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Press Review – recycled information selection, intermediation, synergy and increasing auditorium base

Abstract: This article is a press review analysis with an emphasis on the media selection function, the daily schedule and an analysis of selected communication models which seem adequate in a study on the selection of secondary media broadcasts. Moreover, various characteristics of press review as a media form are discussed in relation to intermediation processes, media synergy and formatting the audience. The conclusions are based on a comparative empirical analysis of 200 press reviews between 15.05.2008 – 15.06.2008. An analysis of content was the method used, the most popular one in media studies and mass communication research.

Key words: press review, agenda setting, selective function, intermediation, secondary broadcaster, communication models

Introduction

Press review is a very interesting type of information programme, although it is rather rarely analysed. Meanwhile, some of its features such as a high level of interaction between different types of media and journalist genres, secondary selection of information, its synergy value make it an exciting subject of research. Press review is also influential as far as establishing order of the day or a list of key events which are the focus of public attention for the next several hours. Hence, this analysis of press review will focus on the media selection process of *gate keeping* and *agenda setting*. It will also use selected models of communication adequate in the analysis of media broadcasts by secondary broadcasters.

The results of research carried out are based on an empirical comparative analysis of over 200 press reviews between 15.05.2008 and 15.06.2008 from TV stations (TVP, TVN, TVN24), radio (RADIO TOK FM, POLSKIE RADIO), Internet portals (www.wp.pl, www.onet.pl, www.wprost.pl), WAP (Wireless Application Protocol) services, enabling access to Web sources via mobile devices such as PDA and mobile phones, and the weekly “Angora”.

A content analysis was performed, the most popular analysis method in media and communication studies (combining quantity and quality analysis)¹. The unit of analysis was a several minute long press review, encompassing three TV stations, three radio stations, three Internet portals and additionally one WAP service and one weekly with re-prints of press texts from other newspapers, hence, the analysed sample encompasses all types of press review. The presented conclusions are based on content analysis and include statistical data used to make generalizations included in this article. This analysis is an example of narrow, empirical, factual research results where the observation method, thanks to using a broad sample of media types, stations, titles and the number of press reviews, allows us to make conclusions of general synthesis character.

The author uses an elementary technique of empirical cognition used in social studies research, that of direct observation (deliberate, planned, aimed at systematic examination of

¹ Analysis of content was performed in order to find the answer to the following research questions/issues:

- number of presented newspapers
- choice of topics
- subjects ignored
- phrases used by press review hosts
- topic areas most frequently discussed
- preferred newspapers
- press review dynamics

the phenomenon). This technique allows for the gathering of data via observation, during a natural course of events and within direct range of the observer's senses.²

The subject of analysis (in the empirical part) are original materials directly examined by the researcher. Beside becoming familiar with the content of the source materials, the author also used the notes method, according to the earlier prepared, for the purposes of this analysis, diagram. Other research tools were: a TV set, a radio and a computer with Internet access.

In the second part, the conclusions of the empirical analysis are interpreted through the prism of available theoretical ideas, commonly accepted in literature on the subject, used to build specific term structures, ie. a communication model taking into consideration the phenomenon of secondary selection of information, mediation, synergy, the publicity effect, and increasing the auditorium base. The analysis below is of descriptive character, with elements of comparative analysis of the various types of press review in different media.

Press review – a characteristic

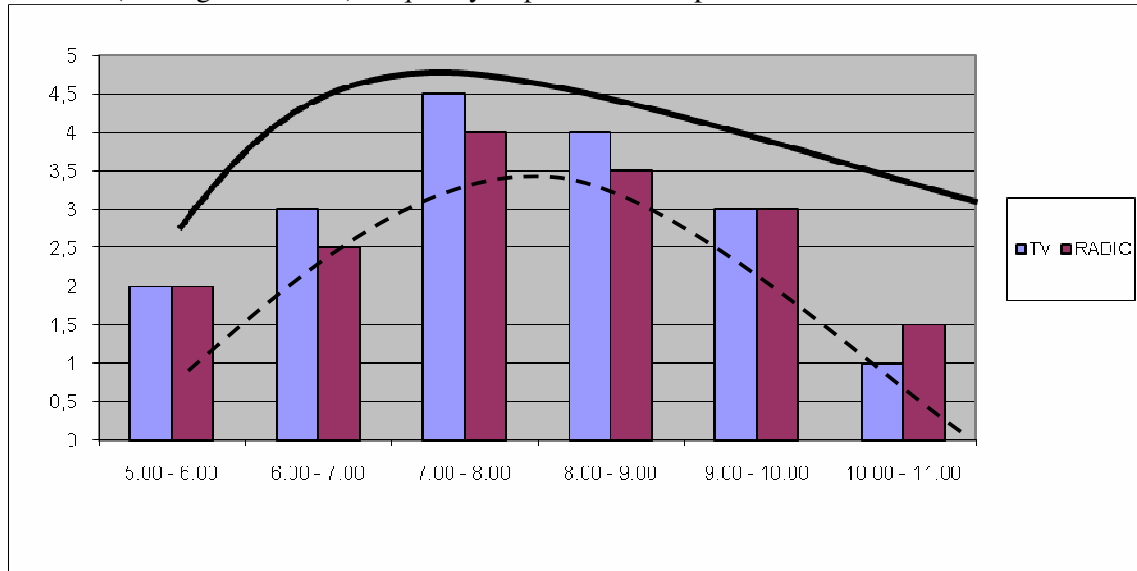
Television or radio press reviews are usually parts of longer programmes ie. morning shows on TV or radio during which journalists go through the press, including dailies and weeklies, commenting on the contents and recommending to people what they see fit. Sometimes, the term 'author's press review' is used emphasizing journalist independence in their choice of newspapers and subjects offered and discussed or signaling the station not taking responsibility for journalist commentary and the topics conferred.

A typical press review often lasts between two to five minutes. Since it is impossible to do a press review of all newspapers within such a short period of time, usually there are different types of press reviews³ (between 5.30 and 9.30 AM, and in extraordinary situations to 10:30 – 11 AM, depending on the medium and station). The first or earliest review, between 5:30 and 7:00, selects, presents and comments on the most important events of the day from the main, opinion forming newspapers with the largest circulation. The following reviews focus on information and events that are not from major titles and not front page news. Headline news is first commented on and recommended between 5:30 and 6:30, and later the same is repeated to a larger (and different) audience between 7:00 and 9:00.

² For more see: A. J. Chodubski, *Wstęp do badań politologicznych*. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, Gdańsk 2004, p. 134-139

³ Presented as frequently as 4-5 times an hour, although such frequent reviews are typical of thematic information stations such as TVN24, or TOK FM rather than general stations ie. TVP or POLSKIE RADIO.

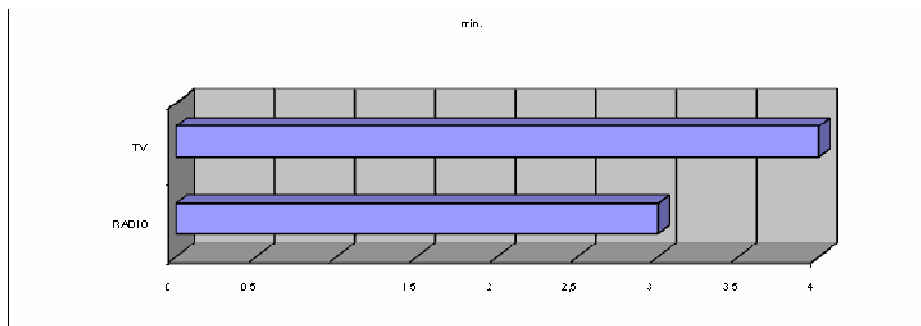
Chart 1: (Average statistical) frequency of press reviews per hour



thematic information stations (ie. TVN 24, Radio TOK FM)
 general stations (ie. TVP, TVN)

Source: by author

Chart 2: (Average statistical) length of press review on TV and radio



Source: by author

The empirical analysis shows that if a press review directly precedes a news service, then the materials selected for it are not the same as the ones presented in the news brief. In some cases, press reviews take place near midnight, or five to six hours before the newspapers reach the stands. This is how it is done on TVN24 where after midnight presented are the headlines of major newspapers for the next day.

Surely, press reviews in various types of media differ from each other, for example, radio press reviews (as opposed to TV) use more citations of articles, while TV ones offer a selection of photos, charts or other visual data. Often times, TV press reviews are carried out by guest journalists invited specifically for this purpose while on radio it happens rather rarely. Also, radio press reviews are often done by two journalists, the same ones who do the morning show.

Table 1: Number of presented newspaper titles and topics/articles per one press review in different media (statistical average)

	TV	Radio
Number of presented titles	3.5	3
Number of presented topics/articles	5	4.5

Source: by author

There are also press reviews offered on the Internet (for examples see: www.wp.pl lub www.onet.pl) which sometimes also include materials from press abroad. Generally, Internet reviews are structured better, with topics divided into categories, ie. international, domestic, economy, etc. On TV and radio, we are dealing with journalists who use paper versions of newspapers, flip through and select those topics of interest to them or ones they consider appropriate for recommending. The one exception is TVN24 which has got an economic press review before 7 AM.

	www.wp.pl	www.onet.pl	www.wprost.pl
	http://media.wp.pl/	http://wiadomosci.onet.pl/kiosk.html	http://www.wprost.pl/prasa/
Number of presented titles	56	70 (including domestic and foreign press)	4*
Number of presented topics/articles	75	86	5**

* Internet services offer press reviews dating back several days and include a many as several dozen press titles, this number represents the amount of topics for one day

** The “Wprost” Internet service focuses on its own information, its press review section includes an archive of several years of reviews

Source: by author

There are also reviews on the Internet made available by particular newspapers, one example is the weekly “Wprost” press review, on the www.wprost.pl site. Parallel to the magazine’s traditional, weekly, paper edition, additionally offered is a daily press review, similar to other Internet reviews. What is more, this portal comments on any relevant news on a current basis so in this way it acts like a daily. Often, information presented on the portal becomes of interest to public opinion. The staff of the weekly “Wprost” and the portal is the same, and it serves a good example of how efficient human resources can be. The portal also acts as advertisement of the weekly, the information is presented on it a couple days earlier, before the weekly comes out, which can make some people interested in the topics highlighted and then purchase the traditional, paper version to find out more.

Television stations also have got their own Internet portals with press reviews. Generally, all modern media use the strategy of 'borrowing' from each other information, quoting information from other sources or re-printing it⁴. This information flow is not entirely one way, from press to electronic media, nevertheless, it is TV, radio and Internet which base on printed materials for their reviews.

It should also be noted that press reviews are also offered via other modern media devices. Owning a mobile phone with a WAP service function (presently rather standard service) enables people to access a wide information base, including press reviews, outside the office or home, basically everywhere where there is range. Mobile technology specialists say, however, that this service is not popular enough so far to compete with traditional media press reviews, ie. those offered on morning shows. It is, nevertheless, impressive as far as availability, elasticity and it is definitely a futuristic service.

Lastly, the weekly "Angora" needs to be discussed which entirely focuses and offers a selection of re-prints of articles from international and domestic press. It is unique as no other medium offers a comprehensive press review on a weekly basis. What is more, we are not dealing here with a classic press review which only mentions titles and topics of interest but it offers a full version of the articles. It is also specific as it does not combine any two mediums (ie. press and TV, or press and radio or Internet). It is the same medium (press) and in the same form (paper) but is targeted (to a large degree) to a different segment of recipients.

Summing up, regardless the type of medium offering the press review, there are common functions which they all have:

- increasing the effect of media broadcast through its publicity
- increasing the audience base
- secondary gate keeping
- agenda setting
- increasing broadcast credibility
- social justification
- promotion of newspapers, journalists
- marginalization of other newspapers and journalists⁵

Analysis of press reviews shows the dynamics of media system evolution. It is dynamically evolving just as are elements and subsystems which construct it. The press, radio, TV and new media (Internet) systems are the core of the media system which is undergoing a diffusion of new technologies and the convergence of electronic media with IT and telecommunications on the one hand and with traditional, printed media on the other.⁶

Mass media distribute information necessary for the political system. They are a part of a larger, more complex communication system inside which there are transfers of one of the most important social resources and binder of community life - information⁷.

Information, or information programmes, are a basic journalistic genre. They include the following characteristics:

- current and topical
- surprising

⁴ Portals like 'wirtualna polska' (www.wp.pl) use information from newspapers and other media and have little of their own journalist base.

⁵ Since on the Polish market journalists often have more than one job, ie. work for the press and the electronic media, they are also often reviewers of their colleagues' work..

⁶ See also: B. Dobek – Ostrowska, *Komunikowanie polityczne i publiczne. Podręcznik akademicki*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2006, p. 115

⁷ At the same time, the media system should be viewed as a internally compound system of intertwined elements with groups creating other sub-systems, ie. electronic media.

- fragmentary
- ephemeral
- indicative
- shaped by values
- interesting
- factual

Press reviews also possess these characteristics, they are broadcasts which are topical and relate the current news. They are non-systematic, they focus on different events and are, at the same time, a classic example of information broadcast – its purpose is to be noticed and orientate people but not be a substitute for knowledge⁸

Synergy, mediation, increasing audience base

Specificity of press and other media (TV, radio, Internet) influence on the recipient is different in each case⁹. In case of press review, we are dealing with a synergy of two types of media and, additionally, with widening (or even multiplying) the audience. It is a fascinating phenomenon regarding the analysis of the dynamic of change of recipient range. The target recipient group, or those viewers designated as the object of interest (to ie. advertisers) is increased to the audience or recipients of other media (radio, TV, Internet) becoming an accumulated audience (available at a given time) which includes the entire (potential) audience available or all those who possess the basic skills and have capabilities of reception.¹⁰

Empirical research points to the fragmentation of mass audience, as one modern media mega trend. It is a consequence of the ever increasing number of available channels, titles and options of reception. Due to the above, the term ‘audience’, understood as more or less a constant group of recipients, is rather outdated¹¹. In the context of press review analysis, its publicity function and increasing the audience base, it is worth to take a look at the factors which format the audience group. According to T. Goban-Klas, these are:

- availability of reception (in terms of time, space and finances) as well as everyday life habits,
- habits of media usage,
- general content preferences, tastes and interests,
- viewing context (alone or with others who may have other viewing preferences).

And regarding the medium:

- targeting a specific recipient segment,

⁸ D. McQuail, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*. Sage, London 2000, Polish edition: „Teorie komunikowania masowego”, ed. by T. Goban – Klap. Wydawnictwo PWN, Warszawa 2008, p. 371-372

⁹For more see: W. Cwalina, E. Dzienis, Wpływ źródła przekazu na odbiór i ocenę programów TV. (in:) Psychologiczne aspekty odbioru telewizji (red.) P. Francuz. Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, Lublin 2004, p. 301 and on.

¹⁰ D. McQuail, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*. Sage, London 2000, Polish edition ed. by T. Goban – Klap. Wydawnictwo PWN, Warszawa 2008, p. 406-408

¹¹ D. McQuail, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*. Sage, London 2000, Polish edition ed. by T. Goban – Klap. Wydawnictwo PWN, Warszawa 2008, p. 525

- programme schedule and times are decided upon based on the recipient audience and its preferences¹²

The synergy which press reviews offer is an exception to the rule, due to numerous secondary broadcasters, the original transmitter multiplies his potential audience¹³. Additionally, there is the issue of defining the audience, via medium type and content. Usually, every newspaper possesses a specific target audience to which it directs its articles and style. Meanwhile, press reviews publicize certain topics, via TV, radio or the Internet, which may have been directed to an entirely different recipient segment.

The discussed above synergy (of different media types and journalistic genres) is one of the trends taking place on the media market these days.¹⁴ It does not mean that new trends are replacing old but it is definitely true that the old and the new are interacting on many levels. Interactions which in case of press reviews mean the mixing of usually two media types are known as mediation. In literature mediation metaphors are:

- windows which broaden our horizons,
- mirrors which reflect what goes on in the world,
- filters which select what is of importance,
- lodestars, guides or interpreters which aid us in understanding what is complicated,
- popularisation which makes information available to the masses,
- interlocutor or a well informed partner in a discussion.¹⁵

Without doubt, these illustrate the earlier mentioned functions which, in the process of media communication, press reviews offer. Here, the difference between factual and broadcasted reality takes place via secondary selection, firstly by newspaper editors, then by press review hosts. In this case, personal views and opinions matter as they play a role in the selection process¹⁶. The opinions of press review hosts are of relevance since, according to international research, a larger percentage of journalists (than in society) have liberal views.¹⁷

Theory

In search of an adequate model for the process of communication which could serve as an explanatory tool in a press review analysis, we should take a look at E. Katz and P. Lazarsfeld's two stage information flow model¹⁸. In the 1950s, these two researchers noticed that mass communication is a complex, two stage process – from media to opinion leaders and from opinion leaders to the public, with opinion leaders' role being the decisive one. In the past, they were local leaders of communities who used the media on a much larger scale than the average individual, in turn communicating to people what they have learned, after filtering the information. This is a good starting point since in modern day mass

¹² T. Goban – Klas, *Media i komunikowanie masowe. Teorie i analizy prasy, radia, telewizji i Internetu*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2006, p. 228-229

¹³ The accumulated number of recipients multiplies the number of original recipients for the given title.

¹⁴ H. Jenkins, *Kultura konwergencji. Zderzenie starych i nowych mediów*. Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne. Warszawa 2007, p. 7-22

¹⁵ D. McQuail, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*. Sage, London 2000, Polish edition ed. by. T. Goban – Klap. Wydawnictwo PWN, Warszawa 2008, p. 96 - 98

¹⁶ It influences their selection criteria.

¹⁷ See: W. Schultz, *Komunikacja polityczna. Koncepcje teoretyczne i wyniki badań empirycznych na temat mediów masowych w polityce*. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego. Kraków 2006, 39

¹⁸ E. Katz, *The Two – Step Flow of Information. An up-to-date Report on the Hypothesis*. Public Opinion Quarterly vol. 21 / 1957 and E. Katz, P. Lazarsfeld, *Personal Influence*. Free Press, Glenncoe, 1955

communication opinion leaders are not local anymore, those roles are played by other subjects and leaders, also often by mass media journalists.

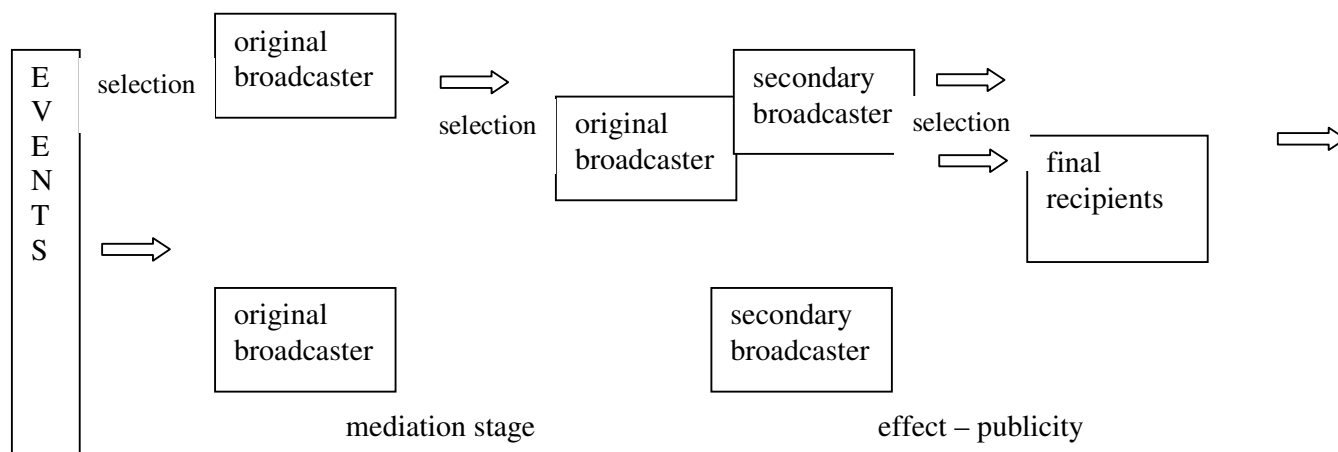
Among other models of mediation, as the main communication models are called which play the role of an intermediary or a gate keeper¹⁹, noteworthy is also W. Schramm's model of communication. When building his model, Schramm rejected the theory that the process of communication is linear in character. Besides coding by source (broadcaster) and decoding by recipient, he also introduced the element of recipient interpretation.²⁰ This is his sequence:

coding - sending - reception – decoding - interpretation – coding –etc.²¹.

Finally, the publicity model should be mentioned. It considers communication a show which draws attention and focuses on the fact that often the media's primary goal is to draw and keep people's attention, via image or sound, more so than to share concrete information²². This way, the media realize their commercial goals (drawing profits from high ratings)²³.

When we put together the elements of the above discussed communication models for the purpose of building an explanatory model aiding the interpretation of the phenomenon of press review, we obtain the following:

Coding – decoding – interpretation – coding – decoding – interpretation



This article attempts to analyse, also basing on the above diagram, press reviews as a specific form of media communication, with a focus on *gate keeping* and *agenda setting*. K. Lewin²⁴ wrote about gate keepers as people who organize the flow of information. It could be

¹⁹ W. Jabłoński, *Kreowanie informacji. Media relations*. Wydawnictwa Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2006, p. 41

²⁰ W. Schramm, *How Communication Works* (in:) W. Schramm (red.) *The Process and Effects of Mass Communication*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press. 1954

²¹ On the individual level everyone is, at the same time, the source and the recipient of communication.

²² Drawing attention is a zero sum process, time devoted to one medium cannot be spent on another and recipients' time is limited.

²³ D. McQuail, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*. Sage, London 2000, Polish edition ed. by T. Goban – Klap. Wydawnictwo PWN, Warszawa 2008, p. 85-86

²⁴ K. Lewin, *Channels of Group Life* (in:) *Human Relations* 1 / 1947 p. 143-154

an individual, a group or a group responsible for and in control of information flow in communication channels.²⁵

The media, being in the heart of the political communication system, play a fundamental role within the political process. One of their functions is that of *agenda setting* - selecting what is communicated and deciding upon order of the day and, in consequence, what happens within the public sphere in general²⁶.

Research on media capability regarding the selection of major events was first carried out in the 1920s (Lippmann, 1921, 1922). It was later continued by P. Lazarsfeld, P. Merton, C. Cohen and following generation of researchers. The hypothesis of *agenda setting* was eventually formulated in the 1970s (M. McCombs, D. L. Shaw 1977). H. Lasswell also carried out research in this sphere (ie. *The Communication of Ideas*, 1948), based on the analysis of US election campaigns he proposed a linear model of communication with the recipient being a passive figure influenced by broadcaster's propaganda materials, the so called traditional, dominant paradigm.²⁷

The *agenda setting* hypothesis relates to the correlation between the pressure the media put on a specific fragment of reality and its relevance in the perception of individual recipients and in public opinion. The information which the mass media devote most attention to the recipients treat as most important. Selection of major events, creating order of the day (*agenda setting*) and, consequently, building public discourse are essential mechanisms within the media communication sphere, with a particular focus on political communication.

Empirical research shows that press and TV play an imperative role in the forming of order of the day within the political sphere, with the press being more influential in between elections and TV being more persuasive directly before elections.²⁸ The media, despite being a secondary broadcaster (they are an intermediary in communication of politicians with their electorate) during the elections and despite being pressured by different campaign teams, still play a leading role in shaping people's opinions and influencing preferences.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it should be noted that regarding press review we are dealing with a interesting synergy effect, where press specificity interpenetrates with other media specificity, ie. TV, radio or Internet. The interactions between different media subsystems take place within the context of the observed mega trends, such as a diffusion of IT technologies or audience fragmentation. Media interactivity (press and TV or radio) has to take into account variable time elasticity of the different media (TV and radio are quick to change their news, press does it on a daily basis, weeklies – once a week).

Press review, being an information programme, plays an important role in creating order of the day. Being based on the mechanism of *gate keeping*, its role is the selection key information²⁹. Hosts of press reviews direct, this way, the attention of public opinion toward

²⁵ B. Dobek – Ostrowska, *Komunikowanie polityczne i publiczne. Podręcznik akademicki*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2006, p. 34-35

²⁶ Through the functions of *agenda setting*, *priming* and *news framing* media determine the hierarchy of topics for public opinion.

²⁷ Following research developed an alternative paradigm rejecting the transmission model of communication, see M. McCombs, *Setting the Agenda: The Mass Media and Public Opinion*. Cambridge Policy Press 2004.

²⁸ P. Walgrave, P. van Aelst, *The Contingency of the Mass Media's Political Agenda Setting Power: Toward a Preliminary Theory*. "Journal of Communication" nr 56, 2007, p. 89.

²⁹ Since the amount of information available in newspapers on any given day is so large, there is a necessity to select, choose some and reject others.

certain events while ignoring others³⁰. They influence and form public opinion, strengthening the impact of the original broadcast by publicizing it and increasing the audience base.

As was shown on the above model, press reviews are another stage in the selection of information (*secondary gate keeping*), aiding in establishing which news is noteworthy (*agenda setting*), however, there is also a drawback as they give press materials credence (via the mechanism of social credibility).

³⁰ M. McCombs, *Setting the Agenda: The Mass Media and Public Opinion*. Cambridge Policy Press 2004

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