

# VIOLENCE IN THE ROMANIAN AUDIOVISUAL - COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW

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## **Abstract:**

*Media research specialists have long drawn society's attention to the excessive presence of social violence in newscasts of television and radio stations. If fictional violence forms the basis of artistic content, real violence in informative programs, for example, is found in a different dimension and requires a special approach. Thus, it is noticeable that the elaboration of the news programs obviously gives more attention to the sensational events, which satisfy the extraordinary taste of the information beneficiaries. This paper aims to demonstrate that, compared with a decade ago, the results of a specialized study conducted by the National Audiovisual Council can still be found today.*

**Keywords:** *violence, audio-visual, media, content, people*

**JEL Classification:** L82

## **1. Introduction**

Few aspects attract attention to the specialists who analyse the press and, in particular, the audio-visual field, as much as violence on the small screen and on the big screen does. Some violence is undoubtedly inevitable in any drama, comedy and melodrama. But the unstoppable growth of violent crimes in everyday life, many of them committed by young people, has often been linked to the harsh, agitated lives of characters playing high-profile roles, such as bloody sports practitioners, animated superheroes whose gallery continues to widen. It is believed that what a young man sees, becomes too easily what he also does. Since society can't accept the anarchy of criminal rules, it must act to eliminate the causes (Clifford, Fackler, Rotzoll, McKee, 2001).

On the other hand, those who censure violence are in opposition to the defenders of freedom, passionate fighters, who insist that any expression should be protected. They also think that violent programs do not necessarily give rise to violent behaviours.

Over the past decades, numerous researches have been carried out by specialized committees, including content analyses, active observations, case studies, interviews and experimental studies, in particular recommending the more severe application of existing laws, increasing the degree of control and constraint, in the idea of reducing the level and frequency of viewing violent content that tends to create an incentive for crimes, and to develop a destructive social link in the minds of people who can, under certain pressure circumstances, show new attitudes.

Real violence, often publicized on television and radio journals, is not considered by media professionals as a media product, compared to fictional violence that abounds in artistic films, serials, criminological and cartoon programs, but is accepted as a „reality of reality”, which has an important coefficient in the content of informative broadcasts.

When this violence comes from reality, therefore it is a true mirror of the events that really happen; the interest of the public for real violence is superior to the interest in fictional violence. From this point of view, the news broadcasts present a predominant reality under the impact of violence of various types and the most diverse forms, and journalists pay particular attention to the positioning of violent news in the structure of the journals (Rusnac, 2010).

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Besides, the interest of the stations for the coverage of violent events is considerable. By complying with the unwritten rules of competition and being under the mark of the rating they are required to take into account, journalists continue to respect the remarkable opinion that „the best news are the bad news”, which is why information programs tend to focus in the informational process, on the exploitation of the spectacular aspect of the events, amplified by the use of styling techniques and linguistic means stylistically marked, transferring the information from the information-cognitive sphere to the information-expressive sphere.

At the same time, we cannot even say that the reality proposed, especially by television, does not objectively express reality, even if it is organized on the basis of a hierarchical or other principle. In this respect, media reality only expresses fragments of real reality. Therefore, the intense and systematic coverage of violent events creates the false impression that in reality there are more negative and less positive events (Rusnac, 2010).

## **2. The context of a specialized study development in our country**

As Romania entered a new age after 1989, our way of life has changed completely. One of the most desired and appreciated changes is freedom of expression and, with it, the emergence of an unprecedented offer of television, national and international TV stations that provide to viewers a wide range of programs. Along with the quantity, today the Romanians having electronic, etheric, or online access to more than 200 channels, obviously the problem of quality came up. Diversity did not always mean quality, so it was and still is a concern of the authorities to “clean” the television of what George Pruteanu bitterly said in 2004: *“The culture of the elite does well, but the mass culture degraded creepily, infuriated by rudeness, slumber sexuality, grobian humor, trickery, agramatism, ignorance. In the houses of culture there are casinos, in cultural houses - crawling. Books are seven times more expensive than in 1989. Televisions offer 0.01% culture. It is as if this nation is to be conquered, dupery. That's the situation.”* (Pruteanu).

The first specialized, scientifically conducted attempt to tell the truth about the content of the television programs was made in 2004. But a first-ever study of the media in our country was the comparative research report (from the year 2008) carried out by the program initiated and funded by the National Audiovisual Council (CNA). The project was the approach as a topic and methodology of television violence. It was called **“Measuring the degree of violence present in the Romanian audiovisual programs”**, the authors being a group of PhD students, coordinated by Prof. Ioan Drăgan and Prof. Poliana Ștefănescu (Center for Media Studies and New Communication Technologies).

The present paper aims to demonstrate that 10 years after the publication of that study, today, in 2018, the situation is not much different. It is true that there are positive developments, for example, the disappearance of some television stations (eg OTV) that strongly advocated violence, or programs from other TV's grids. At the same time, other stations (eg KANAL D broadcasting WOW BIZ) or other shows on known posts (eg ANTENA 1 - Direct Access) appeared.

At the same time, the most important aspect, in our opinion, was that its results led to the elaboration of the **Audiovisual Content Regulatory Code** – CNA - Decision no. 220/2011, a document that successfully completes Broadcasting Law 504/2002 and which includes clear regulations, detailing aspects that broadcasters have an obligation to respect. This Code is permanently updated, the last version being applicable as of March 26, 2017, and a new amendment proposal is currently under public debate (<http://www.cna.ro/Proiect-de-decizie-entru9045.html>).

All such research has helped to establish national, European and international policies for the protection of minors and human dignity in the audiovisual field. The most important key pursued factors are (<http://www.cna.ro/Development-project-for909045.html>):

1. The content, characteristics and “contexts of meaning”, i.e. the production of meanings and meanings of acts / scenes of violence;
2. The duration of exposure for children, teenagers, young people to TV programs;
3. The context and the socio-cultural environment of producing and receiving messages;
4. The psychological characteristics of the receiving individual - from child to young - starting from the premise that young people, even if they look at the same programs as adults, see “something else” and “different” in the contents of TV shows.

We recognize the context without being specialists in the field, it is visible to the naked eye: the explosive development of the media industries and the phenomenon of media coverage of violence in two forms: “real violence” (in news and televised) and “fictional violence” (cinemas also broadcast by television, telefilms, serials, TV films or reality-shows).

The project had and undoubtedly has a scientific, deontological and support value for concerted action among broadcasters, community, school and family to delimit and limit television violence. It falls into the broad directions of the European and international theme. Its negative impact on juveniles and youngsters has been demonstrated, and more than 5,000 studies have been conducted in the US since the 50s and 60s and later in the Western European countries. Contents on 13 TV channels have been analysed through quantified and rigorous quantitative and qualitative methods - of which the Public Television and three children’s channels - for a week (October 13-19, 2008), six genres and program categories / programs.

It should be noted that the CNA did not leave the job of chance to happen, it has its own control tools. One of these is known as monitoring and done through its own staff in the Monitoring Directorate and Control and Digitalization Directorate. But monitoring is a standard, simplifying, periodic project. The term “monitoring” refers in particular to the object being investigated (issues, timeframes and time intervals - quantitative aspects). Qualitative research methods, such as the method of content analysis (iconic and verbal) or the semio-discursive (content-centred) method of analysis, are used, but that, given the very large number of channels and programs; it is difficult to encompass all of them. Most often they are used when the Council receives petitions / complaints from viewers, who are often helpful in identifying irregularities, skirmishes or violence presented and promoted in the visual media.

### **3. Brief presentation of the CNA study**

The sample included the main types of television channels in Romania: public and private; generalist and thematic; with a balanced distribution of editorial identity - covering relatively the three major genres of broadcasting - informative, fictional and entertaining, with editorial orientation mostly targeted to certain target audiences, or proposing significant programs for scenarios of violence.

Compared to the 2004 project, the number of channels increased and diversified to 13 channels (obviously, in four years, new channels have emerged, many of which are for children). For financial reasons, the analysis period was reduced from two to one week, and the hourly volume to about half the one from 2004. This restriction was compensated by better defined channel selection criteria, broadcast genres, distributed over main time slots, and audience indicators.

Essentially, the results of the study are similar to those of other US research, or countries in the European Union. Two are the elements that give the similarity:

- the editorial model of Romanian televisions broadly reproduces the model of American and Western European televisions;
- the programs broadcast by the Romanian televisions (mainly fiction, movies, telefilms, serials, cartoons, etc.) are in large proportions import productions or domestic productions on import formats (entertainment shows, music clips, serials, etc.).

#### 4. Comparative analysis of the violence situation in the Romanian audio-visual

In the following, an analysis was made between the results found in the study conducted by CNA in 2008 and what is recorded today in the broadcasting in our country.

Trend found in the study at the level of 2008	Author's opinion for 2018
<p>1. There has been a double trend in countries that inspired television in Romania, as a result of the actions of the broadcasting regulatory and anti-violence campaign of civil society:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- a positive, progressive reduction in the <b>number, weight</b> and <b>duration</b> of programs of "real" and "fictional" scenarios;</li> <li>- a negative one, to amplify the <b>intensity / negativity</b> of the mediated violence</li> </ul> <p>- In Romania, TV violence was maintained at high levels in all aspects mentioned. Explanation: at the level of Romanian television, the primary model of sensational and consumerist television dominated. There is a parallel evolution between the diversification and increase of violence in everyday life and the staging of violence on TV screens, but especially a more <b>dramatic</b> and <b>spectacular</b> presentation of real violence in informative programs and an increasingly spectacular aestheticisation of fictional violence. Violence was presented as a socially acceptable conduct; as a source of normal pleasure; scenarios provided an overwhelmingly conflicting picture of social relationships and the role of violence as a way of regulating social relationships.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In Romania, the Audiovisual Content Regulatory Code (Decision 220/2011, amended and completed in 2017, currently in the process of being amended) appeared. Its emergence, the severe sanctioning of large fines and the involvement of civil society has led to the manifestation of our two tendencies in our country.</li> <li>- the share of violence in the programs has decreased. <b>But there is a more dramatic and spectacular presentation of real violence in informative broadcasts and an increasingly spectacular aestheticisation of fictional violence (increasingly sophisticated films). Also, reality-show shows, fictitious fiction, etc. are still in progress, with content of fictional violence (Direct access, Life lessons, etc.).</b></li> <li>- <b>a post that excessively promoted violence in all forms (OTV) disappeared, but another one appeared, which does the same thing (Romania TV).</b></li> </ul>
<p>2. The presentation of violence on television, almost as a "natural given" - amplifies and even hides classical narrative models, emphasizing action rather than character: thus <b>violent action</b> was at the center of the structure, and violence was represented as a natural law (rather than as a cultural law). This is how violence is instigated, the law of the strongest being in accordance with a law of nature.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- still valid today, with an oversight of the fight between Good and Evil. It is mainly seen in TV series. The model of representation of violence in film and TV is consistent with the American cultural-value model and Hollywood-developed cultural code. Violence does not only appear as legitimate, but also as something natural, something that depends on the nature of things. (<b>Grimm, A Teenage Werewolf</b> etc.)</li> <li>- as in Western European countries, private televisions have higher ratings and market shares than public television, that the spectacular-sensationalist model impregnated with elements of the "culture</li> </ul>

Trend found in the study at the level of 2008	Author's opinion for 2018
	of violence" has become dominant in Romania as well. - movies are being rebroadcast, numerous series of these movies are being filmed, positive or negative heroes are brought back to life etc. ( <b>From sunset to sunrise</b> etc.)
<p>3. The schemes, codes and meanings of the presentation of violent television content highlighted by US and European reference research, conducted on <i>fiction</i> and also on <i>informational</i> (televisual, information), were frequently found in TV programs in Romania.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- in cartoons, the mixture of the real and fictional elements of the universe presented was significant. Violence indicators, correlated with the degree of authenticity of the universe presented, <b>increased the degree of harmfulness of the violence in cartoons.</b></li> <li>- the images of violence were more direct, more persistent, more repetitive, such as the presentation of the most dramatic violent scenes in the ad bands, promotions broadcast at contra-indicated hours for children, suggesting an overrepresentation of television violence.</li> </ul>	<p>They also remain at the level of 2018.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Many parents claim that cartoons are violent. But they have the means to block children from accessing them through password and encrypted access. They also have a greater diversity of children's channels, from where they can choose.</li> <li>- Movie promotions keep the mark of over-representation of violence.</li> </ul>
4. Banalizing the violence representation in fiction works	- still valid
<p>5. The analytical schemes applied in the study in Romania proved to be relevant, being similar to those from other studies abroad.</p> <p>A qualitative analysis of the representations of violence was carried out following the appreciation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the context of TV violence;</li> <li>- the level of gratuitousness of violent scenes;</li> <li>- the way of narrative integration in the discursive tram;</li> <li>- Forms of unacceptable violence representation for Americans, involving those included in cartoons that value violence excessively (Batman, X-Men, Power Rangers) or internationally broadcast series.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- still valid</li> <li>- combining content analysis with a psycho-sociological study of behaviors, American researchers conclude that juveniles and young people massively exposed to violent tv-shows are the most inclined to violent behaviors, to fear and insecurity or to desensitization. According to them, the main "negative" elements of violent programs reside not only in the frequency and duration of the violent acts presented, but also in the way of making violent scenarios / defining / signifying violence: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the presentation of attractive characters involved in violence as an author or victim;</li> <li>- the use of weapons;</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Trend found in the study at the level of 2008	Author's opinion for 2018
<p>- there was a tendency to reduce the violence in programs broadcast during the first part of the evening (protection of minors), but on the other hand, in general, the series produced in the 1990s contain more and more violence.</p>	<p>- realistic scenario of violence;  - the absence of sanctions for acts of violence;  - avoiding the suffering and the real consequences of violence;  - the mixture of violence and humour.  <b>The last four forms of contextualization and making scenarios of violence mark the TV violence in Romania more significantly.</b></p>
<p>6. The results of the study in Romania were consistent with the data obtained in other studies abroad (US, UK, Germany)</p>	<p>- still valid, our televisions also import formats, movies, etc. or foreign channels are broadcast in Romania</p>
<p>7. The presentation of violence, at least at fictional level, saw the TV channels in our country in 2008 in a more negative position compared to the European and American ones.  USA, Canada, France and Romania violence programs have been compared, which have negated a current assumption at that time: contrary to what was believed to be based on the <i>two basic indicators</i> (the percentage of violent broadcasts and the frequency of violent scenes per hour), the share of violence was lower in TV programs. North American, compared to the French ones (somewhat representative of Europe), especially in high audience and Canadian audiences. The share of violent content was lower in the respective countries than in Romania, although some indicators showed some decreases in violent content in 2008 compared to 2004.  The number of violent sequences per hour continued to decline in the US, while in France (and other European or extra-European countries) their number increased due to imported programs containing more violence, especially those from the USA.</p>	<p>- better protection measures have been imposed through audiovisual legislation  - without taking measurements, based on opinions, the presentation of violence of all kinds tends to decrease.</p>
<p>8. <b>Real violence</b>, that is, the one present in the journalism (considered by journalists not as a media product - as in fictions - but as a given of the real world) has an important weight in the information broadcast economy, as American studies show, but systematically and the 2008 Romanian study:</p>	<p>- still valid</p>

Trend found in the study at the level of 2008	Author's opinion for 2018
<p><i>Topics Selected from TV journals:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Violent crime</li> <li>2. Tragedies and catastrophes</li> <li>3. Conflicts without violence</li> <li>4. Social, collective (ethnic) conflicts</li> <li>5. Wars, military conflicts</li> </ol>	
<p>9. The mechanism of the relationship between "virtual, series, repetition", irreversibility (death and injuries are irreversible), shock show and images - that excite emotion and overshadow the mechanisms of "psychological defense" make television violence "unilateral and reductionist, seemingly unavoidable, as only the process of violent interaction is represented" (according to psychology specialists). It had a dominant significance of the scenes of television violence in our country, especially from fiction and cartoons.</p>	<p>- still valid</p>
<p>10. Another important conclusion of foreign research - which was also supported by our team's studies - was to dismantle the argument (with the defence of broadcasters and programmers) that the taste and requirements of the public are responsible for the share of violent programs. By doing a parallel "between violent and non-violent program audiences" (running in parallel), it was found that audiences of the most violent programs were not superior, but rather non-violent programs. Examining the television consumption preferences during the evening, it was found that the public showed their predilection for non-violent programs running in parallel.</p>	<p>- still valid</p>
<p>11. The study of advertising videos for the release of "new" discs and albums is also of interest: the US study (1986) by Sherman and Dominick identified violent scenes in 57% of the video clips. Musical videos broadcast in Romania contain a similar proportion of violence.</p>	
<p>12. Comparative study to highlight the level of violence in programs (tv series, telefilms, etc.) <i>imported</i>, particularly from the US, was brought to attention in 2008. All transcultural comparative studies on</p>	<p>- the authors' opinion is that these weights have fallen based on regulatory regulations. Moreover, the hours they are broadcasting are at the time of the day (night) when it is supposed that young</p>

Trend found in the study at the level of 2008	Author's opinion for 2018
<p>television violence have shown that programs imported from the US were much more violent than those produced in other countries.</p> <p>As comparative differences:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. between programs of the same gender from different countries;</li> <li>2. The dosage of the different types of imported programs was not only the intensity of violence in the same type of programs, but also the proportion of tv series, dramatic programs and imported cartoons, especially those in the USA, which tended to amplify the level of television violence at certain time intervals, including prime time, when “family television” is more present. The comparison referred to the proportion of violence in series and action, adventure, and police films.</li> </ol> <p>- It is important to compare the situation in Romania with those in other countries (on these subjects) such as England (where violent fictions occupy about 19% of the program grid compared to 37% in the USA and where, as a result of the measures taken, the share of violence has been reduced, in the BBC case, from an average of 2.1 violent acts per hour to 1.4 acts); with Canada, where violent episodes were mostly from the USA (96% of episodes and 88% of programs); with the situation in Western European countries (like France), where the “quota” regime, adopted by the European Union under the “Television without Frontiers” Directive, has considerably reduced the share of imported overseas programs, especially those of the violent ones. Our research indicates a very high proportion of violence in US action films (53%) and in domestic production (41%).</p>	<p>people and children do not watch or are under parental control.</p>
<p>13. Concerning the televised debates, the highest frequencies of violent interactions (especially psychological, as "humiliation", “ridicule” and “downgrading” of protagonists as well as verbal ones) were identified in debates, some with pre-election (tense electoral year).</p>	<p>- most of TV stations take protective measures because they have paid fierce fines. They warn and intervene if any such manifestations occur.</p> <p>- political candidates now have, with some exceptions, another political</p>



Trend found in the study at the level of 2008	Author's opinion for 2018
<p>- verbal violence registered the highest share in 2008 compared to other types.</p> <p>- the manifestations of verbal violence are certainly the amplification of a phenomenon called “violence of violence” more and more prevalent in the media and everyday interactions. Some authors even believed that verbal language violence, so frequent on screen (but also in everyday life, may be more shocking and potentially more dangerous) (adding “and words can kill”), so more violent than violent images.</p> <p>- <b>the average duration of verbal violence generally exceeded</b> all other types of violence. Exceptions made the TVR1 public channel where psychological violence is stronger than verbal. Compared to debates without candidates for political positions, electoral debates have proved less violent than verbal but more violent at the psychological level. Forms of violence from candidates' debates have a higher potential for human dignity (insults, physical labels, humiliation of opponents, plus a form of psychological violence not seen in unaddressed debates: ridiculing).</p>	<p>education.</p> <p>- there are slippages and discrimination, especially gender.</p>
<p>14. The contextualization of adopted acts of violence has proven its relevance and pertinence by allowing to determine the proportion of categories of significance adopted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Free” acts and scenes of violence;</li> <li>• Horror scenes;</li> <li>• “Legitimate” acts and scenes of violence;</li> <li>• Acts and self-defence scenes;</li> <li>• Acts and scenes logically included in a narrative drama;</li> <li>• Violence as a game and amusement;</li> <li>• The acts and scenes of "exaltation" of violence;</li> <li>• Presence and use of weapons;</li> <li>• Acts and scenes that overshadow the violent representation of the world, society, groups, individuals;</li> <li>• Acts that render life and the dangers that threaten it, exercising a warning function;</li> <li>• Violence, robbery, homicide;</li> </ul>	<p>- still valid.</p> <p>- presentations go from the most atrocious forms of physical brutality (homicides) to verbal aggressions, often referred to as mere transgressions of morals or just as “irrational irritations”.</p> <p>- significantly, in the programs broadcast by Romanian televisions, the first place is held by verbal violence rather than by physical, with some differences between “real” and “fictional” violence.</p> <p>- legislation prohibits the explicit presentation of situations. Blurred images or faces are also used.</p>

Trend found in the study at the level of 2008	Author's opinion for 2018
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Violence as punishment or reward;</li> <li>• Attractive violence acts (rescue heroes, etc.);</li> <li>• Languages: adult, pornographic, jargon, slang, naughty, insolent (from swearing to suburb jokes).</li> </ul>	
<p>15. The study has allowed ratings to be classified as likely to produce effects on minors and young people:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Imitation and social learning (identifying children with aggressive characters);</li> <li>Impregnation (assimilation, even unconscious, of the violent style of human relationship);</li> <li>• Disinhibition (images that can greatly promote the passing of minors to violence);</li> <li>• Frequent desensitization and repetition of violent scenes reduces children's awareness of violence and increases their degree of accommodation with violent acts;</li> <li>• Catharsis (release of aggressive pulses);</li> </ul> <p>Incubation (fear, terror, insecurity).</p> <p>- the most damaging aspect is represented by the scenarios of the ambivalent report of the individual with violence, on the one hand fear and rejection, and on the other, fascination, pleasure, television emphasizing attraction and fascination through the spectacularization of violence.</p> <p>- if in the case of fictitious violence the difference between public and private channels was net in favour of premiums, in terms of real violence (frequency, weight and duration), public and private televisions were very close. Fictive violence has high odds and high-risk potential of harmful influence.</p>	<p>- still valid.</p> <p>- the context of significance differs: in the case of private channels, the focus is on the spectacular and "diverse" nature of the violent news, while the public channels are more careful in terms of valorizing the prevention and warning dimension, sanctioning the media coverage of violence .</p>
<p>16. In the case of cartoon channels, the weight of the duration and frequency of the violence in an hour of broadcasting was extremely high.</p>	<p>- not based on measurements, but taking into account the views of parents, they are now large, but there is the possibility of blocking children's access to them.</p>

### 5. Conclusion

It can be noted that although we have just taken over and synthesized the conclusions of the 2008 study, they are still valid, although efforts to reduce or even abolish the violence in the audiovisual are very large and concerted.

The reiterative trend of violence in TV / radio programs in the world and in Romania is confirmed by the observations of specialists, based on the scientific data collection and

processing, but also on the conclusions of the large audience to which the programs are addressed. It expresses them both individually, through the voice of each individual, or collectively, through the voice of the community or of various organizations: associations, schools, etc.

The “actuality” reason seems to be dictated by financial and audience reasons! The reason is, however, too big, often paid at the cost of human lives and not only. It is an alarm that tells us that although it is very heavy, this fight must be continued, and the sanction must be more severe.

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