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HOW THE MEDIA SCANDAL WORKS: IGOR STACHOWIAK'S DEATH CASE

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The aim of the article is to analyze the media scandal. The thesis describes the theoretical conditions for the scandal and its popularity in the media, as well as the features of the event qualifying as a scandal and the ways of its media presentation. Next, it was pointed out how the mechanisms of scandal worked in the manner of presenting the death of Igor Stachowiak in the Polish media. He was a young man detained by the Police in the Market Square in Wrocław. After the interrogation, during which the stun gun was used, the man died. After a year, TVN's private television broadcasted a report about this death. Since then, the event has become increasingly popular and exciting audiences. More newspapers were written about him, and more and more scandalous features. In the article, a media reconstruction of the scandal was made on the basis of selected examples from the Polish press and television. The analysis was confronted with the theoretical issues outlined earlier.

Key words: scandal, media picture, death in media, content analysis.

Introduction. On May 15, 2016 Igor Stachowiak was detained on the Wrocław market. The Polish Police officers confused him with the searched fugitive Mariusz Frontczak. After being arrested, a 25-year-old man was taken to the Wrocław – Stare Miasto police station at Trzemeska 12. On the same day, the man died in that Police station after several hours of interrogation. The autopsy performed as possible causes of death indicated the presence of psychoactive substances in the body of the denat, repeated electric shock by the stun gun and multiple, strong pressure on the neck by the person or the other during incapacitation.

A year after the death of Stachowiak, on May 20, 2017, TVN24 broadcasted a report from the Superwizjer series presenting the effects of a journalistic investigation of events

that led to the death of Stachowiak. The broadcast of the reportage provoked a multilateral and complex discussion and media debate about this event. The purpose of this analysis is not to evaluate or analyze the tragic event itself, but to outline the specifics of its media resonance. Undoubtedly, this event was set by the Polish Police in a bad light, and it has many features characteristic of the media scandal. In this context, its media reconstruction will be carried out based on press and audiovisual materials available on the Internet after entering the search term «death of Igor Stachowiak» in the Google search engine. The analysis was based on audiovisual material and press photos from the first hundred search results. In the research selected materials from the popular Polish television channel TVN, radio RMF FM, the weeklies «Polityka», «Wprost», «Newsweek», «Do Rzeczy» and the daily newspapers «Fakt», «Super Express», «Gazeta Wyborcza», «Gazeta Wroclawska» was analyzed.

For the needs of the research, it was assumed that in order for the event to have the characteristics of a media scandal it generally has the following characteristics:

- media event
- scandal
- repeated drama of the message.

Methodology. In the presented study, the authors use media content analysis. According to Klaus Krippendorff, this method is potentially one of the most important research techniques in the social sciences. The content analyst views data as representations not of physical events but of texts, images, and expressions that are created to be seen, read, interpreted, and acted on for their meanings, and must therefore be analyzed with such uses in mind [10, p.11]. Content analysis is a method of studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables [8].

Content analysis was made by looking for features of a media scandal in the content and presentation of events related to the death of Igor Stachowiak. The media is guided by the choice of the presented content with criteria that make the event attractive to the audience [9, p.94]. According to the researchers, the event has become a «media event» should meet the following features:

- the existence of a conflict, the possibility of presenting the reasons of various parties, their argumentation and generating interest through dramatization,
- great importance for the audience, the event should be perceived as important, but indirectly also affecting audience experience, the proximity of the event is an additional factor in favor of the issue or publication,
- time factor, the most recent events have a privileged nature, especially those that have taken place in the last 24 hours and which can be easily monitored as they develop,
- simplicity, the significance of events should be relatively unambiguous, the diversity of potential interpretations should be kept to a minimum,
- personalization, which emphasizes people who «cope with life on earth» instead of abstract descriptions of «faceless» structures, forces and institutions,
- surprising character, the event should be extraordinary, in line with the old journalistic maxim that an interesting person is bitten by a dog, and not when the opposite occurs;
- continuity indicating a chance for the event to develop, preferably in a way that maintains tension for a long time;
- negativism, meaning that bad news is usually preferred and much more readily discussed from good news [2–4].

According to Hans Mathias Kepplinger, author of numerous theoretical and empirical works on scandal in the media, in order for the message to be scandalized, the media event must have the features of a scandal [5, 7]. In his study presenting the specifics of numerous scandals, Kepplinger presents the following features of such an event:

- existence of irregularities of a significant nature,
- analysis of the perpetrator and the motives of his actions,
- stigmatizing the perpetrator,
- analyze each and every event and its circumstances in detail,
- similar to this type of event, but original and different (so the bestial murder was not yet ...),
- the opportunity to consider whether the perpetrator is also a victim,
- seeking public opinion (do you think it must have happened?)
- everybody knows a lot and think they are well-informed,
- everyone is shocked and outraged,
- the guilty should be punished, someone must be guilty,
- the event is developing, there are still new facts that are even more shocking,
- it is important to speculate whether the guilty party has been punished enough,
- there is the illusion of autonomous formulation of grades,
- there is an essential inference from appearances,
- the media cite each other, although all say the same, but this increases the intensity of the message,
- panic and opposition voices are emphasized,
- must evoke strong emotions [1, 12].

A media event which is a scandal is presented in a characteristic way, which Kepplinger describes as a dramatization of the message. It is characterized in particular by:

- horror label – presenting everything as even more horrible than it did,
- calling associations with crime,
- creating speculation around the worst possible scenario,
- showing other cases from the past, which creates catastrophic collages,
- accumulation of offenses,
- exaggeration [6, p.33-34].

On the basis of the analyzed research material, in the way of speaking about the death of Stachowiak, it was possible to identify, on numerous examples, almost all of the elements of media scandal presented here.

Results. The scandal is a situation in which there is a potential possibility that every human being will be in such circumstances as the victim. In this context, the indication of the weekly «Polityka» about the social shock and the title «Excuse me, but here they hit» with the subtitle «horror that everyone could meet and still can» makes the recipient feel that absolutely everyone one day may be in situation of the victim. Such reflection deepens the sense of closeness with the man who died and his family.

A significant part of the media news and press texts referring to the death of Stachowiak contained a clear indication of the developmental character of the event. Most often these were the titles of «New Facts», as in the weekly «Uważam Rze» and the weekly «Wprost». The TVN24 television achieved even more suggestive effect thanks to the title «New questions about death of Stachowiak». The development of the situation seems even

more dynamic, because in the face of new questions, with time there will also be new answers, that is new facts.



Figure 1. Title of the article in weekly «Do Rzeczy»: «The death of Igor Stachowiak is still unsolved, new facts, political intervention», below protesting young people with a banner «Stop murderers in uniforms» – Source: <https://dorzeczy.pl/kraj/30132/Sprawa-smierci-Igora-Stachowiaka-wciaz-nierozwiazana-Nowe-fakty-polityczna-interwencja.html> (19.04.2018)

According to Kepplinger, the media event should be easy to receive. The title in «Do Rzeczy»: «A policeman who used a stun gun lost his job» should be considered as very unambiguous. It is clear that the policeman is at fault and the loss of work is an elementary punishment that must meet him. The essence of the scandal is the irregularity. An excellent description of its meaning, which would be easy to convey in the title on the RMF24 portal: «The error of the Wrocław police: Igor S. was in handcuffs when the police used a stun gun». Information about numerous irregularities and the photo of protesting young people with a photo of Igor completes the scale of the conflict, in which all parties can present their reasons.

The scandal, as indicated, must concern a human being, and so must be a victim. «Polityka» in its text already in the title marked the drama of an ordinary man, adding that «the tragic death of an innocent man at the police station» took place, further reinforcing this statement in the second sentence with the question «will anyone bear responsibility?»

Scandal makes journalists go into details. All the circumstances that can be told are presented. As a result, the recipient will identify more with the victim. That is why it is so often said about the color of Stachowiak's sweater, about what he had in his purse or in

what circumstances his father learned about his death. This is illustrated by the following fragments of media messages:

«I went to my parents for a Sunday dinner and there the gentlemen came and told us that the son was confused with another man, that he fell off the chair and he just died, he is dead, that was the first message from the police officers – said in «Fakty po faktach», Igor's father, Maciej Stachowiak. – He was confused with some other man, a wanted person who should be arrested – he added.

«The film's author went to work at one of the pubs on the Market Square in Wrocław on Sunday morning. On the way, she saw a man in light trousers and an orange sweater. He stood with his hands in his pockets. Moments later she was already in the pub. She saw the police car approaching the man. Then the second one. The young man sat on the bench and pulled everything out of his pocket».

«In the purse he had with him at the time of death, Stachowiak holds a wooden rosary, a telescopic baton, two cell phones, a charger and keys. Also found in it 30 zlotys 62 grosze and bought the day before the lottery coupon».

However, an event which is a scandal, despite its uniqueness, must give rise to some degree of doubt. «Wprost» weekly made the title of Ziobro's statement «According to one of the experts, there was no evidence that Igor Stachowiak was beaten and kicked by policemen». Scandal thanks to such speculations is gaining momentum. Recipients may have doubts for a moment whether the Police is entirely responsible for the situation.

In the media coverage of scandals, bad news is great. The title from the weekly «Polityka»: «Policemen and prosecutors without guilt» touches upon the most important issue of scandal, the problem of guilt and responsibility. In a scandal, as has already been said, someone must be guilty and he should suffer a severe punishment. That is why the tabloid «Fakt» asks the question: «A policeman from a stun gun will hear the charge of homicide?». The guilty must be found, determined, the fault should be unmasked, unambiguously proven, and the media speculation must be about whether the punishment is sufficient. In this context, receiving remuneration, which was signaled by the weekly «Wprost» in the title, «The torturer of Stachowiak grab Macierewicz (then Polish minister of defense). Nevertheless, he continues to receive a salary» indicates that the punishment is too small.

Media usually formulate evaluations, although sometimes it seems that they are independent and thought-out. An excellent example of a title that proves the illusory nature of formulating independent assessments is the question in «Fakt»: «What else is hiding about the death of Stachowiak by the Police?». This title, importantly, leaves no doubt that something is hidden. Only the question what is hidden shall be answered. The scandal is also conducive to the conclusion of appearances. Often, these conclusions are not made directly. An example of this could be found in «Super Express». In the newspaper information that Stachowiak had no signs of beating when detained is illustrated by photo of marching youth with the banner «You killed Igor!». It should also be noted that the media cite each other, it increases credibility and dynamics, and also illustrates the scale of the problem. «Gazeta Wroclawska» is quoted by «Super Express», and «Gazeta Wyborcza» quotes TVN24.



Figure 2. Title of the article in «Gazeta Wroclawska»: «Igor DID NOT have any signs of beating when stopping! Another riot at the police station.», below protesting young people with a banner «You killed Igor!» – Source: http://www.se.pl/wiadomosci/polska/gazeta-wroclawska-igor-nie-mial-sladow-pobicia-podczas-zatrzymania-kolejne-zamieszki-pod-komisariacie_839181.html (19.04.2018)

The media is trying to accentuate the voices of panic and opposition. «Only in Fakt! This is what the executioners of Igor Stachowiak look like today» is the title of the article, which describes the allegations, which were put to Police officers after several months. Media relations evoke strong emotions, fear, opposition, anger. A great example of an event that can be included in the scandal is the hearing in the prosecutor's office, the author of the reportage on TVN24.

The dramatization of the message about the scandal is one of the most important means of the media expression. The events were presented using extreme concepts and illustrated with repeated macabre and brutal shots, such as arrows from a stun gun or images from Stachowiak's arrest. Dramatization is also associated with a description of reality in terms of associations with crime, or at least a violation of norms. In the «Newsweek» weekly, there is a search for what is hidden by Minister Kempa in connection with her visit to Wrocław. Speculation around the worst scenario is an additional opportunity to increase dramaturgy. The title of the «Fakt» daily: «The father's dramatic confession: „The beasts from the police murder my son!» is an example of such speculation. Disorders of catastrophes are also an inseparable element of the drama, and so the recalling of events that are similar to the scandal. The subtitle in «Newsweek» «on the Polish stations beats prisoners» can only be strengthened by numbers. That's why «Wprost» is looking for statistics on how many people have ever been killed in police stations or during the intervention. The title «16 deaths as a result of intervention» makes an impression and suggests the problems of the Polish Police.

The technique of accumulation of offenses allows the media to keep the recipients' attention for longer. The irregularity that took place is compounded by another one. As «Wprost» reported, the commanders in connection with the scandal retired, but got high

severance pay. «Newsweek», in turn, indicated that Minister Zielinski knew about Police brutality, but he did not do anything.

Visual exaggeration consists in the presentation of gruesome fragments of events, including their repeated repetition, as well as compilation of shocking photos, such as photos of Stachowiak's head before and after death, or pictures of Stachowiak's gravestone in combination with a group of policemen in the background.



Figure 3. Photos from the program «Superwizjer» broadcasted by TVN24 – Source: TV screenshot

Discussion. Media scandal escapes unambiguous evaluation. Undoubtedly, it is a value for society, because it enforces action and generates the feeling that no one can break the rules. Media stigma is the compensation that institutions do not function in a perfect way. The media certainly react faster than the courts, the prosecutor's office or other institutions. The scandal consequently leads to preventive action. Everyone is more cautious about phenomena around the problem that has already occurred [6, p.123-133].

However, there is no doubt that scandals also have their price. The consequences for those guilty may be greater than in an identical situation, which would not be a scandal, as the public expects a severe punishment. Finally, other people may also be affected. The event from Wrocław undoubtedly affected the image of the entire Police, although it was a single event.

According to empirical research, the media image of the Polish Police is bad. Usually, the subject of police is accompanied by a picture of a roadster, radar and a written mandate, which carries a strongly negative tone. Media reports often present events related to the Police within a specific framework – Police officers are usually guilty of something, while Police work consists mainly in writing tickets and catching drivers who drive too fast. Police in the Polish media is not treated as a particularly important subject, it seems that it revives mainly during the defeat of uniformed services or road actions. Research shows that the media does not broaden the knowledge about the Police, rather in the direction of sensationalism and the problem of exciting readers [11]. Scandals with the Police complete this picture.

The analysis of media scandals, their dynamics, causes and presentation is an interesting research challenge. Each case is different, but the media tools used to present them are similar. Progressive commercialization of media is a factor that promotes the presentation of scandals in the media. Further research into the media content in the context of scandals shows promising perspectives.

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ЯК ПРАЦЮЄ МЕДІА-СКАНДАЛ: СМЕРТЬ ІГОРЯ СТАХОВ'ЯКА

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Метою статті є аналіз скандалу ЗМІ, в якому описані теоретичні причини виникнення скандалу, його популярність в ЗМІ, а також особливості подій, що характеризують скандал та способи його представлення. Також було вказано, як механізми скандалу впливали на демонстрацію смерті Ігоря Стахов'яка в польських медіях, який був затриманий поліцією на Ринковій Площі у Вроцлаві. Після допиту, під час якого проти нього був застосований паралізатор, чоловік помер. Через рік після події польський приватний телеканал TVN транслював репортаж про трагічну загибель Ігоря Стахов'яка. Від того часу ця подія ставала все більш популярною і зацікавлювала суспільство, про це писали також в газетах. У статті зроблена реконструкція медіа-скандалу на підставі прикладів, взятих з польських ЗМІ. Аналіз стосувався теоретичних питань, що були описані вище.

Ключові слова: скандал, медіа-образ, смерть в ЗМІ, аналіз змісту.