

Topics on Crises in Electronic Media in Croatia

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ABSTRACT

One of the most important elements in emergency situations and catastrophes is information. It often stands in a very small number, particularly when there is the highest need for it. Mass media is the main link of services responding to emergency situations and disasters to general public. To survivors, to public and even to those enabling help, television, radio and newspapers are most often very crucial sources of information about areas hit by disasters. The interest of media, or their lack of interest, in emergency situations and disasters, can affect on the help arriving. The news is creating a »referential frame« which turns events into phenomenon discussed by the public and that way it is, at the same time, the recorder and the product of social realities. Whether the news will be published or not depends on criteria of efficiency, social context, human, political or social interests, news and regularities, all of these things determine the importance of the story or some of its parts to a particular media, and also determine the way in which it will be processed and context in which it will be aired in public.

Key words: *media, emergency situations and disasters, journalists, public*

Introduction

Due to the rising number of accidents and crisis, communication in these times of need has taken a key position in the life of institutions and companies. There isn't a unique view on the definition of a crisis – it can only be defined as an incoming risk. In his book »Crisis Communication«, Božidar Novak defines crisis as a serious incident that affects a person's safety, environment, products or the reputation of an organisation¹. Some authors define the crisis as an unplanned and unwanted process which lasts for some time, it can't be influenced on, but only partly and it can end in various ways.

O. Baskin and co-authors state in the book »Public Relations – The Profession and the Practice« that mass media are an integral part of modern society. The media are companies that deal in gathering, processing and publishing of information, and they keep us in touch with the world that is outside of our reach. Mass media have an important role in shaping our personal perceptions and beliefs, which are mostly focused on events and topics we do not know enough about.

Information is one of the most vital goods during a disaster and it usually can't be found when it's needed the most. The mass media – radio, television, newspapers,

magazines, and internet sources are the main connection between services that respond to catastrophes and the general public. It is, therefore, vital to ensure the role of the media so the public is rightly informed.

Television, radio and newspapers are important sources of information for the victims, the public and even for the rescue teams. Public opinion influences journalism, but is also under the influence of it.

The Media and its Influence on Crisis Situations

News and its value in crisis situations

The news itself is a quickly disappearing merchandise, it changes daily and even hourly. It creates the »reference scope« that turns events into the focus of the public, and at the same time it is a testament to the times, as well as a product of social reality. During disasters, news reflects the mood far more than it uncovers the reasons for it. As to the question of whether something is publishable – it shows how important a story, or parts of it, are to a journalist which is based on the criteria of effi-

ciency, social context, human, political or social interests, news and normality.

»The main power of the media is its power to determine on what news actually is. Many events circulate daily. Events that people have prepared and consider them to be important. The media has the power to choose which of the events will become headlines, and which will be ignored« (Douglas Cater, head assistant to President Lindon Johnson and author of *The Fourth Branch of Government*).

There has been enough experience in some very serious problems in the media coverage of catastrophes. Political and ethnical bias can be obvious in the news. Myths and rumours can be propagated especially if journalists are not familiar with the object of the disaster or the places they occurred in. Media coverage of catastrophes can often be unsystematic and unviable and can give not enough attention to accuracy of information which can lead to a bad interpretation of the event. The media provides publicity for catastrophes and that can increase the »gathering reaction« and unwontedly attract a large number of people to the affected area: bystanders, large number of reporters, TV crews, well-meaning but unorganized people and so on. Transport, housing, communication and information systems can be overwhelmed by the media in times when they are needed for searching and rescue. Furthermore, the media can provoke the government to release premature and rash statements, especially right after the impact, when the situation is far from clear. Negative reports can ultimately affect credibility and authority of people who manage catastrophes.

Generally speaking, the media wants to report accurate information to the public. Journalism is a competitive business in which adversary stations, channels and newspapers constantly compete. The media has two basic goals:

1. Finding and spreading the truth
2. Profit making

Journalists in crisis situation reports

Reporters will willingly cooperate with planners for catastrophe cases and managers of urgent situations, as long as they have positive, honest and open outlook towards them. Reporters can be lead to visualize their role in helping and minimising of the consequences. A journalist sees news as disposable goods, while the source of the news cares for the permanent effect of that piece of news. A journalist doesn't concern himself with the positive or negative effects of the story as long as the facts are truthfully shown, whereas the source of information always wishes to be portrayed in the best of lights.

Cooperation between the media and the government can prevent speculation, break myths, avoid confusion, inform and educate the public and efficiently spread official information to news receivers. When they are treated properly, media dealing with news can be lead to inform about the seriousness, duration, scope and effects of

the catastrophe, as well as how rescue is progressing, giving help and searching. They can be persuaded to promote attempts to mitigate the crisis and educate the public. However, the media differentiates between needs: the radio needs information quickly, television needs a series of appealing visual images, newspapers need detailed information, photographs and graphics. All media organisations dealing with news work with strict deadlines and depend on regular and constant sources of information. They work through official and unofficial channels that need to be properly understood in order to successfully manage the media. It is also necessary to be able to recognize stages of stress and pressure under which reports usually work. Very often there just isn't enough time to check the accuracy of the story before it gets published.

Information in the media usually needs when dealing with news in emergencies:

- Initial demands
 - General explanation of the situation
 - Reports on the situation linked to the latest events
 - Access to persons in charge of emergency operations, who have the main role in the story.
 - Opportunity to take pictures and record scenes of the catastrophe, i.e. the main sites hit by the disaster in which people have been hurt, property damaged or are threatened to be.
- Constant demands
 - Number of hurt people
 - Number of dead and the location of their bodies
 - Is someone famous among the dead or hurt
 - Number of hurt people, the nature of their injuries and where they are being treated
 - Testimonies of people hurt by the disaster, who have managed to survive without being badly injured
- Property damage
 - Which buildings were torn down and what is the damage
 - How important are the damages to the community
 - Was there previously ever such a damage and if so, when
- Events
 - What caused the catastrophe
 - Interviews with eye-witnesses
- Reaction of emergency services to the disaster
 - who sounded off the alarm
 - information on predictions, warnings, warning signs and so on.
 - Who was the first to react and what they saw when they got to the site
 - How many people, services and how much equipment reacted to the catastrophe
 - How do team leaders cope with the situation on site
 - Where there any special rescue or heroic deeds

- What is being done to protect the community from further dangers and risks

The relationship between experts and journalists deserves special attention because it can easily come to misunderstandings between them. Experts are trained to give raw and accurate information that can be useful to journalists and ultimately, the public. However, scientific information isn't always understandable to laymen and not many journalists have the scientific knowledge, so it can be difficult to translate science into understandable information. Experts should also keep in mind that they are talking to the broad public through the media, and a large number of people will not understand expert terms and data. It is recommendable that they adjust their statements so that a wider circle of people understands them.

Along with these previously mentioned problems, there are also other ones that link the media and its role in gatherings of people after a disaster and their role in overzealous stimulation in the reactions of the public. News that reports on a catastrophe can motivate the public to overwhelm emergency services with questions. As a solution to this problem, the media should call on a specific type of cooperation (e.g. phone calls to the police station).

Results

Wanting to research the presence of topics in crisis situations, whether the media covers topics on protection and rescue only when they happen or do they deal with them preventively, and if they approach crisis topics sensationally, we followed the information programme for 4 months (from October 1st 2012 to January 31st 2013). It is known that television has a strong influence on the public and dominates the creating of public opinion. »Television is the most authoritative medium. Nielson's index shows that 57% of viewers prefer television, 20% prefer newspapers, 11% magazines and 9% of viewers think that radio is the most powerful medium that affects the public. Also, 81% of questioned persons think that television is the most influential medium, and 76% think it is the most exciting.«². This is why we have based our research on television reports.

This research included registering of crisis topics in central news on three national Croatian channels: HTV (News at 19:30), RTL (RTL Today at 18:30) and Nova TV (News at 19:15). The research included longer reports on crisis topics, as well as short, read news that mention crisis topics only in a few lines.

We have divided topics into domestic, foreign and preventive, so they could be easily analysed. During these four months preventive topics in central news were exclusively domestic.

Share of crisis topics

As our research has shown, crisis topics on Croatian national televisions are mostly covered only when the

crisis occurs, whether inland or abroad. During the four months of research each of the three televisions has had 123 central informative news, but there were far more crisis topics that were spread through days when they were situations when one topic was covered many times, and some topics weren't covered at all.

If we compare the number of shows that covered crisis topics on national television, RTL television takes the first place with 84.55%, then comes Nova TV with 73.17% and finally HTV with 62.60%. This shows that commercial television pays more attention to crisis topics, i.e. journalists from commercial TV stations react more often when a crisis occurs, even if it is not too alarming. The mere fact that something unusual has happened, something that endangers a certain area, represents a challenge for journalists who want to be first at the scene in order to present the information, as well as to put the focus on their TV station. It is a well-known fact that the public wants to have all the information on what has happened, which area is in danger, whether human lives are in danger. Ratings of news in these situations are regularly very high (Figure 1).

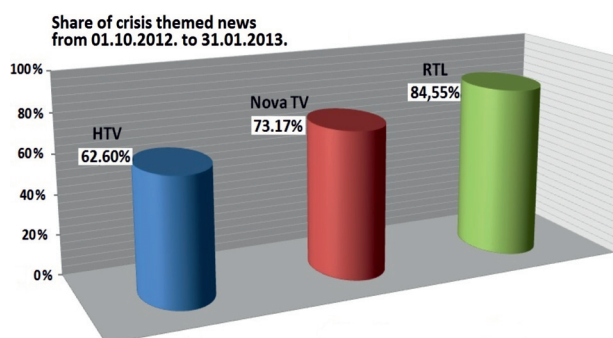


Fig. 1. Graph chart of shows on HTV, Nova TV and RTL on crisis topics from 01.01. 2012 to 31.01.2013.

Systematic coverage of crisis topics

Even though the percentage of shows that have covered reports on some kind of crisis, is relatively high, all three stations have had between 62 and 84 percent of crisis topic coverage, further research has shown that there is actually no systematic coverage of crisis topics and that editors and journalists react mostly on the spur of the moment. »Journalists and editors know that people are attracted to and interested in the things that are new, unique and unexpected. In the end, a conflict means a series of strikes, fights, wars, crimes of politics and sports. Conflict is too often the main feature of news – not only because journalists are attracted to them, but because the media wishes to awake the public's interest through sensationalism and insecurities.«⁶. The same sentence that describes conflict can be used to describe crisis topics in the media. Editors and journalists find them appealing and they have a sort of magnetic draw to the general public, they boost ratings and finally, the look extremely good on TV that is the base for such events. That is why

when a crisis occurs it doesn't go unnoticed. This can be seen from our research, which has shown that all three stations have had more than two reports on crisis, which indicates that all the media attention goes to the crisis events. It is then covered mostly in a sensational manner as to provoke the public's attention. Of course it is important to bring the facts, inform the public on the situation on the grounds and on the dangers that lurk or have already stroke a certain area, but the event can be, more than often, covered as something bigger and scarier just by looking at it from different points of view. For example, flood reports – flooded area, pumping of extra water, rescue, and afterwards a special feature on the flooded area »from above« featuring only the pilot and the journalist commenting on the route and how the area looks without the water. This could have easily been a part of the story that has already been told on the first report on flooding of that area. This often occurs in the coverage of crisis topics (Figures 2 and 3).

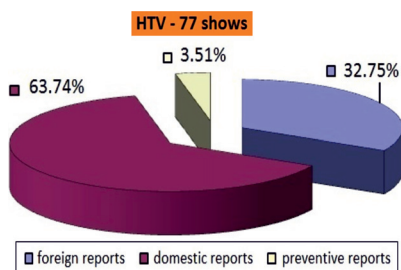


Fig. 2. Number of news with reports on crisis topics on HTV from 01.10.2012 to 31.01.2013 with a graph chart of the percentage share of reports sectioned to foreign, domestic and preventive.

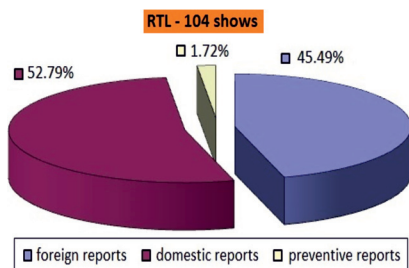


Fig. 3. Number of news with reports on crisis topics on RTL from 01.10.2012 to 31.10.2013 with a graph chart of percentage share of reports sectioned to foreign, domestic and preventive.

Preventive topics

The part that covers preventive topics shows just how systematically crisis topics are covered. The chart shows exactly how the preventive measures on three national TV stations have failed. During the time we have monitored these stations, Nova TV has had the most preventive reports, then came HTV and then RTL television. However, all three TV stations' preventive topics are pretty much nonexistent, seeing how compared to other crisis reports, their share has only been 5.38% (Figure 4).

Low percentage of preventive topics on commercial stations is understandable to a degree, because these sta-

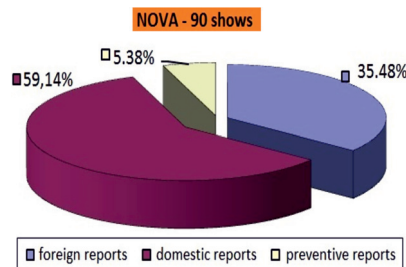


Fig. 4. Number of news with reports on crisis topics on Nova TV from 01.10.2012 to 31.10.2013 with a graph chart of percentage share of reports sectioned to foreign, domestic and preventive.

tions tend to report on events that are marketable, i.e. that will attract more viewers. From that point of view the interest for a crisis situation is also understandable, but on the other side, public television stations should have more preventive topics

The lack of preventive reports is one of the biggest indicators of how there isn't a systematic coverage of crisis topics, because if there was one, the number of preventive topics would be bigger. Additional issue is that there actually aren't any journalists who cover protection and rescue topics, but when a crisis occurs it is decided on the spot who will cover it. The reports we have watched showed that there weren't one or more reporters that have systematically covered the crisis event, but the reporters have changed from day to day, they have reacted ad hoc, covered the event only at the news level and just as the crisis situation came to an end, protection and rescue stop being anyone's business.

Questionnaire: crisis topics in the media

»In crisis situations time doesn't flow in the usual way – everyone is in a hurry, we don't have time to prepare informative materials, and journalists are going to need basic information on the organisation, what it's about and what it does. Crisis situations usually draw more attention to an organisation, much more than it is used to. This also means that organisation is being reported on by many reporters that haven't had any previous contact with it. Their first contact with the organisation is during a crisis, when everyone is in a hurry and there is no one who can take time to explain and present some basic things«⁴. Exactly these crisis situations are common in Croatia, we have already pointed out that Croatian media don't have a systematic coverage of crisis situations which is why in cases of accidents, crisis and catastrophes the first journalist that is available covers these topics.

Wanting to find out the situation in media houses and to generally learn about the role of journalists in the system of protection and rescue, as well as to question the presence of crisis management topics in the media, we have composed a questionnaire which we forwarded to journalists in different media houses. The questionnaire was anonymous and we asked that the answers be truthful seeing how the results were meant for research pur-

poses only. The questionnaire gathered 125 journalists who work for different national and local media houses, from all over Croatia. The journalists also assessed how efficient in following different types of crisis situations they are and if it that is enough to professionally cover these types of situations.

Personal knowledge on acting in emergency situations

When requested to evaluate to which extent their personal knowledge on acting in emergency situations is adequate to professionally cover crisis situations, the average grade would be a solid C, i.e. basic knowledge.

According to our research results, most journalists know a lot about fire extinguishing and actions fire fighters have to take. Most of the journalist i.e. 35.2% gave themselves a B, while 1.6% said they don't know enough about actions of fire crews during an emergency situation. In assessing their knowledge on the Emergency help, 36% graded themselves with a C grade, 31.2% with a B and 3.2% of the questioned journalists think they don't know enough about Emergency help. The same goes for reactions in floods and inaccessible areas. However, numbers turn in the opposite direction when it comes to rescuing people from ruins, most of the questioned – 31.5% said they know very little (a D grade) about rescue services from ruins, only 8% now a lot about them. The same goes safety and technical interventions (Table 1).

We weren't at all surprised by these answers because fire extinguishing, emergency help services and floods are the types of crisis situations most journalists came across during their careers and have gained personal and professional experiences on reacting of these services. On the other hand, only a few have found themselves in the situation to report from ruins or technical interventions

Our research also shows that journalists aren't educated enough on emergency services and their reactions during crisis situations. Most of them have learned about these situations »through years of experience and much field work they have reported from« and that knowledge is neither systematic nor sufficient, especially in case of some great catastrophe. »Crisis relationships with the media do not mean just working with the media in crisis

situations, but they include preparation for the crisis and removing of crisis residue. In that way, crisis relationships with the media consists of pre-crisis (preventive), crisis (acute) and post-crisis (rehabilitation) work. There is no organisation that can say that accidents and crisis can't happen to them. To say that would be a sign of utmost immaturity and irresponsibility. How can anyone be certain that accidents and crisis will not happen to them – it's just that we don't know what kind and when they will happen and we must therefore be ready for them. That also goes for working in the media«⁴. But in reality, people don't comply with these thoughts seeing how there aren't any journalists that cover crisis topics systematically. So on the one hand we have journalists that »chase after news« and don't have the time to be educated, and on the other public relations services that don't consider their work to be educational. They limit themselves to answering questions, writing statements and giving statements only when it's inevitable.

Assessment of cooperation quality with emergency services

Journalists have graded cooperation quality with emergency services (Centre 112, fire fighters, Mountain rescue, police and ER) very highly. Mountain rescue got the highest grades, 56% of journalists think they do excellent work, then there is cooperation with fire fighters, 47% of journalists think the same about them, and in the end there is the Crisis centre 112 with 37%. The research also shows a bit poorer quality of cooperation with the police and ER, most journalists think it is ok or just satisfactory. There is barely any percentage of journalists that haven't had any contact with these emergency services (Table 2).

The research has shown that emergency services that don't have any secret information to keep are most accessible and open for communication. The ones that are bound by secrets are doctors and medical personnel, or police officers, who are not allowed to give statements without a spokesperson. Even the spokespersons aren't allowed to give out information in some cases, according to new criminal laws, so the press is redirected to the District attorney's office which makes it even harder to cooperate.

TABLE 1
PERCENTAGE OF ANSWERS GIVEN BY THE 125 QUESTIONED JOURNALISTS. THE QUESTION WAS HOW IMPORTANT IS PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE OF ACTIONS OF EMERGENCY SERVICES IN CRISIS SITUATIONS

	Not enough	A little	Enough	Very well	Excellent
Fire extinguishing	1.6%	7.2%	28.0%	35.2%	28.0%
ER	3.2%	10.4%	36.8%	31.2%	18.4%
Rescue from difficult areas	2.4%	28.0%	26.4%	25.6%	17.6%
Rescue from floods	6.4%	20.8%	32.8%	23.2%	16.8%
Rescue from ruins	16.9%	31.5%	28.2%	15.3%	8.1%
Safety situations	4.0%	29.6%	29.6%	26.4%	10.4%
Technical interventions	9.7%	27.4%	36.3%	21.7%	4.8%

TABLE 2
PERCENTAGE OF ANSWERS OF 125 QUESTIONED ON EVALUATING OF COOPERATION WITH EMERGENCY SERVICES

Service	Not at all	Occasional	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent
DUZS – 112	2.4%	11.2%	13.6%	35.2%	37.6%
Fire fighters	2.4%	5.6%	11.2%	33.6%	47.2%
ER	4.0%	16.0%	32.0%	32.8%	15.2%
The police	0.8%	16.8%	28.0%	31.2%	23.2%
Mountain rescue	4.8%	8.0%	7.2%	24.0%	56.0%

Preventive topics in the media

Preventive topics for crisis situations (education of people, transference of public service messages, showing of the work public services do) are covered occasionally in the media they work in for 47% of journalists, 52.8% think that preventive topics are covered in other media as well. The impression that they are regularly being covered in their media have 9.2% journalists, while 4% of them think other media cover preventive topics regularly (Tables 3 and 4).

Even though questioned journalists think preventive topics are covered occasionally in their and in other media, our four-month long research of three national television stations has shown the complete opposite.

During 123 days and as many shows, there have been between 4 and 10 preventive topics (4 on RTL, 6 on HTV and 10 on Nova TV). Compared to the overall number of reports based on crisis themes the numbers are: 1.72% on RTL, 3.51% on HTV and 5.38% on Nova TV. This is disturbingly low percentage and it can't be seen as occasional, but as very seldom monitoring of preventive topics.

Table 5 shows that questioned journalists are aware of that fact that there are not enough crisis topics in Croatian media, even though they think that preventive topics are covered occasionally. As much as 65.6% of questioned journalists think there are not enough preventive

topics on crisis situations and this just supports our research, as well as the thesis that prevention is almost completely neglected in Croatian media.

Crisis events as themes in the media

When crisis occurs for the media it means a »good story« and everyone wants to report about it, be the first ones on sight and get more information. When asked to evaluate to what extent their media house covered crisis events (major accidents and catastrophes) after they have occurred, 60.5% say they cover crisis events regularly, 19.4 cover them often, 16.9 occasionally and no one answered that they don't cover crisis events at all (Table 6).

Once again, this question confirms the fact we have come to during our research on the share of crisis topics in the news, according to which the shares are: 62.60% on HTV, 73.17% on Nova TV and 84.55% on RTL, and there are twice as much reports than TV news. Crisis events are firstly covered on the news level, then the stories try to spread, bringing in new elements. Many viewers (readers) can follow crisis topic only through the media, so journalists try to be as thorough as possible in covering the news. »Crisis situations don't get bigger or smaller just because the media covers them. Modern electronic media do enable a faster flow of news, which can shorten the time to react, which can sometimes be a

TABLE 3
PERCENTAGE OF ANSWERS OF 125 QUESTIONED JOURNALISTS TO EVALUATE HOW OFTEN ARE PREVENTIVE TOPICS ON CRISIS SITUATED COVERED IN THE MEDIA THEY WORK IN

1 – never	2 – rarely	3 – occasionally	4 – often	5 – regularly
0.0%	21.6%	47.2%	21.6%	9.6%

TABLE 4
PERCENTAGE OF ANSWERS OF 125 QUESTIONED JOURNALISTS ON THE QUESTION TO EVALUATE HOW PREVENTIVE TOPICS ON CRISIS SITUATION ARE COVERED IN OTHER CROATIAN MEDIA

1 – never	2 – rarely	3 – occasionally	4 – often	5 – regularly
0.0%	27.2%	52.8%	16%	4%

TABLE 5
PERCENTAGE OF ANSWERS OF 125 QUESTIONED JOURNALISTS ON THE QUESTION IF THEY THINK CROATIAN MEDIA COVER ENOUGH TOPICS THAT CAN BE CONSIDERED PREVENTIVE IN CRISIS SITUATIONS

1 – Yes	2 – No	3 – I don't know	4 – I don't care
23.2%	65.6%	10.4%	0.8%

TABLE 6
PERCENTAGE OF ANSWERS OF 125 QUESTIONED JOURNALISTS ON THE QUESTION TO WHAT EXTANT DOES THE MEDIA THEY WORK FOR COVER CRISIS EVENTS (GREAT ACCIDENTS AND CATASTROPHES), AFTER THEY HAVE HAPPENED

1 – never	2 – rarely	3 – occasionally	4 – often	5 – regularly
0.0%	3.2%	16.9%	19.4%	60.5%

good thing, and sometimes a bad thing. That is why there is no need for any kind of media obsession over publicity, and also for rear«⁴.

Sensational approach to reporting

Journalists often get trapped in sensationalism because they want to cover a crisis event as quickly, thoroughly and differently as possible, so reports on crisis topics are more than often borderline »yellow«. When it comes to managing crisis events, the book »Discovering of public relation«, states: »Fist media reports will contain guessing, inaccuracies, exaggerating and sensationalism, and they will often be extremely personalized, malicious and harmful – and maybe even true! You can expect the media to »round up« the numbers, just because the story will sound better. Expect your media to create drama. Opinions and rumours will dominate the media coverage, especially if the organisation doesn't react properly. Expect the rumours to become facts, and one rumour replaces another«⁵.

Even journalists themselves are aware of sensationalism, and when asked to estimate how often Croatian media covers crisis situations in such a manner, 47.5% say their media house covers crisis events sensationally, and when they are observing other media houses 65.8% say they cover them sensationally. This thesis is also confirmed by the monitoring of three national TV houses. During the days when a crisis situation was present, there have been several reports on it, and the timing for these reports was mostly during the prime time slot. It is very interesting, however, that journalists always think »the other ones« are prone to sensationalism. It is always the competition that is covering crisis in that way, and 10.6% questioned journalists claim there is no sensationalism in their media. It is evident that answers go around in a circle and that only the approach to the employer is less objective than when third parties are being evaluated (Table 7).

Availability of services for gathering of information

When asked to estimate to what extent services in charge are available for gathering of information in times of actual crisis events, the journalists put Mountain rescue on the first place, just as they did when they were estimating the cooperation of emergency services. 64.5% think Mountain rescue is completely available for gathering of information, next are fire fighters and Emergency centre 112. It is the hardest to get information from the police and ER (Table 8).

When asked to estimate how often they can get a quality collocutor from services that are in charge during a crisis, the journalist gave a very interesting piece of information. Mountain rescue is again in the first place, 64.8% of journalists claim they always get quality collocutors from them. Interestingly, research has shown that Emergency centre 112 provides often (not always!) quality collocutors and exactly they should be the first to present competent personnel in communicating in emergency situations. Journalists consider Emergency centre 112 to be over voted even by the police and fire fighters, as seen in previous questions on cooperation and information sources. Seeing how Centre 112 and other government centres should be the leading organisations in protection and rescue, it is rather unusual that journalists can't get a hold of quality information from these centres. Even the police are said to be easier to communicate with and it is known how difficult it is to reach quality collocutors within them. Double of the questioned journalist consider it is easier to get information from Mountain rescue than government centres (Table 9).

When asked to evaluate how useful information of services in charge are to them, in times of crisis situations, most of the journalists consider them to be useful, pointing out information given by fire fighters – 70% of questioned journalists consider them to be useful. Never-

TABLE 7
PERCENTAGE OF ANSWERS OF 125 QUESTIONED JOURNALISTS ON THE QUESTION TO EVALUATE HOW OFTEN CROATIAN MEDIA HAVE A SENSATIONALISTIC APPROACH INN REPORTING ON CRISIS SITUATIONS

	Don't know	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often
Your media house	0%	10.6%	18.9%	47.5%	22.9%
Other media	0%	0.0%	5.8%	28.4%	65.8%

TABLE 8
PERCENTAGE OF ANSWERS OF 125 QUESTIONED JOURNALISTS ON THE QUESTION TO EVALUATE TO WHAT EXTENT ARE SERVICES IN CHARGE DURING A CRISIS SITUATION AVAILABLE FOR GATHERING OF INFORMATION

Service	Not at all	Seldom	Occasionally	Often	Completely
Emergency centre – 112	0.0%	4.0%	16.0%	33.6%	46.4%
Fire fighters	0.0%	0.8%	8.1%	40.3%	50.8%
ER	3.3%	11.4%	28.4%	42.3%	14.6%
The police	0.8%	6.4%	24.2%	43.6%	25.0%
Mountain rescue	1.6%	1.6%	8.9%	23.4%	64.5%

TABLE 9
PERCENTAGE OF ANSWERS OF 125 QUESTIONED JOURNALISTS ON THE QUESTION TO EVALUATE HOW OFTEN THEY CAN GET QUALITY COLLOCUTORS FROM SERVICES IN CHARGE IN CRISIS SITUATIONS

Service	Never	Seldom	Occasionally	Often	Always
Emergency centre – 112	0.0%	8.9%	21.8%	35.4%	33.8%
Fire-fighters	0.0%	0.8%	9.6%	44.8%	44.8%
ER	2.4%	14.7%	36.1%	29.5%	17.2%
The police	2.4%	13.0%	26.8%	36.6%	21.1%
Mountain rescue	1.6%	0.8%	8.8%	24.0%	64.8%

TABLE 10
PERCENTAGE OF ANSWERS OF 125 QUESTIONED JOURNALISTS ON THE QUESTION TO EVALUATE HOW USEFUL ARE TO THEM INFORMATION FROM SERVICES IN CHARGE DURING A CRISIS SITUATION

Service	Worthless	Of little value	Either useless nor useful	Useful	The main source of information
Emergency centre – 112	0.0%	12.9%	13.7%	56.5%	16.9%
Fire fighters	2.4%	3.2%	10.5%	70.9%	12.9%
ER	8.2%	10.7%	20.7%	54.5%	5.8%
The police	2.4%	10.5%	18.5%	56.4%	12.1%
Mountain rescue	0.8%	2.4%	8.8%	58.4%	29.6%

theless, information given by emergency services that should be the main source of information during crisis situations, but they are in fact the main source of information only to some journalists. They usually use the information given to them by emergency centres as starting information and gather the rest of the data on sight, where the whole story happens (Table 10).

Personal recommendations for a quality report

»What is in your opinion the most important factor in creating a quality media report on accidents, major accidents, catastrophes and crisis situations in general?« – that was the question we asked the journalist in order to find out their personal thoughts on the system, cooperation and any activities they would take to improve the system. We have deduced a few guidelines from their answers.

Double-checking of information, finding the most competent collocutor, clear and often reports on safety measures, explaining of the cause, keeping people from panicking.

Timely gathering of information from services that are in charge, getting close to the scene, ensuring of quality collocutors and not hiding of information that could calm the public down.

A whole scale of factors but mostly the people on the scene of the accident and not in offices receiving partial and distorted information, who will be in charge of communicating with the press without making journalists feel like they are in the way of solving the crisis situation. That means a person that will know all the key information, instructions and that knows the media are the main source of information for the public.

I think that following of crisis situations would be much more thorough and safer if there were journalists in this sector, who would be specialised for working on such topics and would be educated in that area. When it comes to these services, it would be good if they selected a person in charge of media relations, who would also be educated on the nature of the media business and who would always be available to provide information for the public. Coordinated actions and informing of the public can save many lives and it would therefore be good if these services maintained a regular contact with the media, even in times when there are no crisis situations – so they could act swiftly when these situations occur.

All services (or a united service centre) should delegate a person/persons who would, in case of an accident or a catastrophe, constantly communicate with the press in order to inform them about all events on time. I think the lack of communication with these services creates only made up stories, alleged rumours or unverified information. Even »off the record« information or other unofficial information could reduce the space for sensationalism in the media in general. Services are too closed off to journalists, or they leak information selectively which is why I think communication between services and the media is insufficient.

Conclusion

In cases of crisis situations most important are timely media reports and timely reports from public services that are affected by the crisis. By informing the public on time and working together with the media, public ser-

vices can not only inform the public, but prevent speculation and possible spreading of panic.

Journalists can, if they are not in sync with their information, make tragic situations even more tragic and cause more trouble. On the other hand, the media has given people such strength and hope in almost hopeless situations. It is therefore necessary to create a better cooperation of the media and emergency services, not only in crisis situations but mostly in times without any crisis situations. In these situations they should work on the education of journalists as well as emergency service personnel working with the media.

The research we have conducted has shown that prevention in crisis topics on Croatian nation television has failed, which is also supported by the questioned journalists who have stated that preventive topics aren't covered nearly enough not only on television but in other media as well. Preventive topics in protection and rescue areas should be created, but they should be interesting to media representatives and the general public. Current

prevention exercises aren't realistic or interesting to the media representatives and they seem like a well-rehearsed play.

Services that are in charge during crisis times must be available to the press at all times. If that is not the case, inexperienced or malicious media representatives can distort the image of the crisis, because panic can be spread mostly because of lack of information. Information is one of the basic goods during a disaster and it can help the media to create a realistic image of the crisis and thus calm the public. The lack of correct and timely information leads journalists to guessing and hear-say reports, creating sensational reports which are present all through Croatian media, as 125 questioned journalists have stated.

Journalists and emergency services should both have one thing in mind during a disaster – and that is the person or people in danger, not the thought on how high the ratings are going to be. This is often forgotten, because an »exclusive story« is the thing journalists chase after.

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KRIZNE TEME U MEDIJIMA

SAŽETAK

Informacije su jedan od najvitalnijih elemenata u žurnim situacijama i katastrofama. Često ih je vrlo malo onda kad je potreba za njima najveća. Masovni mediji glavna su veza između službi koje reagiraju na žurne situacije i katastrofe i opće javnosti. Preživjelima, javnosti, a do neke mjere i pružateljima pomoći, televizija, radio i novine najčešće su iznimno važni izvori informacija o stanju u nepogodama pogođenim područjima. Interesi ili pomanjkanje interesa medija mogu utjecati na stizanja ili nestizanja pomoći. Vijest tvori »okvir referentnosti« koji pretvara događaje u pojave o kojima javnost raspravlja te je istovremeno i evidentičar i proizvod društvenih stvarnosti. Objavljivost vijesti temelji se na kriterijima učinka, društvenog konteksta, ljudskih, političkih ili društvenih interesa, novosti i uobičajenosti, sve to određuje koliko je za pojedini medij važna priča ili neki njezini dijelovi, te kako će je obraditi i u kojem kontekstu plasirati u javnost.