the country's football and the tendency of the football managers to blame the media for the low interest in football and low attendance of the football matches, due to their policies, doesn't seem to be correct.

At last it is possible to proclaim that media are participating on a creation of a public opinion on different issues or matters in general and sport, in this case football, doesn't represent any exception. Mass media are more than prepared for any positive change within the Slovak football, which would bring brighter future for everyone involved in it. At the moment media's opinion on different aspects of Slovak football, such as infrastructure, sports quality of performances, fair play or fair competition, is rather negative, but definitely most of the time realistic, because when the things are not working as they are supposed to, there are not many possibilities to present it in a positive view. Truly, but also little bit more positively are the media presenting the football from the prospective of the Slovak national team, especially due to its actually impressive results over the period of last few seasons.

It is necessary not to increase only professionalism and popularity of football in Slovakia, but first of all find its respected place and status within the society. More trust and better image would also lead to a better presentation of the football by the media.

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