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AN INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH ON INTERNET MEDIA NEWS REPORTING

Andrej Kovacic[1]

Abstract
This article is based on an extended research consisting 7,586 analyzed headlines and short abstracts and opens many important issues issue on how negative feelings are evoked when being exposed to media "news" reporting in media on the internet. Over the period of 35 months - from December 2008 to September 2013 from a random selection among more than 724,000, news from 21 different sources using RSS internet abstracting (television, newspaper and internet) were analyzed. An analysis also includes a comparison of four different languages groups (English, Croatian, German and Slovenian). Results show that overall in all tested media there is a strong negative bias. In addition in International (English) the average negative feelings are the most negative. On the other side however when analyzing the "size" of the negative feelings on a 9 point scale Slovenian media (a group with the lowest quantity of negative evaluations) has on average evoked the most negative feelings among negative evaluations.

Key words: news, international, media

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Introduction

"At least 16 people have been killed…" "Hundreds are feared dead…" "Bus-train crash kills 9, injures 212 in Argentina". These are only a few examples of how news reporting can evoke negative feelings. These negative feelings are an important factor in influencing our states, our behaviour and our character as Johnston and Davey (1997:85) explains in their research. They tested three groups with 14-min TV news bulletins that were edited to display either positive, neutral or negative material and discovered that participants who watched the negative bulletin showed "increases in both anxious and sad mood", and also a "significant increase in the tendency to catastrophize a personal worry".

Apollonio and Malone (2008, 485) analyzed negative political reporting and political advertising, another context of negative news reporting and

[1] Assistant prof. Andrej Kovačič, Ph.D. Contact: andrej.kovacic(at) ceos.si

concluded that by increasing awareness to potential problems, media is actually encouraging people to reconsider their established opinions. In terms of these effects on the psychological health of viewers, it is important that TV schedulers should consider such effects when preparing and scheduling programs containing emotively negative content. Similarly Johnston and Davey (1997:85) suggest that negative TV news programs can "exacerbate a range of personal concerns that are not specifically relevant to the content of the program." Increases in negative mood as a result of viewing a negative news bulletin were also associated with increases in the catastrophizing of personal worries. In fact as Horn (2007) explains, public discontent with the media in general results largely from exaggerated claims based on erroneous reasoning along these lines.

The evidence of the extreme consequence of negative news reporting can be found in Sudak H. and Sudak D. (2005: 499). In an extensive literature review they provided examples how specific media reporting of suicide news has an impact on further suicides. They also present the guidelines which may help to diminish such effects to help prevent additional suicides or suicide attempts. Browne and Hamilton - Giachritsis (2005) similarly analyzed violence in connection to the violence presented in media. They claim that there is evidence that violent imagery has short-term effects on arousal, thoughts, and emotions, increasing the likelihood of aggressive or fearful behavior. Similarly in their experiment Hawton et al. (1999) showed that broadcast of popular television dramas depicting self poisoning may have a short term influence in increases of hospitalization of overdose patients. Authors point out that this raises serious questions about the advisability of the media portraying such behavior.

While the relationship between media and mood change has been researched extensively, the correlation between negative media content and negative long term effects on health appears to be more difficult to research. Browne and Hamilton-Giachritsis (2005) believe that long-term outcomes for children viewing media violence are controversial because of the methodological difficulties. Nevertheless they present studies that show that media violence also has substantial long-term effect on public-health. Another good attempt to provide evidence that support the relationship between mood (influenced by media) and long term health risk is a thirty-five-year longitudinal study by Peterson, Seligman and Vaillant (1988, 23-25). This study showed that pessimistic style predicted poor health at ages 45 through 60, even when physical and mental health at age 25 were controlled thus pessimism in early

adulthood appears to be a risk factor for poor health in middle and late adulthood.

Why do media report more negative news?

The reason for the increase of negative reporting can be seen in a limited attention in a flood of modern media. The incentive to buy (purchase newspapers, or spare television time) is closely related to visual attention. Visual attention as defined in Ketelaar, Gisbergen, Bosman and Beentjes (2008: 16) is "the allocation or concentration of cognitive energy to process one part of the visual field at the expense of other parts." Similarly Cummings (2007: 6) defines attention as "a concentration of the mind on a single object or thought, especially one preferentially selected from a complex, with a view to limiting or clarifying receptivity by narrowing the range of stimuli." Both definitions clearly indicate the main objective of media owners and advertisers in this fast changing modern world – that is to attract consumer visual attention. Young (2010: 3) refers to this objective as "stopping power". For advertising he states that in order to be effective "print advertisement must get noticed and attract a reader". Similarly Heath (2007b: 18) claims that achieving nor attention nor engagement means you are in serious danger of having an unsuccessful message and "bad" news attracts attention more than "good" news.

Bad news also serves as a better contrast to predominately positive advertising. Consumers that are in a bad mood tend to buy more goods as a form of emotional relief. As advertising is more effective thus making media more profitable without any consideration on the consumer bad state.

Research hypotheses

Our main research question is to what extent media is reporting news that evokes negative feelings. Thus we structure three basic hypothesis:

Media tone.
H1: There is more negative evoked feelings from news reporting than positive for each of the media.

Language groups
H2: International media (English) are a group with the most negative evoked feelings by news reporting (as % of news evoking negative feelings).

How negative news that are evaluated negatively really are?
H3: Slovene group (a group with the least percentage of negative feelings evoked by news reporting) will when evoking negative feelings report more negatively rated on a 9-point scale (only negatively evaluated news are compared).

Research design, method and sampling
We used stratified random sample for each media with each record (news) having exactly the same probability of being selected without repetition. This selection procedure assured the normal distribution as well as sufficient representation of different media.

In the analysis the independent variable was the evaluation of the story based on a one item 9- point Likert scale, “How did this news make you feel?” supported by a pleasure dimension of SAM (appendix 7). Self-Assessment Manikin (SAM) is a visual non-verbal scale with a graphic character arrayed along a continuous 9-point scale. Due to the high reliability and simplicity SAM gained popularity and is used by many authors (Moris, Woo and Singh, 2005; Poels and Dewitte, 2006; Bruner and King, 2003). Results of the evaluation were calculated to range from -4 (extremely negative evoked feelings) through 0 (neutral) to 4 (extremely positive evoked feelings). Although Likert scale is in its essence ordinal in this example (SAM) can approximate an interval-level used for measurement ranging from -4 to +4.

Each news headline and short summary (up to 250 characters) was evaluated twice by two independent evaluators1. Evaluators have been fluent in language or native speaker2.

Following the evaluation a Krippendorff's alpha (□) on interval variables was used to evaluate the inter-rater reliability between the evaluations of the each pair of evaluators. Krippendorff's alpha is proposed as the standard reliability statistic for content analysis by Hayes (2007) because it satisfies the conditions that observers are treated being unaffected by their observations. In addition □ is exclusively rooted in the data generated by all observers and defines the two reliability scale points as 1.00 for perfect reliability and 0.00 for the absence of reliability which are statistically unrelated to the units they describe. Finally (□) can measures agreements for nominal, ordinal, interval, and ratio data and is thus very suitable in this research.

Table 1: The calculated Krippendorff's □□ for nominal variables

	Media tone	Evaluation on SAM
International (English)	0.900	0.947
Croatian	0.917	0.942
German	0.912	0.931
Slovene	0.926	0.945
Overall	0.911	0.944

The sampling distribution of the means is assumed to be normally distributed as well as the sampling distribution of the scores. Reliability calculations using Krippendorff's □ for each of the language group shows alphas above 0.90 (see table 1), which is to be considered reliable variable for analysis3.

1 The evaluators were independent and were rewarded in money for the task. Their judgments were not influenced by any of the authors or support team neither was any of the authors of this article a part of the evaluation team.

2 Native speakers were in Croatian and Slovene language as well as one for English language. Other evaluators all had at fluent proficiency language skills proved by education degree or language certificates.

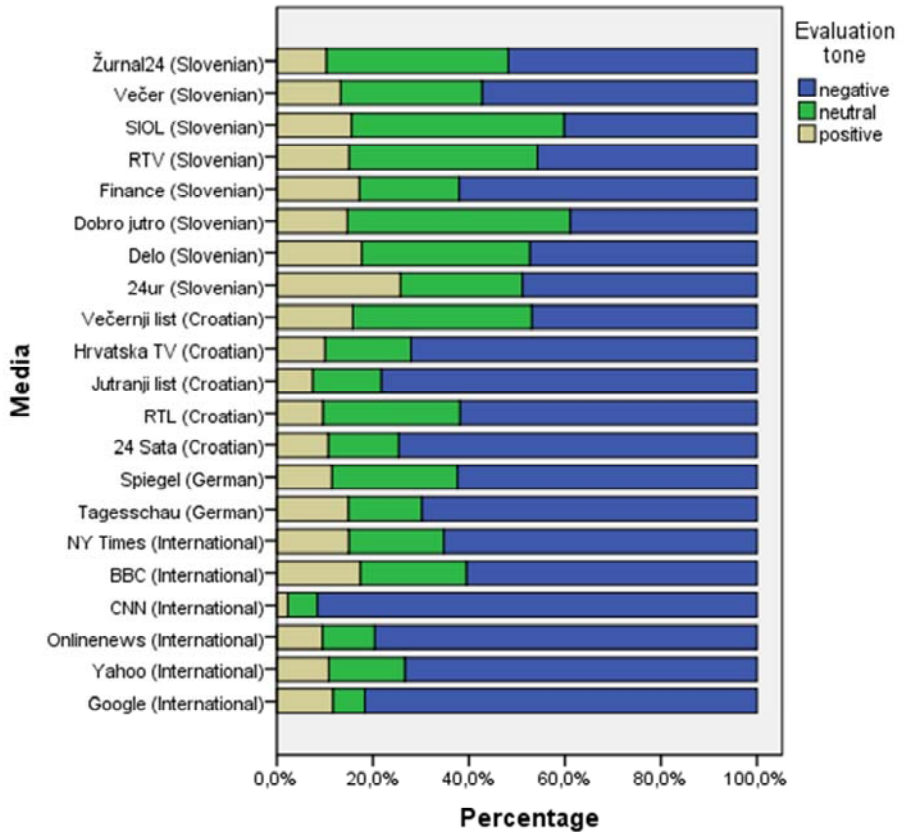
3 Krippendorff (2004: 241) suggest to rely on evaluators with variables $\alpha \geq 0{,}80$ although $\alpha \geq .667$ can suffice for drawing tentative conclusions. For example alpha 0,90 % means that 90 % of the units tested by evaluators are perfectly reliable while only 10% are the results of chance.

Results

Media tone (testing H1)

A Chi-Square goodness of fit was calculated comparing the frequencies of occurrence of news rated negatively and positively. It was hypothesized that positive and negative feelings would occur an equal number of times. Significant deviation was found for analyses news as a whole χ (1)= 2,355.24, p <000 as well as for each of the media separately at p <000 level. Thus we can conclude that all media is reporting news that evoke more negative feelings than positive and we can confirm H1. The negativity can be clearly seen on Figure 1 and Appendix 2.

Figure 1: Media tone



Language groups (testing H2)

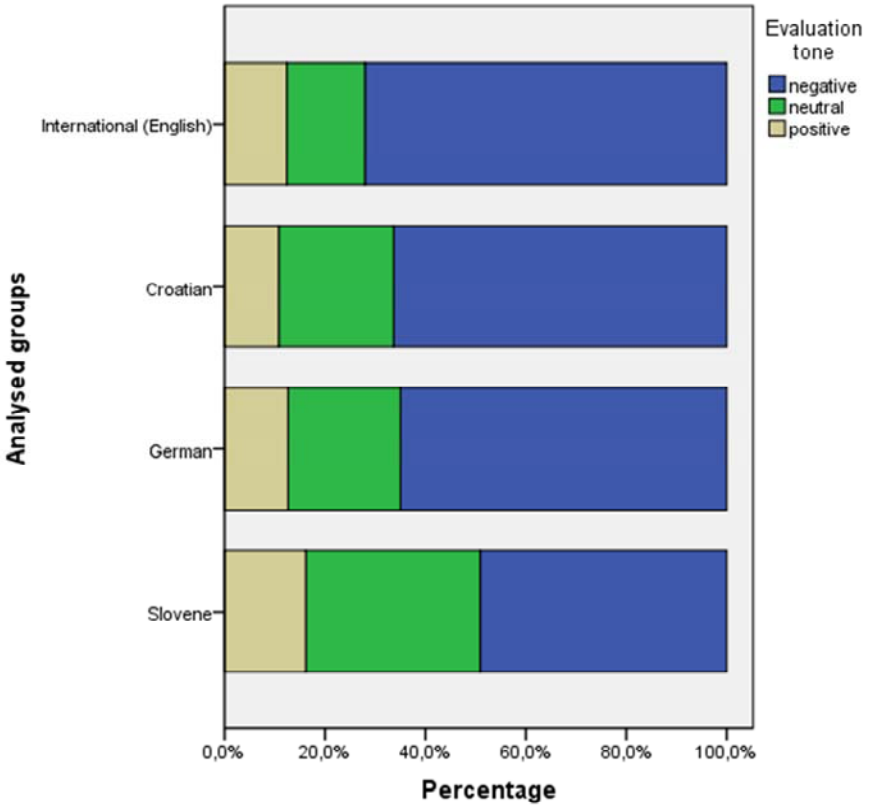
H2: International media (English) are a group with the most negative evoked feelings by news reporting (as % of news evoking negative feelings).

A One-Way Analysis of Variance (oneway ANOVA) comparing four different groups was used to analyze the evaluations of the news. In the analysis the independent variable was based on a 9- point Likert scale. The results of the evaluation were calculated to range from -4 (extremely negative evoked feelings) through 0 (neutral) to 4 (extremely positive evoked feelings). The dependent variable has for groups:

Group 1 = International media in English language (CNN, BBC, NY Times, Google, Yahoo, Online news)
Group 2 = Croatian media in Croatian language (24 Sata, Hrvatska TV, Večernji list, RTL, Jutranji list)
Group 3 = German media in German language (Tagesschau, Spiegel)
Group 4 = Slovenian media in Slovenian language (24ur, Delo, Dobro jutro, Finance, RTV, SIOL, Večer, Žurnal24)

The results from the analysis Appendix 3 indicate that a significant difference was found between media groups: $F(3,7359) = 17.075$, $p < .000$. The mean values for the five media groups indicate that there is indeed negative news reporting ranging from -0.73 (German) to -0.99 (International) group on a -4 to + 4 scale. International English group (m= -0.99, sd= 1.23) indeed has the lowest average and is significantly different than German (m= - 0.73, sd= 1.07) at $p < 000$. International English group is also significantly different than Slovene (m= - 0.75, sd= 1.51) at $p < 000$. We did however not find that it differs significantly from Croatian group (m= - 0.95, sd= 1.18). Thus we can only partly confirm H2 as Slovene and German news reporting differs substantially from International whereas Croatian does not. We illustrate the proportions of negative felling evoked by news reporting across different groups on a Figure 2 and Appendix 3.

Figure 2: Media tone for different groups.

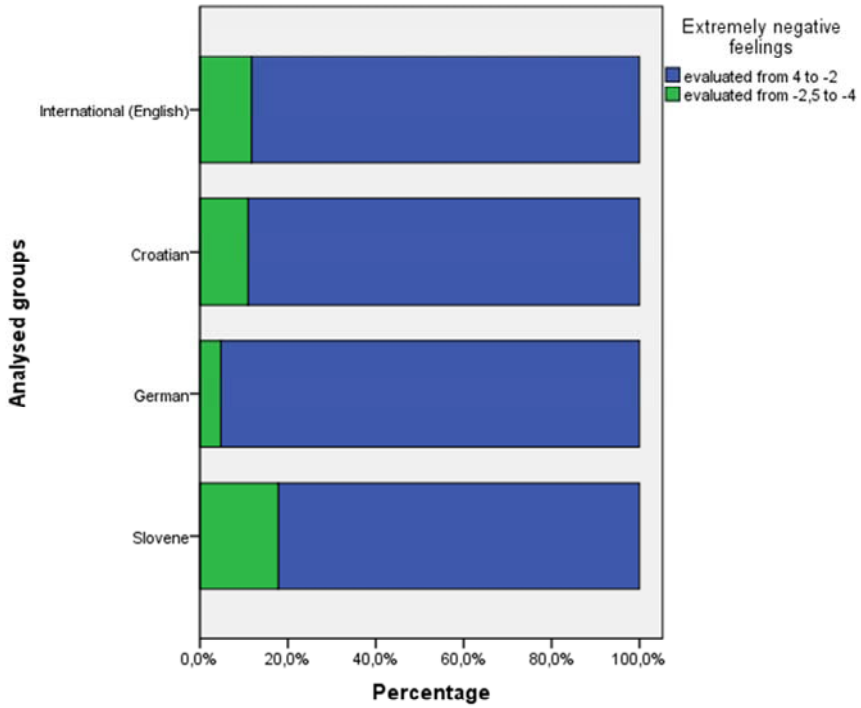


How negative news that are evaluated negatively really are (testing H3)?

A conservative Scheffé test was used for Post Hoc Comparisons on the same four groups (International, Croatian, German, Slovene). As can be seen in the multiple comparison table 2.3 the highly significant $F(3,4588) = 87.066$ ($p < .001$) indicates that the means of the four groups differ significantly in their negative evaluations averages. The mean difference values accompanied by asterisks in table xxx indicate which media groups differ significantly from each other at the 0.05 level of significance. In the context of H3 the results indicate that the Slovene group as suggested differs from all the other groups at 000 significance level. Slovene is substantially lower (m=-2.00, 1.024) from International (m=-1.59, 0.79), Croatian (m=-1.62, 0.79) and German (m=-1.36, 0.65) and Croatian (m=-1.62, 0.79). This confirms H3 and may suggest that Slovene media tries to compensate lower quantity with more extreme reporting. To illustrate this Figure 3 shows the percentage of extremely negative evaluations with average below -2.5 to -4 on a -4 to +4 scale,

Here Slovene news evoke the most of those extreme negative feelings and thus make up for the lowest quantity.

Figure 3: The percentage of extreme negative evaluations



In appendix 4 we can see that in Slovene group more than 17.8% of news was evaluated in the lowest negative 25 percentile of the scale in comparison to 4.7 % in German group. For specific media data are ranging from 3.5 % (NY Times (International group) to 26.5 % (Večer – Slovenia group).

Limitations of the research

Every research has some limitations and this one is no exception. In the pursue of the international comparison the usage of four different languages was a necessary. We understand that although being chosen on a descending order according to their popularity the chosen media may not represent the nation's media correctly. As a consequence we attach the analysis of a separate media to allow the reader to separate and make his/her own conclusions. For further research we would also suggest the stratification on the media type in addition to popularity – this however exceded the scope of this research.

We also acknowledge the fact that not all evaluators were native speakers living in their own environment. However, a lot of effort has been invested to train the evaluators which is indicated by strong inter-coder reliability results. In addition the research clear methodology enables other researchers to verify these results and thus contribute to better understanding of the field.

Conclusions and Implications

Being bombarded with negative news is a broad and systemic problem of media reporting as it is stimulated by limited media attention and media profitability objectives. This research has shown that this important issue is also to be addressed in the future. Media is strongly biased towards negativity.

Consequences of such negative reporting are shown in many academic articles. Research on consequences varies from mood change to suicidal increases and from short to long-term effects. Researchers seem to be united on the fact that negative news reporting negatively influences the well-being of people and regardless of our efforts to avoid negative news the information is processed in our brain and is affecting our mood and long-term health. Given the potential harm it is important to place media tone research in the future research.

Finding a solution to this serious issue of negative news reporting is difficult. On the one hand free press has always been important for the functioning of democracy and governments have been largely avoiding media regulations. As a consequence in most Western societies the media are considered powerful as they provide citizens the news as “facts” and politicians the influence and the control they need. But on the other hand in doing so, the media shapes public opinion and our mood, influencing our long-term health and thus, as recognized also by Horn (2007), has to be regulated.

This research has shown that the general ratio 62 % negative : 24.4 % neutral : 13 % positive does not look like media are doing a lot of good for our positive mood state. How and to what extent we can regulate media to evoke more positive than negative feelings remains however a challenging task for the future for Slovenian regulator as well as for researchers. Until then it is vitally important to deal with this issue more extensively and thus to systematically measure the true proportion of negative news reporting, its influence on our mood change, and its long - term effects it has on our lives.

Appendix 1: One item pleasure scale supported on the pleasure component of SAM

How did this news headline and abstract make you feel?

4 3 2 1 0 -1 -2 -3 -4

Appendix 2: Media tone of different media

Media Tone	Positive	Negative	Neutral
CNN (International)	2.30%	91.60%	6.10%
BBC (International)	17.30%	60.50%	22.10%
NY Times (International)	15.00%	65.30%	19.80%
Tagesschau (German)	14.90%	69.80%	15.30%
Spiegel (German)	11.40%	62.40%	26.20%
24 Sata (Croatian)	10.70%	74.60%	14.70%
Hrvatska TV (Croatian)	10.00%	72.00%	17.90%
Večernji list (Croatian)	15.80%	46.90%	37.30%
Google (International)	11.70%	81.70%	6.70%
Yahoo (International)	10.80%	73.40%	15.80%
RTL (Croatian)	9.60%	61.90%	28.50%
Jutranji list (Croatian)	7.40%	78.30%	14.30%
Onlinenews (International)	9.50%	79.60%	10.90%
24ur (Slovenian)	25.70%	48.90%	25.40%
Delo (Slovenian)	17.70%	47.30%	35.00%
Dobro jutro (Slovenian)	14.70%	38.90%	46.40%
Finance (Slovenian)	17.20%	62.00%	20.80%
RTV (Slovenian)	15.00%	45.70%	39.30%
SIOL (Slovenian)	15.50%	40.20%	44.30%
Večer (Slovenian)	13.20%	57.30%	29.50%
Žurnal24 (Slovenian)	10.30%	51.80%	37.90%
Total	13.20%	62.40%	24.40%

Appendix 3: Media group media tone

	Positive	Negative	Neutral
International (English)	12.40%	72.00%	15.60%
Croatian	10.80%	66.30%	22.90%
German	12.60%	65.00%	22.40%
Slovene	16.20%	49.10%	34.70%

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