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THE CRIME PRODUCING AND CRIME PREVENTION POTENTIAL OF MASS MEDIA

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The modern mass media is not just information about the reality, it's a mean of impact on the masses. The media forms a programmed view of the world, events which are not always true. Most people get the idea and perceive crime and criminality from mass media. Information about crimes can have a negative impact on a person and social life. The author deals with the wrong way it can cause crimes and aggression, with fear of crimes and with the reduction of law enforcement and justice.

The fact is that the modern world is full of information flows, and of information that perceives a mass consumer ("mass information") has not been just an information about the reality, but is a mean of impact on the masses, that is, a mean of forming and programming ideas about the reality.

Information tends to be interpreted (perceived and understood in one way or another). A variety of perception and understanding of information becomes possible through the modification of both its form and content. This makes it possible to turn it into a tool of targeted action.

Mass media possesses the most large-scale (up to global) potential of influence. Modern media does not simply transmit reliable information – that the public expect most from it, – not only is a mean of communication, but also it transmits and thus forms one or another version of the world (interpretation of events). Marshall McLuhan calls the media a mediator. It means that the message can be understood in different ways, can have a different meaning depending on how it designed [5].

Modern media is a multifunctional social institution, operating through a system of relatively local means of distributing information, and is addressed to a mass audience. The mass nature of the consumer gives the media a significant social transforming potential, as it can be successfully used for social control - to have an effect on the mass consumers through controlled self-regulation of civil society, the formation of legal awareness and the control of government bodies.

Social control can be understood as a set of processes in the social system, through which the following of certain patterns of activity is achieved, as well as observation of restrictions in behavior, the violation of which adversely affects the functioning of society as a system of relations [2].

It is extremely interesting and significant that every second message distributed by the media is associated with a crime. What causes this? Public interest in a crime rate, crime causation and crime prevention is clear. Interest to learn about crimes and crime prevention is an important component of human consciousness, that causes the perception of social events and events of own life, affects the sense of satisfaction/dissatisfaction and influences the behavior. We believe that it's also due to the fact that a single crime and, all the more, criminality as a multitude of crimes always causes an extremely strong emotional mass reaction because of the consequences for human life and for all the social structure. As prof. J. Gilinsky says in the 20th century the crime topic has become the dominant [1, p. 5].

Social studies show that most people take view and perception of crime and criminality from mass media. According to the survey conducted by the Public Opinion Foundation in 2006 in order to ascertain the source of ideas about crime, 99% of respondents got information about crime from media reports. This means that the media is the main source of information about this phenomenon for most people [3, p. 150].

Mass media can have a serious preventive effect on the population, improve the quality level of legal awareness, reduce the level of aggression, educate people in the spirit of compliance with legal norms, reduce the level of legal nihilism, increase legal ignorance and maintain the moral foundations of the society. The preventive effect of the media is possible with the help of adequate informing the public about the state of crime and the criminal threats existing in the society. Mass media can also help to destroy the romantic aura around criminals.

Significant preventive potential also has appeals to interact with law enforcement agencies and provides them with information about committed or planned crimes. Along with this, media can become a channel for disinformation of criminals and can disclose information that prevents planned crimes.

The state has been engaged in crime prevention for several centuries and has actively been using the social-transforming potential of media. Unfortunately, the society faces impunity of the subjects of crimes, their self-confidence, aggression, and at the same time their helplessness. Therefore, with the help of the media, the state also seeks to distribute information about justice in order to maintain the psychological comfort (satisfaction) of the society.

The positive experience of using the potential of such media as social networks for crime / victimization prevention is interesting and indicative. In 2017, Pasco County Sheriff's Office (USA) launched # 9PMRoutine project. By the time, they had had about 9,000 Twitter followers and 40,000 Facebook followers. That is why they decided that they could use mass media to prevent crimes. They came up with the idea of reminding people to lock their houses and cars every evening and realized their social media platforms were the ideal place for this reminder. People often forgot to lock their cars and houses, therefore many thefts and car thefts were committed. The main goal of this project was to prevent unlocked auto burglary and hose thefts. The police created a group on social networks and after 9 p.m. reminded their subscribers to lock the doors and / or check whether they were locked or not. The initiative began in January 2017 and by May of the same year the level of unlocked car burglaries had gone down up to 33%. At the same time, no other reduction factors were identified. Pasco's # 9PMRoutine positive experience was subsequently taken by the other 25 US and Canadian police agencies [7].

Subsequently, hashtags and mobile apps, as well as communities emerged. For example, the Sacramento Police Department (California) created the Nextdoor community ("Neighbors"), with the help of which people could anonymously contact the police, as well as share information about crimes or offenses. About 80,000 members of this community are already registered in 160 regions adjacent to Sacramento. Due to this community, in 2016 the city experienced a burglary rate decrease up to 17,5% [7].

The experience of using hashtags is also interesting. The Baltimore Police Department (Maryland) created the hashtag #WantedWednesday, the purpose of which was to identify the wanted criminal suspects. In this case, the circle of wanted suspects can be expanded with the help of subscribers, and the detection time was reduced [7].

But despite the fact that today mass media is the main source of information distribution, and it helps to reduce crime, there is also the flip side of the coin.

It is hard to imagine what will happen if the interpreted information is unreliable or if the transmitters interpret the reliable information in a wrong way. In this case, the media can become a mean of producing crime, form criminogenic attitudes and a negative view of law, justice and law enforcement. Inadequate presentation of information about people who committed crime and criminality may cause such a phenomena as imitation of criminals / crimes, fear of crime, xenophobia and discrimination.

Scientific studies on the crime representation in popular culture and in the mass media have been associated with the impact on the audience. The goal of the studies is to know how criminal stories are presented and how it may affect on the perception of crime. Researchers have figured out how images of crime can shape views, attitudes, and actions. Studies have shown that with a high level of consumption of television news and reading activity, the fear to become a victim of crime is increasing. In its turn, the fear to become a victim of crime is directly related to the measure of consciousness repressiveness (the tendency to punish and to respond to crimes harshly).

In the 1960s, a special term "wound culture" appeared, denoting a societal dedication to violence and crime. The concept of a "wound culture" was introduced, in the later 1990s, to provide an alternative description of the contemporary society, and, more exactly, to set out an alternative account of modern and contemporary forms of crime and violence, and the forms of media and institutions, proper to this type of the world. In short, the concept redescribed new species and scenes of death and life in a public culture in which addictive and spectacular bodily violence has become public spectacle.

The debate about the influence of media perceptions on violence and crime has been raging for decades and has been showing no signs of weakening. Blaming the media and pop-culture for promoting violence is not a new phenomenon. However, the interpretation of media effects can be difficult, because commentators often seem to point to greater consensus that understates more contradictory and nuanced interpretations of the data. According to Brad Bushman, more than 90% of pediatricians and about two thirds of surveyed media researchers agreed that violent video games increase child aggression (Bushman, 2016) [8].

In 2008, psychologist John Murray summed up the results of many years research: "Fifty years of research on the effect of TV violence on children leads to the inescapable conclusion that viewing media violence is related to increases in aggressive attitudes, values, and behaviors" (Murray, 2008) [8].

In 2014, psychologist Wayne Warburton concluded that aggressive media influence increases the chance of aggressive behavior. In the short and long term, increases hostile perception and attitude and reduces people's sensitivity to violent content [8].

As Jacqueline Helfgott notes, over the past 40 years, more than 1,000 studies have been conducted on the effects of violence on television and in movies. Studies of the influence of television violence on aggression invariably show that it intensifies aggression and social anxiety, cultivates the "average view" of the world and negatively influences behavior in the real world [8].

This phenomenon can be explained by the mechanism of imitation – a crime can be inspired by another crime (Helfgott, 2015). A Clockwork Orange was released in 1971 – and the most recent copycat crime connected to it was in 2005. Following the film's immediate release was a string of crimes that included beatings and the gang rape of a 17-year-old. After that, director Stanley Kubrick pulled the film from UK theaters. The most recent incident involved a gang of young men, and a teenaged girl, beating a bar owner to death in a manner similar to how it was shown in the film [6].

Offenders model their behavior on the basis of reports about violence in the media, real or fictional crimes. Offenders imitate fictional characters who are represented on television with negative characters. For example, on July 20, 2012 at the cinema in Aurora, Colorado, at the midnight premiere of the film The Dark Knight Rises a man shot 12 people and wounded 70 people. According to his words, he imitated the negative character of the movie – "Joker".

In general, the link between causes and consequences – media influence and violent criminal behavior – has not yet been confirmed, and most researchers avoid such causal assumptions. Instead, many emphasize that the media does not directly cause aggression and violence, but acts as a risk factor among other variables (Bushman & Anderson, 2015; Warburton, 2014). In the review of media effects, Brad Bushman and the psychologist Craig Anderson concluded: "In general, studies show that violence in the media is a causal risk factor not only for milder forms of aggression, but also for more severe forms of aggression, including violent criminal behavior. This does not mean that the violent influence of the media itself will turn a normal child or teenager who has little or no other risk factors into a violent criminal or a school shooter. Such extreme violence is rare and tends to occur only when many risk factors converge in time, space, and within a person" (Bushman & Anderson, 2015, p. 1817) [8].

Therefore, it is logical to conclude that mass information distribution about crimes is necessary, but it should be carried out strictly in accordance with the knowledge of the media properties and the public opinion regularities. Due to the fact that the modern world is not just information about reality, but is a mean of influencing the masses, the media forms a programmed view of this reality, which is not always true.

It should be noted that the mass media has both positive and negative sides. So, on the one hand, the media presents information about the world around it, allowing, by that, a person to be aware of events. In addition, speaking about the presentation of information related to crimes, a person becomes educated and is able to act in a given situation. On the other hand, crime information can have a negative mental impact on a person. In addition, the information interpreted by the media may be unreliable and that may contribute to a negative perception of justice.

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