

**Miscellaneous**

**Manipulation and Persuasion in Social  
Influence of the Romanian Media**

**Mihaela Sandu<sup>1</sup>, Tanase Tasente<sup>2</sup>, Nicoleta Ciacu<sup>3</sup>**

**Abstract:** The present society has a high degree of vulnerability. Vulnerable are the persons, the communities, the companies and people as a whole. Romania, in this long and painful transition has a very fragile balance, undermined by the prolonged economic crisis and the accumulation in all spheres of social disruption. This paper aims to investigate the level of knowledge regarding the Media manipulation. In terms of the variable label "sex", we see that in this study participated 42 women and 38 men, a total of 80 subjects. In terms of education, after the study conducted it was found that of the 80 subjects who responded to questions only 38 of them have higher education, remaining 42 with secondary education. Regarding the area of origin, it was found that only 16 of the 80 subjects come from rural areas and 63 in urban areas. In terms of the variable labeled "old" we see that it covers a wide range from 16 to 79 years. In terms of marital status revealed that 41 of the subjects who participated in the study are married, 37 unmarried and only 2 are from "other circumstances".

**Keywords:** manipulation; survey, persuasion; social influence; Romanian media

**1. Introduction**

The present society has a high degree of vulnerability. Vulnerable are the persons, the communities, the companies and people as a whole. Romania, in this long and painful transition has a very fragile balance, undermined by the prolonged economic crisis and the accumulation in all spheres of social disruption.

Through its very structure, from the creation, the human being is community, but with the life that can not be developed than in communion with our neighbor. From its beginnings until today people communicated with each other and have transmitted thoughts, ideas, words, influencing each other. Therefore the communication was understood and defined differently over the time.

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<sup>1</sup> "Andrei Saguna" University, Constanta, Faculty of Psycho sociology, Romania, Address: 13 Al. Lapusneanu Blvd., Constanta, Romania, e-mail: mihaela\_psy1977@yahoo.com.

<sup>2</sup> "Andrei Saguna" University, Constanta, Faculty of Communication and Political Sciences, Romania, Address: 13 Al. Lapusneanu Blvd., Constanta, Romania, Corresponding author: tashy@tashy.ro.

<sup>3</sup> "Constantin Brancoveanu" University, Pitesti, Faculty of Communication and Administrative Sciences, Address: 16-18 Rubinelor Street, Braila, Romania, e-mail: nicoleta\_ciacu@yahoo.com.

Today, in the daily life of man, the communication becomes a size and significance as never ever had in the human history.

It said many times that nowadays the communication takes unusual proportions, being an essential feature of civilization and has become undoubtedly an institution.

There is no area of common life that is not using, in a lesser or higher, of what we call, in a broad sense, the communication, defined by the dictionary as the human action to communicate, to establish a relationship with another person, to be related to ideas, thoughts, or as simple, communication between two people.

Media have great importance around the world, representing today a huge force which is not only inform but also shapes attitudes and behaviors. Media profoundly influences the way in which people understand the life, the world and their own existence: it influence so, the universe.

The effects of Media can manifest in many areas of the human life: social, cultural, political, economic but also religious. It is a fact today that mass media can exert a great influence, positive or negative, can help an evolution or involution of the customs, traditions, ideas, principles, rules of life in general of civilization may accelerate or brake the intellectual, spiritual and cultural human or a whole community.

Unfortunately, the access to information through the media is not always a factor with formative role in the sense of the word builder.

Sometimes - and seem to confirm the present times more than this - the media fails to materialize in practice the beneficial potential that it has, on the contrary, it become an instrument of evil.

The aggression informational with which the contemporary media images impose public consciousness, often contradicts with the spiritual aspirations at individual or socially.

From the beginning of this century and in current period occurred changes in mentality, which led changes also in the assessing of the human behavior. Some facts that were considered degrading or could draw the discrediting of a person in society are now seen as part of the normal behavior without pejorative connotations. Changing of the human behavior assessment is part of the changes that time brings in the order of reality, thought and in the relations between people.

Along with the time, many attitudes and behaviors that were hidden from social shame today are not only leaves known and discussed, but even are sometimes intentional object of self-disclosure and public appearance.

Discretion, which meant that each person will want to know as little about it, is replaced by a persistent struggle to emerge from obscurity, exposing more of the details of their lives and self characteristics.

Undoubtedly, today's society felt strong the pressure of violence, the wild and bloody violence as well as the insidious and less spectacular, which we is following us at all times our daily lives, entering, making havoc in the privacy of our ego, which is altering and alienates us not only the affects but also the thoughts, the ideas.

At the same time, it insists on the every day violence or, better said, on the content on which the epoch flows on the human feelings so familiar today: alienation, loneliness, lack of perspective.

Periodically, and more often lately, sociologists, educationalists, moralists, psychologists, theologian alert the public opinion, denounces the negative role of the media, especially of the cinema and television in spread the violence in contemporary society. In many movies the normal daily violence is the dominant theme.

If the violence is essentially marked the entire history of humanity, but also the lives of all human communities, as well as the personal lives of individuals of all ages, it is also true that actually we are witnessing an escalation in violence and an unprecedented awareness of the impact of this violence.

The causes are diverse and they were strongly and often analyzed rigorously in many ways.

## **2. Theoretical Aspects Of Social Influence**

The social influence was rarely treated in general. Usually textbooks include chapters devoted to key forms of influence, but remain silent on social influence. However, there are certainly traits that are not characterizes some form of influence, but the influence in the whole. Can not be avoided remarks that almost anyone is making purport to speak about the social influence: the Theoretical almost confuse it with social psychology. Indeed, if one takes into account the definition of Gordon Allport – “The social psychology is an attempt to understand and explain how the thoughts, feelings and behaviors of individuals are influenced by the presence of actual, imagined or implied of others” (Boncu, 2002, p. 15) - the coincidence between the discipline and its area is complete. The social psychology is, from this point of view, the science of influence phenomena. However, from the definition of the American author, concludes that the social influence can form the core of the discipline (or form it at the time when Allport develop its text), being responsible for all the human behavior that are not strictly biologically determined.

We set out a definition of social psychology known for detecting the possible overlap of the fields of social psychology and social influence.

“The social Influence can be defined as any change that person's relationships with others (individuals, groups, institutions or society as a whole) it produces on her intellectual activities on their emotions or actions” (Boncu, 2002, p. 18). The understanding of this field will certainly help by listing the subdomains that includes. They can be viewed as a form of social influence: the social facilitation, the normalization or formation of group norms, conformity, group polarization, minority influence and social change phenomena, complacency in the face of demand of others, imitation, obedience, deindividualisation, the social laziness, contagion.

The researches on the social influence are among the first research in social psychology. The social influence has therefore a chronological upward relative to other areas of the discipline. In the early research on the social influence we can put on Norman Triplett - with his studies on the impact of co-action on individual performance - or Ringelman Max, who had the idea of reducing the effort to examine individual groups. But more entitled to aspire to the title of the domain initiators is Gabriel Tarde, which imposed imitation term in social sciences, studying the conditions under which an individual takes proposals submitted answers source, and Gustave Le Bon who, building on work of suggestion and hypnosis, conducted a mass bus analysis on behavior (Boncu, 2002, p. 125).

Up to 1930, the group had enough demonstrations of the power of individuals to change the judgments. The presumed mechanism of influence of each group was based on the suggestion. The psychologists study focused on the manner in which individuals cope with the social difference or opposition, but their interpretation was not appropriate for capturing the social phenomenon that they had in mind. Gradually, as appreciates Asch, the doctrine of relativity of the social judgment has found substantiation in stimulus-response psychology. It was assimilated, for example, the power of group to control individuals providing the rewards and sentencing. Listening to group norms leads to rewards. Avoidance of deviant posture was interpreted in terms of fear of negative sanctions of the group.

In the second half of the decade six, two trends become visible. Some social psychologists, Asch's footsteps, analyzes the influence as a group process (such studies are carried out on conformism, polarization, leadership), other approaches the influence as a dyadic process that takes place between an agent of influence and target (studies of social power, obedience, interpersonal influence techniques). The concept of power and leadership are closely related to the social influence. There are authors for who terms of power and influence are absolutely equivalent. The power means the ability of a person or a social group to impose penalties and rewards, make important decisions and control resources. As for the leader and

leadership terms, their definition often evokes phenomena of influence. Fiedler, for example, believes that the leader is an individual who influences group activities. Influence thus becomes a dimension of leadership.

In the current sense, the influence has the sense of direction form of effective action on someone, but it also represents a way of communication that is relevant mainly, if not the only, conviction. The influence must be understood as the ability to convince appealing to positive reasons, generate compliance with the influencer suggestions. M. Vlăsceanu sees in the social influence the action exercised by an entity oriented towards modification of options and other events, action associated with relations of power and social control, but differing from them in that they do not resort to coercion (Vlăsceanu, 2002, p. 125). Therefore, the basic definition of influence involves the presence of at least two entities (individuals or groups) A and B, and an object that requires a response (opinion, evaluation, attitude, behavior, reasoning and so on). To produce the influence, there must be a relative disagreement between reactions of A and those of B. It will be called source entity exercising the influence (body dimension) and target entity supports the influence (entity affected). If the relationships that are established between A and B will lead B to have reactions according to those of A, then it is a relationship of influence. (Mugny, 2002, p. 126)

About the relationship power, influence within groups, one person has power over another if it can perform an action that will cause a change to the other person. The ability to influence another depends on: 1) certain characteristics of the agent, called power resources and 2) certain values or needs of the affected person (the target), called motivational bases of power.

### **2.1. Imitation as a means of the social influence**

Imitation is one of the most important ways of transmitting values, attitudes, patterns of thought and behavior.

Founders of the social psychology made from imitation one of the most important themes of the discipline. Gabriel Tarde, William Edward and Ross McDougall considered it an essential process, without this approach can not say anything substantial about the social reality.

The imitation means, in principle, the appearance of similarity between the behavior of the model and that of a subject, while the behavior of the first served as an indicator for the behavior of the latter.

## **2.2. The social contagion, as a means of influence**

The contagion is an old concept in the social sciences that seems abandoned today, although designates the specific influences. The first crowd theorists have used to explain the spontaneous takeover of emotional state or behavior by all members of the crowd.

The scientific career of the concept does not begin until after the Second World War.

The contagion occurs when the observer tends to express certain feelings, but the control exercised by superego proves strong enough to prevent the manifestation of feelings. The model most courageous - or "initiator" as it designates Redl - appear not to feel guilty for what he does, annihilates superego control and it causes the subject to express themselves. It should be noted that Redl is considering a takeover by group behavior, and not an emotional states.

The contagion is based on a dynamic disinhibition. Initially, there is a restraint or a blockage of the subject to perform a certain behavior, but this restraint disappears in the presence of model engaged repressed behavior by topic. There are three types of inhibitions or restraints, depending on their source: inhibition caused by group, inhibitions caused by authority and self-generated inhibitions. When the inhibitions are related to group membership rules, the subject fears that will be rejected by the group if is not carefully monitor the trends to perform the forbidden behavior. Regarding the self-generated inhibitions, these are not necessarily aware self imposed. They have a moral essence emerging from the superego. The subject fears that he will regret and feel guilty if they still perform the behavior it wants to perform.

## **2.3. The persuasion as a means of influence**

The persuasion can be defined as the process of changing opinions, attitudes or behavior of people aware that this change is intended by exposure to messages with this purpose. The persuasion, along with information, is purpose of advertising as nonpersonal shape, lucrative of transmitting messages about goods, services or ideas.

The persuasive communication can have positive as well as negative effects. When the doctor influences us and we quit smoking is nothing wrong, when the teacher manages to determine us to not only read the material they teach, the persuasive action has positive values. Not the same thing happens when a political leader urges racial hatred, xenophobia or intolerance towards the minority groups, in which case it is a negative effect persuasion. It is important to know how to defend ourselves against the negative persuasion. The psychosociologists formulated not

only the principles of persuasion, but also identified the factors that generate resistance to the negative social influence:

1. Psychological reactance - increases the resistance to persuasion in conjunction with other psychological factors, such as the interaction with self-esteem or people's willingness to provide positive identity in society, based on the consistency of attitudes and opinions.
2. The public employment - can increase the resistance to strength against attitudinal persuasion if there is the strength to declare publicly what thinks with the risk even of being considered conformist or negative.
3. The early attitudinal change - if is changing the attitudes before the exposure to a persuasive message after its reception proves a extended durability to attempt to influence (McGuire, Papageorgis, 2002, p. 138)
4. The inoculation – “People can acquire immunity from previous messages if before they are exposed to persuasive communication against attitudinal moderate or weak.”

## **2. Perception of Media Manipulation from Romania within the Population**

Purpose

This study aims to investigate the perception of Media manipulation and the psychosocial implications that it develops within the population.

### **The research objective**

O1: To investigate the level of knowledge regarding the Media manipulation.

### **Participants in the study**

In terms of the variable label “sex”, we see that in this study participated 42 women and 38 men, a total of 80 subjects.

In terms of education, after the study conducted it was found that of the 80 subjects who responded to questions only 38 of them have higher education, remaining 42 with secondary education.

Regarding the area of origin, it was found that only 16 of the 80 subjects come from rural areas and 63 in urban areas.

In terms of the variable labeled "old" we see that it covers a wide range from 16 to 79 years.

In terms of marital status revealed that 41 of the subjects who participated in the study are married, 37 unmarried and only 2 are from “other circumstances”.

### Working instrument

The study was based on a questionnaire with 12 items developed especially in questions related to knowledge of handling Media. The questionnaire was applied by self administration by students and employees from various fields.

### Data analysis and interpretation

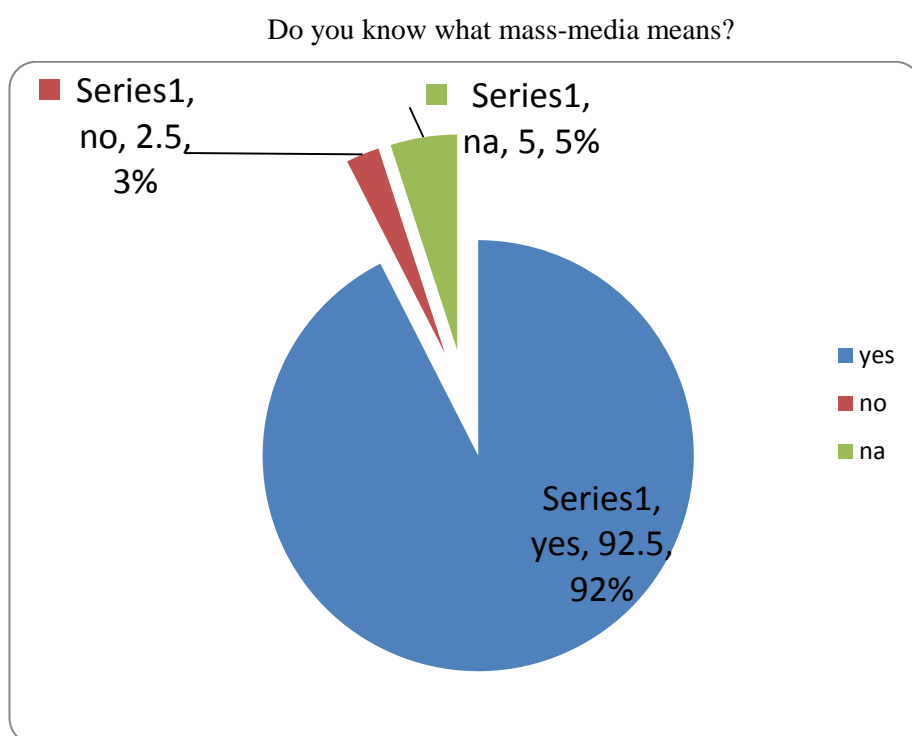


Figure 1. Diagram structure for item 1

On the first item <Do you know what means media? > 74 subjects responded affirmatively, 2 subjects responded negatively and 4 of them did not know or refused to answer. (Figure 1).



Which media do you think it has the biggest impact on individuals?

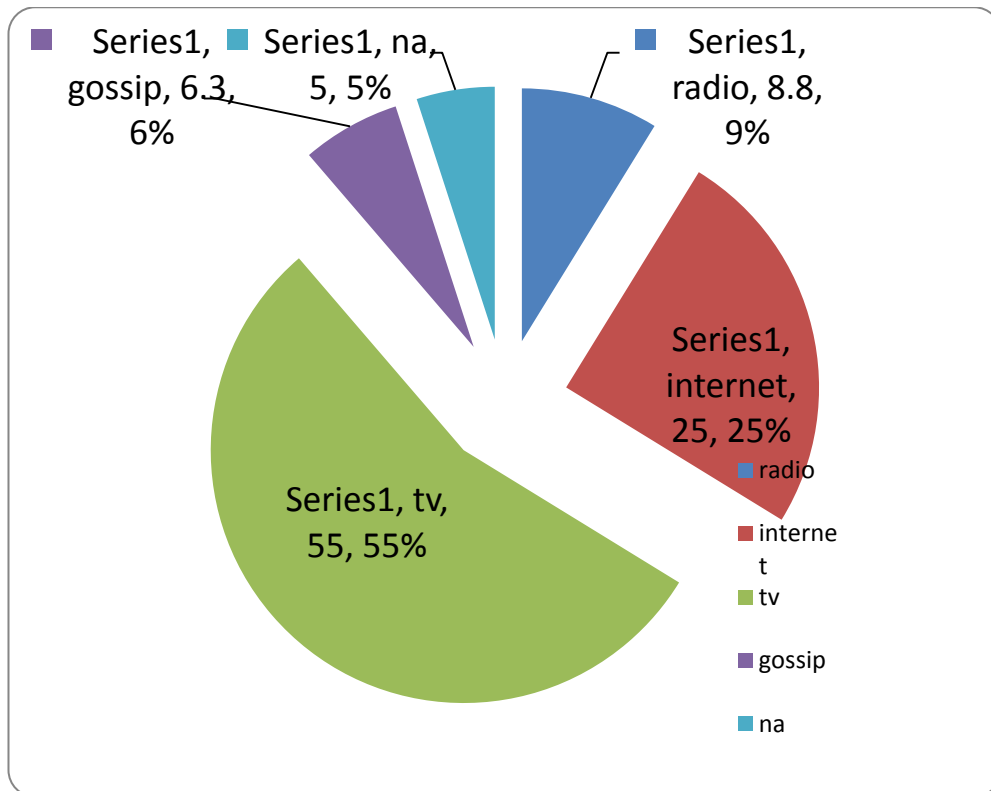


Figure 2. Diagram structure for item 2

On the second item <Which way of media do you think has most impact on individuals? > 7 subjects reported that is the radio, 20 were in favor of the internet, 44 said that is the TV, only 5 were of the opinion that the rumor has the greatest impact and only 4 refused to respond to this question. (Figure 2)

Do you consider that the information provided by the media reflects the reality?

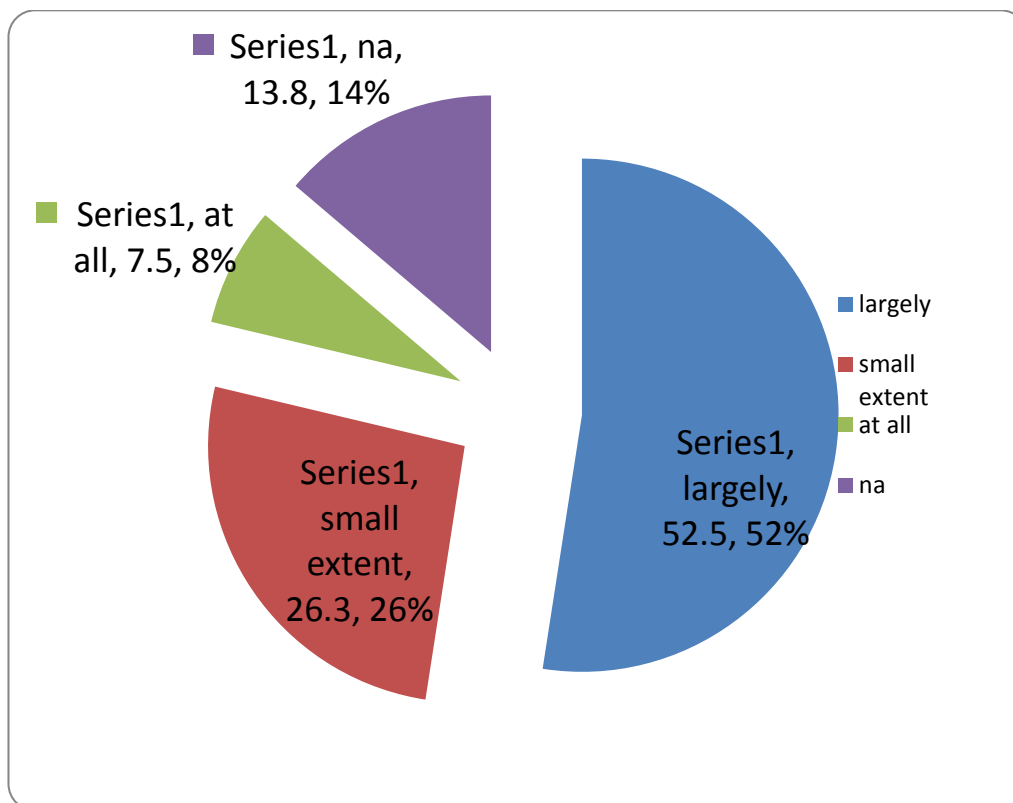


Figure 3. Diagram structure for item 3

At the third item <Do you consider that the information transmitted through the media is reflecting the reality?> 42 subjects chose “largely”, 21 have opted for the “small extent”, 6 were of the opinion that the media are not reflecting the reality at all and 11 of them did not know or refused to answer. (Figure 3)

Do you think that the media has the power to influence public opinion?

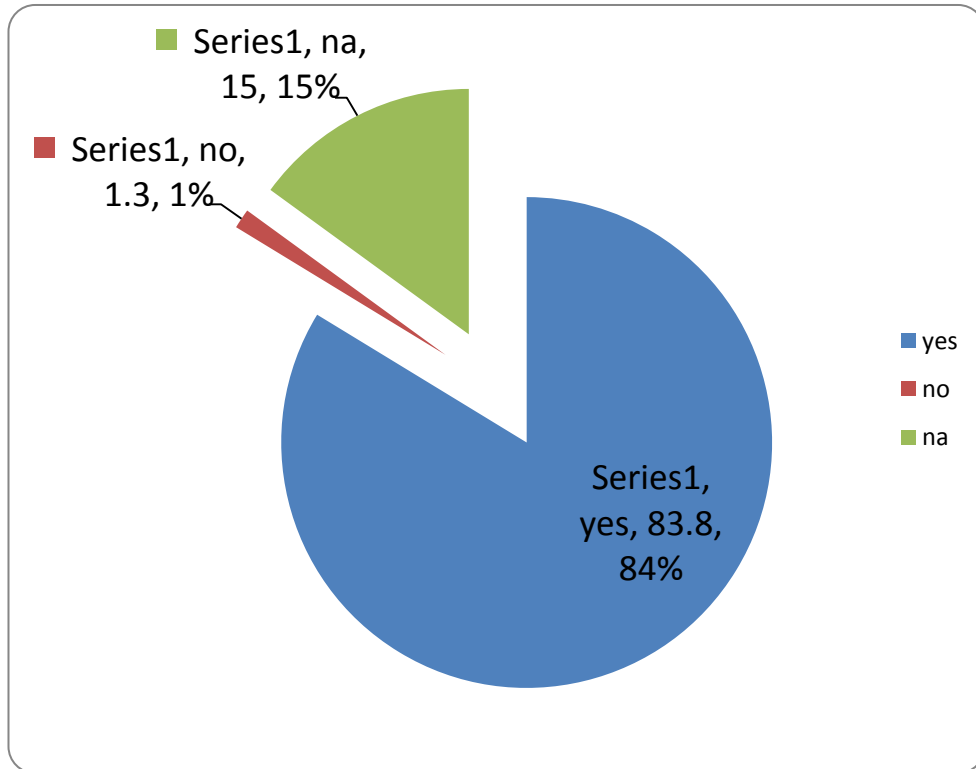


Figure 4. Diagram structure for item 4

On the fourth item <Do you think that the media has the power to influence public opinion? > 67 subjects responded affirmatively, only one responded negatively and 12 of them did not know or did not answer. (Figure 4)

How the media manipulates public opinion?

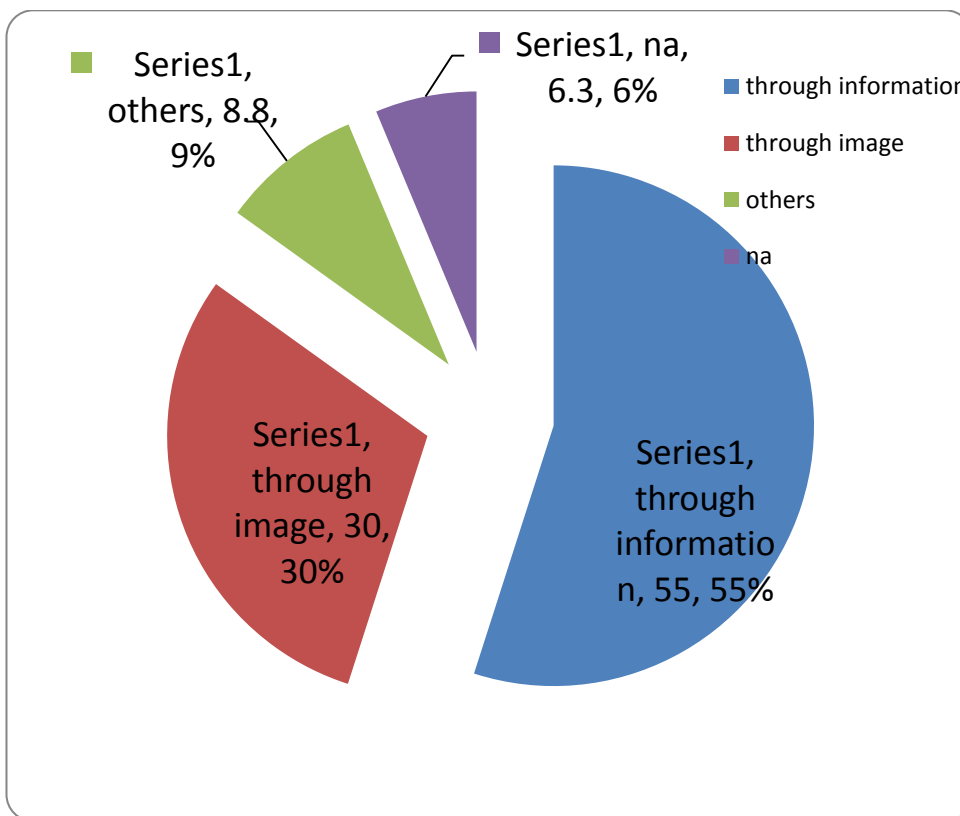


Figure 5. Diagram structure for item 5

To the fifth item <How the media manipulates public opinion?> 44 subjects responded that the handling is achieved through information, 24 of them felt that it is performed by image, 7 subjects chose another way of handling and the rest of 5 subjects did not know to answer the question or did not want. (Figure 5)

What are the methods to manipulate public opinion?

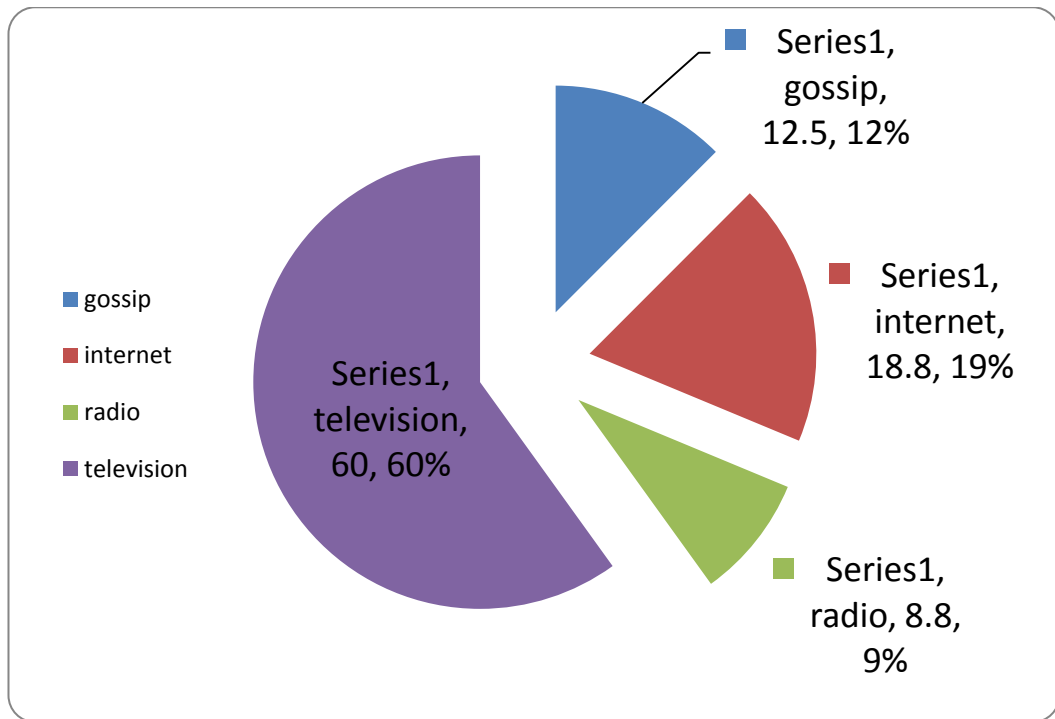


Figure 6. Diagram structure for item 6

On the sixth item <What are the methods to manipulate public opinion? > 10 subjects chose rumor, 15 for internet, 7 on radio, and 48 for television. (Figure 6)

Do you think that the media is a factor of social influence?

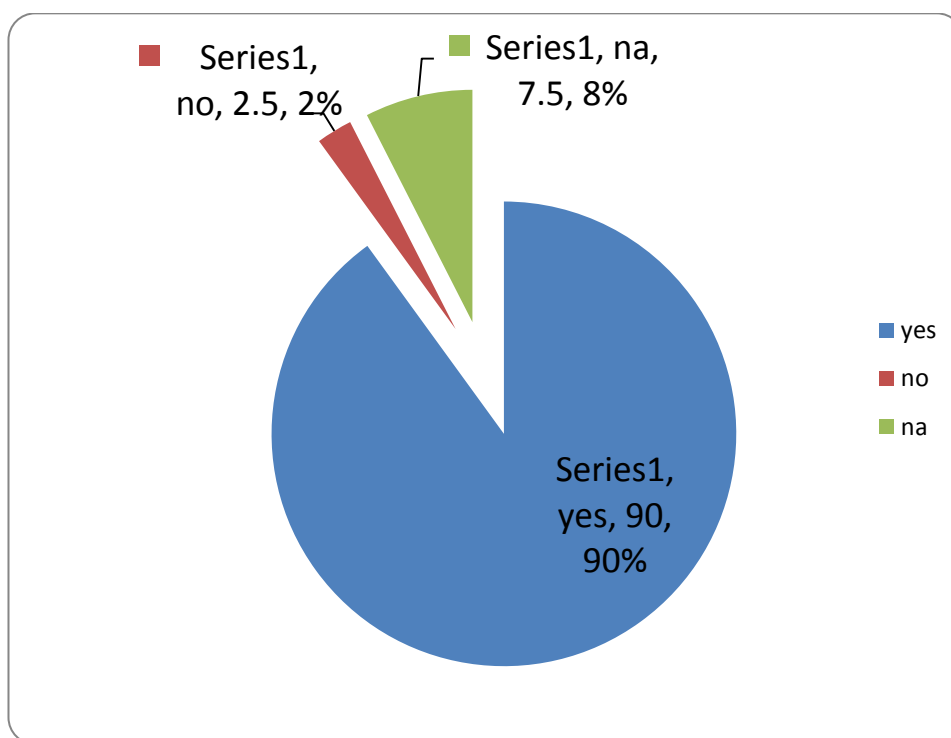


Figure 7. Diagram structure for item 7

To item number 7 <To what extent do you think that the viewing of programs containing negative influences the behavior of children and young? > 52 subjects were of the opinion that this is done to a great extent, 21 said they have limited extent, 4 refused to answer or did not know, 2 said they consider that the media is not influence the behavior of children and young at all and only one said that this is done to a very small extent. (Figure 7)

Do the Media fulfill its educational role they have to promote it?

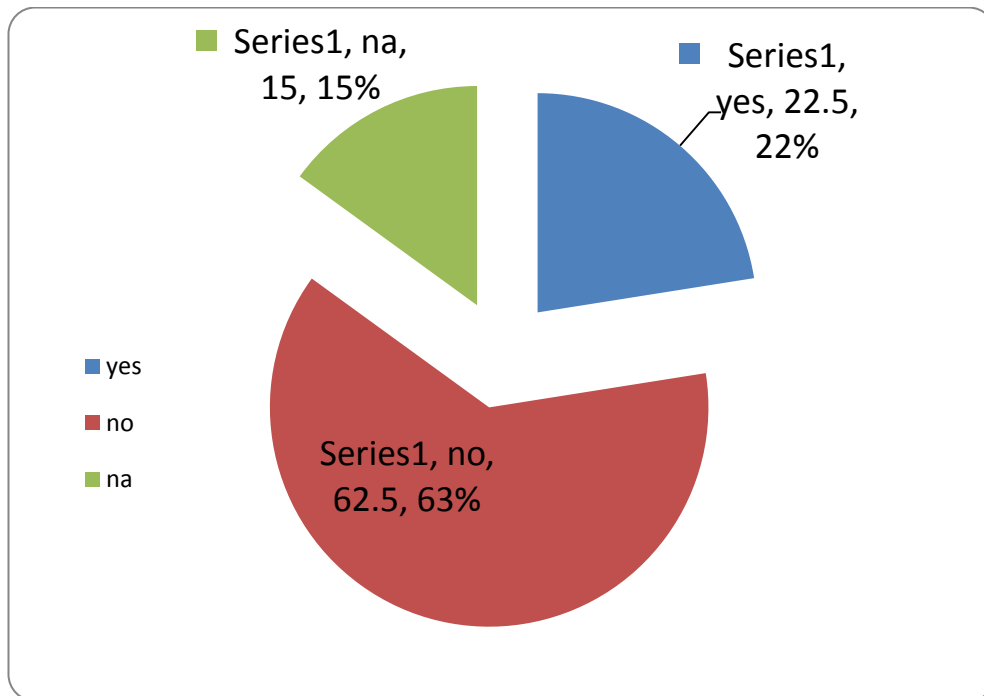


Figure 8. Diagram structure for item 8

To item number 8 <Is the media fulfilling his educational role that must to promote it?> 18 subjects responded affirmative, 50 negative and 12 respondents did not know or did not want to answer. (Figure 8)

The Information transmitted by the media deemed to have a high index of aggression?

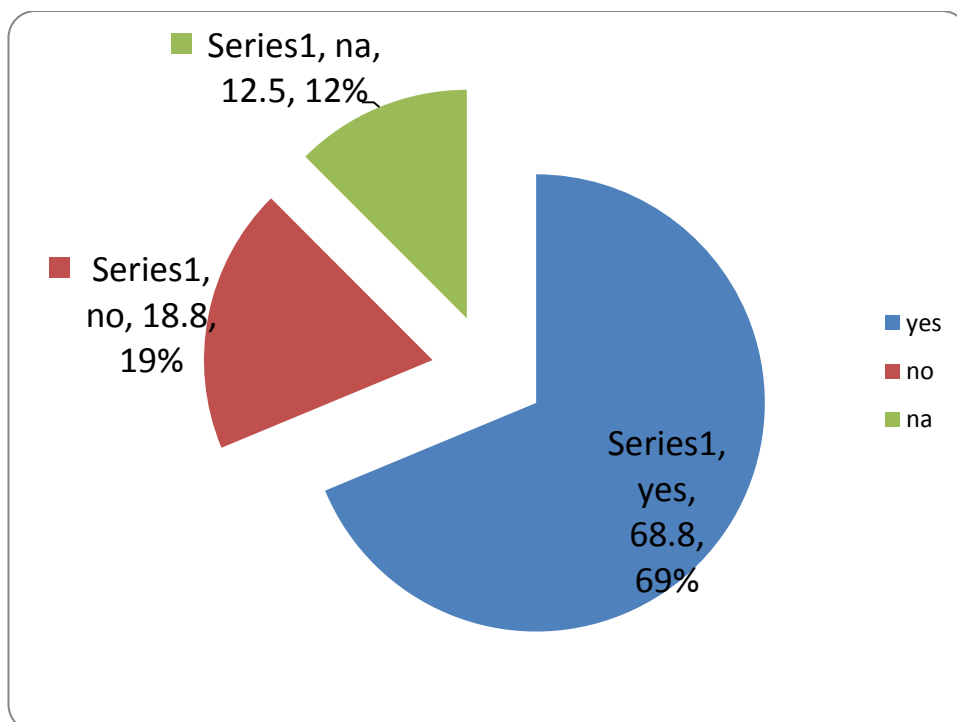


Figure 9. Diagram structure for item 9

To item 9 <Do you consider the media a factor of social influence? > 72 of the subjects participating in the study responded affirmatively, 2 negative and 6 responders did not know or did not want to answer. (Figure 9)



Are you influenced by the media that you usually use?

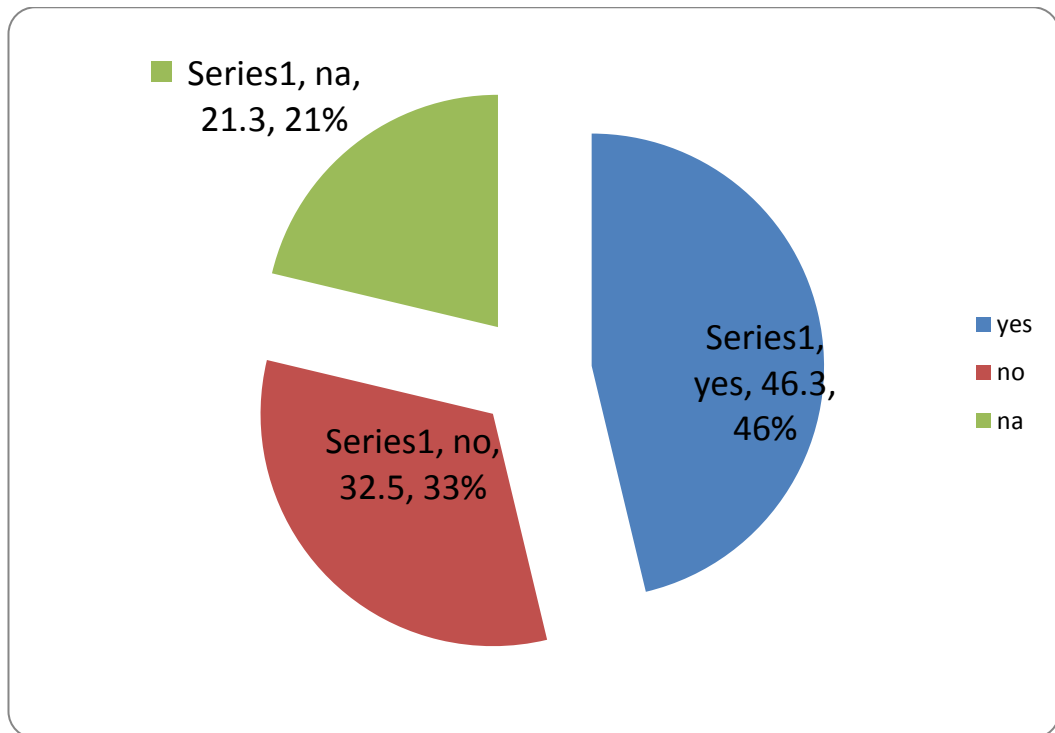


Figure 10. Diagram structure for item 10

To item number 10 <Are you influenced in the process of opinion formation by means media you see?> 37 subjects answered yes, 26 answered negative and 17 of them refused to answer (Figure 10).

In what sense do you realize this influence?

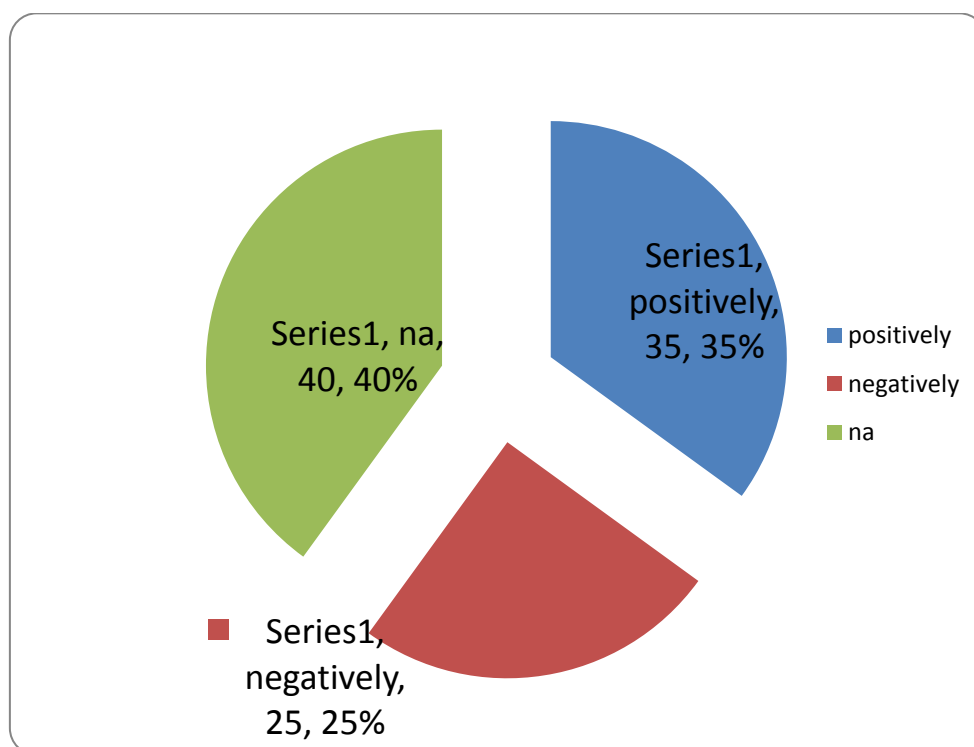


Figure 11. Diagram structure for item 11

At the last item <In what sense do you realize this influence? > 28 subjects stated that this influence is positive, 20 considered as negative and 32 said did not know (Figure 11).

## Conclusions

After analyzing the research results can conclude the following:

- Most respondents have correctly operationalized the concept of “media”;
- The main medium which has the greatest impact on humans is considered to be the TV, followed hierarchical by internet and radio;
- The information transmitted through the media, does not always reflect the reality, but at the same time has the power to influence public opinion and

manipulate both the information and the picture, first in the hierarchy of ways of handling being the rumor.

- In most cases, the information transmitted through the media is inducing aggression and viewing of programs containing negatively is influencing the behavior of children.
- Most respondents said that due to negative information transmitted, media fails to fulfill the educational role that should promote it, but is rather a social influence factor, 46% of respondents saying that they themselves are influenced sometimes by the media that they are consulting.

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