

THE MEDIA COVERAGE OF CORRUPTION: THE CASE OF SLOVAKIA / SPRAVODAJSTVO MÉDIÍ O KORUPCII NA SLOVENSKU

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Abstract: This study takes advantage of Human Assisted Computer Analysis. In particular, this paper analyses selection, coverage and portrayal of various corruption-related issues and subjects by selected newspapers in Slovakia. HACA revealed that the best coverage of corruption as well as relatively widest variety of different types of corruption was provided by *Sme*, distantly followed by *Pravda* and *HN*, and finally by *NČ*. The results of our analysis have suggested that also the largest number of corruption-related articles published during the monitored period appeared in the liberal daily *Sme*. Yet, reviewed literature further revealed rather confusing and partially contradictory results in related research areas.

Key words: corruption, media, Slovakia, newspapers, Human Assisted Computer Analysis

INTRODUCTION

This research paper deals with a simple but important research question: How did selected newspapers in Slovakia select, cover and portray various corruption-related issues and subjects? This is a particularly important topic for academic research due to the fact that, on the one hand, corruption arguably forms a long-term structural problem in Slovakia and, on the other hand, some literature suggests that free press and readership of daily press correlate with low level of corruption. Yet these correlations do not seem to work in such unambiguous way in Slovakia.

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Corruption, manifested in multiple forms, was perceived as widespread by 90% of the Slovak respondents in a 2013 Eurobarometer survey, while 14% of the Slovak respondents had experienced corruption themselves, as indicated by a report of the European Commission.² Although a great deal of publications have dealt with corruption in general (see Mungiu-Pippidi, 2013, 2014), regionally (see Baboš, 2015; Charron, Lapuente, and Rothstein, 2013; Grigorescu, 2006), from media perspective (Boeri and Severgnini, 2008; Suphachalasai, 2005), and also with corruption in Slovakia in particular (see Baboš and Malová, 2014), nothing has been published on this topic in terms of a more in-depth and long-term analysis of conditions in the local newspapers (see general and outdated description in Nagyová and Žitňanský, 2001).

The research conducted by Charon (2013, 116) has revealed that a general trust in the media regarding their credibility in coverage of corruption in politics and the public sector reached the maximal values in Finland, Ireland, Romania and the UK, whereas the lowest scores were reported in Austria, Croatia, Greece and the Czech Republic. Generally, on a scale of 0 – 10, the levels of trust ranged between slightly above 4 and slightly more than 6. These findings have further demonstrated that no direct correlation can be drawn between the perception of corruption as projected by the media coverage, and the actual level of corruption in a country. For instance, Austria has not been regarded as a highly corrupted country (CPI TI 2013: score 69 points, rank 26/177)³, yet the level of trust in the portrayal of corruption by the local media was relatively low. On the other hand, Romania has been perceived as a highly corrupted nation (CPI TI 2014: score 43 points, rank 69/177), nevertheless, the public's faith in the media ability to handle corruption cases was among the highest. Slovakia has fared (with about 4.2 points) in the lower ranks of national ranges for general trust in the media coverage of corruption, sharing an equal position with Spain.

2 European Commission: EU Anti-Corruption Report. Brussels: COM (2014) 38 final, p. 6, http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/e-library/documents/policies/organized-crime-and-human-trafficking/corruption/docs/acr_2014_en.pdf

3 <http://www.transparency.org/cpi2014/infographic/compare>

Slovakia has also scored 50 points (rank 54/175, CPI TI 2014) and 47 points (rank 61/175, CPI TI 2013) in a perceived level of public sector corruption. This contradictory data therefore clearly suggests that it may be problematic to rely exclusively on the media reporting about corruption as an indicator of relevance.

Nevertheless, a study about the role of media vis-a-vis corruption is considered to be particularly important for the framework of political science as well. As mentioned, a strong and long-term correlation has been indicated between the press freedom and readership of daily press on the one side and low level of corruption on the other (Mungiu-Pippidi & Kukutschka, 2013, 38 - charts 23 and 24; Stapenhurst, 2000, Figure 1 or p.2). Yet comparative analyses by Becker, English and Vlad (2013) has suggested that although media freedom is negatively related to corruption, at least as perceived by the general public, the actual relationship is however relatively limited. Slovakia actually enjoyed a considerably high level of press freedom in the first half (2003-2008) of our research period which was later followed by a sudden and extensive deterioration of its position in ranking around 2008/2009. Nonetheless, since then the freedom of press has been slowly improving again, according to the Press Freedom Index compiled by the [Reporters Without Borders](#).⁴ However, this data does not seem to confirm the above-mentioned hypotheses on correlations between press freedom (and readership of daily press) and a low level of corruption. Is it thus possible that the missing factor of high (and declining) readership in the case of Slovakia can make a difference? It is true that in 2015, only 31% of Slovaks read 'last issue' of a newspaper, while 67% read any newspapers in the last fortnights (Median SK, 2015). Or perhaps this data on freedom of the press may not be entirely correct, as comparative estimations of the freedom of the press in Central and Eastern Europe in period 2005-2014 compiled from Nations in Transit study by Balčytienė (2015, 48) might suggest? In this research, Slovakia fared in the middle

4 See <http://index.rsf.org/> and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Press_Freedom_Index. We have consulted this latter online version with P. Samy from index@rsf.org, 31 Mar 2016 who wrote: "From what I see it seems that the datas are correct but I haven't read the page in detail ...The website is currently changing and in a few weeks every ranking will be available from 2002 and with the new edition (which will be released in a couple of weeks)."

of the group with a worsening in freedom of press since 2008, and especially between 2008 and 2011.

Costa (2013) is perhaps more correct with his opinion on the appearance of those countries with free press to be the ones witnessing an increase in perceived corruption. His study focused primarily on the countries that adopted the freedom of information (FOI) laws (Slovakia adopted FOI in 2000) and, according to him, a freedom of press in fact leads to a noticeable increase in publicly perceived corruption together with a simultaneous decrease in the quality of governance, rather than to the expected improvement. Moreover, an increase in perceived corruption apparently takes place particularly during the initial years of reform without major sustainability over a longer period. Costa used various corruption perception indices in his research project, both at the macro- and micro-level. His observations are rather intellectually challenging, and inspire the following question: Do these results imply that these perceptions are actually based on intensive media coverage rather than a negative change in the real occurrence of corruption? Indeed, Baboš and Malová (2014) found that the people who directly experienced corruption in Slovakia only slightly increased its perception thereof. More importantly, Slovaks actually perceive corruption to be high due to the general distrust of the public institutions in effective fight against corruption, and not vice versa (Baboš and Malová, 2014). It is probably in this context that the role of the media in covering corruption contributes to a general negative mood in the society, although it is true that the level of social anomies has decreased from 68% to 58% between 2001 and 2008 (Schenk, 2000). Bergsdorf (2002) argued that the media can make public only a fraction of all wrongdoings they are familiar with. Waisbord (2000) further suggested that factors unrelated to the quality of journalistic work also affect the impact of an exposé. Moreover, contrary to the general assumption, the full-blown scandals which are concerned with substantively grave misconducts are rather difficult for media to initiate and, if left without reactions of official institutions, politicians and relevant public personalities, virtually impossible to sustain on their own (Entman, 2012). In order to answer these and similar potential research questions, it is important to know the actual coverage of corruption in the Slovak print media. In particular, we have focused at the differences and similarities in the newspapers' coverage of corruption and the more detailed research questions are explained in sections 1 and 3.

Regarding theories which can partly help in explaining above mentioned confusing or contradictory data, Entman's (2012, 68) cascading activation model - especially the part related to hierarchy of influences within networks of news organisations - seems to work well in the Slovak case. This finding is further related to the importance of McCombs and Shaw's agenda setting and especially inter-media agenda setting theories which also seem to be relevant in our case. However, these tentative theoretical re-considerations partially question traditional notion of the role of media as the fourth power, i.e. to function as an independent critic of the government and a source of information for the public. The results actually show that even the private media cannot be seen as enacting an equally important watch-dog role in this area. This argument in turn highlights the importance of the uses and gratifications theory. Apparently, different media cover different needs (both in quantitative and qualitative terms) with respect to coverage of corruption scandals. Finally, it should be mentioned that many political economy theorists (such as McChesney, Murdock, Chomsky and Herman) do not sufficiently differentiate among different types of media owners and their various (or sometimes missing - especially in the case of foreign owners) vested interests.

1. METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this study takes advantage of Human Assisted Computer Analysis (HACA). The selection and application of methodological approach followed encouragement expressed by Chuang *et al* (2014, 2), who argued that meticulous manual codification can produce high-quality and intriguing data, however, such studies are only few and far between in the focus of their research. Indeed, we could not find any studies of this type for Slovakia, both inside the country or abroad. Yet we should be aware of the limitations of HACA. For example, Potts, Bednarek & Caple (2015) have suggested three reasons why it is challenging to analyse the construction of news values using computer-used methods. Of these, two are relevant for our study too. First, we need to look at how the text is constructed inter-textually. Second, the meaning of any word cannot be identified reliably if the word is encountered in isolation.

The following thematic text analysis is further combined with a semantic approach. Our variables have indicated an occurrence of specific concepts related to corruption and relations

among selected concepts have also been counted.

It seems that HACA has revealed interesting findings, especially meaningful patterns within the data. However, there were also some limitations related mainly to the process of coding. The adequate selection of method for reaching high-level coding reliability is essential to properly conducted content analysis, and an independent coding of the same data performed by at least two coders has thus proven to be absolutely necessary. Additionally, three intercoder reliability tests were necessary. First, a pre-test using a random procedure at an international sample (8 long English articles, a separate sample) was conducted and the results were manually cross-checked by the University of Perugia team. Second, we tested our approach at local sample (4x100 articles, a subset of the full sample) and the results were manually cross-checked by our research team. Coding disagreements were solved by using a 'majority' decision rule (the key researcher served as tie-breaker). Third, a reliability test was used during the coding of the full sample (randomly selected newspaper with 60 coded articles) and all but two indices (Q27 and 28) were included to calculate reliability in our sample. It was used Holsti's Coefficient or Holst's CR (50 articles). The finally achieved intercoder reliability level coefficient was 0.79..

Nevertheless, our research has also detected a few other issues related to some categories of indicators. For example, it remains problematic whether any questionable, but official representation of institution constitutes either only an individual transgression of norms, or, rather, a misdemeanour within that very institution. An example from 2015, which is related to largely discussed corruption accusations at FIFA, revealed that the whole group of functionaries were involved in corruption. Should we thus see this as an individual transgression of norms, or as, in the end, an institutional transgression of norms? This issue is very closely related to a criminal liability of corporations or corruption at the level of political parties. If an employee did something illegal to benefit the organization, the corporation itself could be held liable for his or her actions in many countries (although not in Slovakia at the time of our research).

The researchers manually coded all selected articles from our sample on the basis of different

key-words (or related words) generally associated with corruption (see Table 1): a) corruption, b) bribe, c) kickback, d) favouritism/clientelism, e) clientelism/cronyism, f) embezzlement, g) nepotism, familism, h) abuse of discretion/power/office, i) collusion. A precise analysis of the word ‘bribe’ in the context of linguistic and legal connotations has further emphasised the need to be cautious while using some other terms that naturally follow it in a logical sequence: ‘favouritism’, ‘conflict of interests’, ‘clientelism’ and ‘nepotism’/’familism’. In reality, local linguistic conditions do not usually differentiate between the words ‘nepotism’ and ‘familism’, or ‘favouritism’ and ‘clientelism’. Moreover, in local perspective, media reports sometimes confuse or interchange the term ‘favouritism’ with the words ‘conflict of interests’ (while connected to ‘cronyism’), as well as ‘clientelism’ and/or ‘nepotism’/’familism’. Linguistically, ‘favouritism’ was perhaps the most challenging word for translation and application. Its accurate translation (literally “protekciónárstvo”) does actually occur rather exceptionally in the phraseology of media reports and various alternatives for the description of this corrupted practice are generally used instead. ‘Favouritism’ has been ranked as the second or third term in the list of specific words, and, together with ‘clientelism’/’cronyism’ and ‘conflict of interest’, it seems to represent some particularly important issues prevailing in present-day Slovakia. Indeed, an OECD survey from 2009 confirmed that less than a quarter of respondents believed that promotions in the civil service sector in Slovakia could be actually conveyed in absolute accordance with the employee’s effort and hard work (Meyer-Sahling, 2009, 36-37).

‘Kickback’ is an expression used to describe a form of grand corruption. Regarding the above discussion, it is interesting that it has occurred as the third specific word in our research, with an exclusion of the general term ‘corruption’. Nevertheless, the frequency of its usage in media reporting is clearly much lower – it appears five times less than the word ‘bribe’, and less than half as many times as all the words in the above mentioned groups, which are largely related to public/state administration. The term ‘kickback’ can also mean a legal form of exchange (a commission; rake-off), thus further reducing the overall number of words related to corruption.

Researchers did not actually code all articles in HACA – instead, a “constructed week” of coverage was created for four selected newspapers in the period of 2004-2013. “Constructed weeks” in a two-month period mean that we have first randomly selected a certain number (defining a day in a week). Starting with this number, we had constructed a full imaginary week of coverage in each newspaper for each year, invariably selecting each consecutive day of coverage. The research aimed at a sample that would cover a “constructed” two-month period in this way. Using this method, we had obtained a total of 356 selected articles from *Pravda*, 376 selected articles from *Hospodárske noviny (HN)*, 152 selected articles from tabloid *Nový Čas (NČ)* and 570 selected articles from *Sme*. It is also necessary to mention that an average weekly number of all types of articles on every topic was calculated on 280 articles in *NČ* (published 7 times a week), 325 articles in *HN* (published 5 times a week), 350 in *Sme* (published 6 times a week) and 350 in *Pravda* (published 6 times a week).

Table 1: RECURRING KEYWORDS

Keyword	Frequency	%
Corruption	26 944	55,3
Bribe	13 997	28,7
Kickback	2426	5,0
Favouritism	1712	3,5
Clientelism/cronyism	2202	4,5
Embezzlement	338	0,7
Nepotism, Familism	558	1,1
Abuse of discretion/of power/of office	352	0,7
Collusion	158	0,3
Total	48 687	100,0

As explained above, word-by-word “mechanical” analysis of recurring words can be potentially misleading.

2. THE ANALYSED MEDIA CORPUS

Four daily newspapers (printed media) were selected for further analysis from the group of relevant publications. The newspapers published uninterruptedly in Slovakia at that time (2004-2013) included *Hospodárske noviny* (the Business Daily in translation), *Nový Čas* (a tabloid daily, the New Times), *Pravda* (a quality daily, the Truth), *Sme* (a quality daily, the We Are), *Šport-Niké* (a sports daily), *Új Szó* (a daily in the Hungarian language, the New Word) and the regional daily *Korzar* (The Corsair). From all of these newspapers, the first four were selected on the basis of a generally coordinated approach in consultation with other international teams. The underlying reason for the selection of these dailies was decided upon to represent two quality newspapers - ideally from different ideological backgrounds -, along with one business and one tabloid newspaper.

A brief description of the prominent Slovakian news publications is given below.

Pravda – this quality newspaper is self-defined as a liberal-left oriented daily.⁵

Sme – this daily is considered as a liberal-right oriented quality/elite newspaper, although it does not openly declare its ideological or political affiliation.⁶ Established in 1993, most of its original staff seceded from the daily *Smena* as a result of political pressure coming from the contemporary government at the time.

Hospodárske noviny – this newspaper was previously a federal weekly periodical, however, after the split-up of Czechoslovakia in 1993, it has been converted into a business daily – the only one of its kind in present Slovakian press.⁷ The paper does not claim to follow any specific ideology, but it clearly shows free enterprise orientation.

Nový Čas – this is the most popular tabloid newspaper in Slovakia, and an off-shoot of *Čas*, which was a marginal newspaper of a former puppet political party during the communist era under the name *Lud* (The People). However, *NČ* has undergone a radical transformation, both in content and

5 See <http://www.pravda.sk/info/7036-o-nas/>

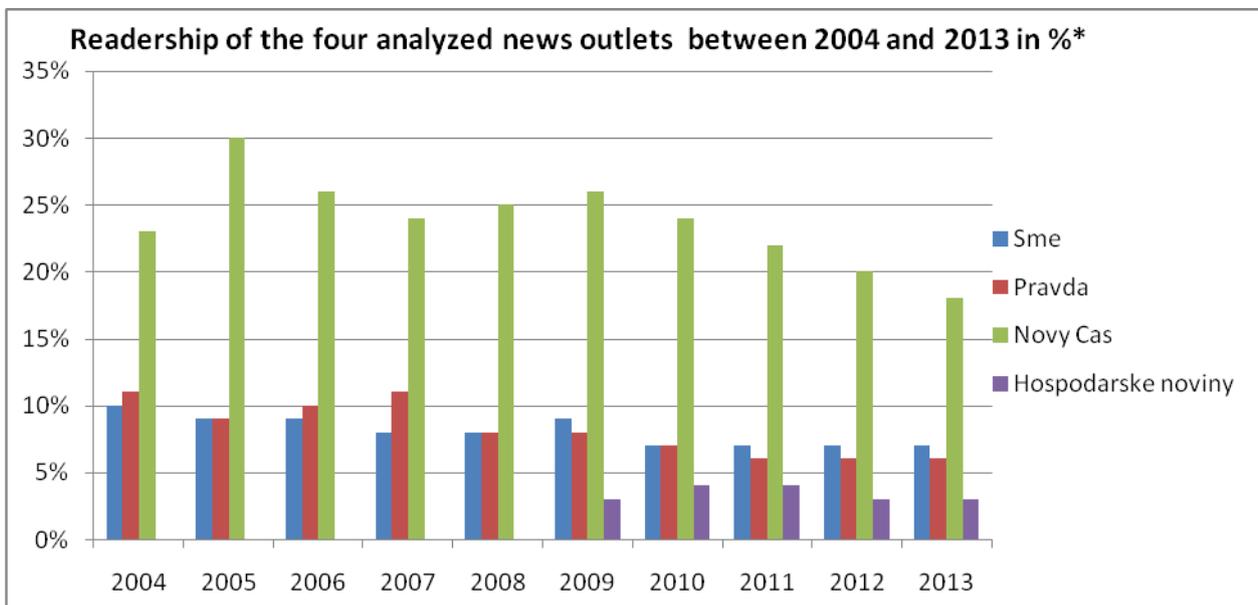
6 See <http://www.petitpress.sk/ponukane-tituly/dennik-sme/>

7 See <http://mafraslovakia.hnonline.sk/titul/hospodarske-noviny>

circulation.

A figure 1 below shows the readership of selected dailies during the researched period.

FIGURE 1



*Data for the first quarter of each year. Data for *Hospodárske noviny* is available only from 2009.⁸

The data on readership (the percentage shares of the overall readership) does not seem to indicate any clear correlation between the quality and quantity of reporting on corruption, and the interest of readers in these particular outlets.

The ownership of the four analyzed periodicals shows changes in the case of three news outlets during period in question: *Sme*, *Pravda* and *NC*. In 2016, apart from *NC*, all these papers have had new owners: one local, one foreign (a Czech citizen with Slovak origin), and one owner who was not clearly identifiable.⁹ In retrospect, it can be said that the majority or equal-share foreign ownership was clearly very helpful in guaranteeing the editorial independence of all four news outlets (see also UEA, 2013; Ociepka and Woźna, 2009). A 2015 Narrative Report on Media Plurality Monitor for Slovakia (Školka, 2015) revealed that media ownership may be a major future challenge for the media to report freely on corruption or any other topics. Lipták (2014, 9)

⁸ Source: Compiled from various quarterly and annual reports of Median SK, http://www.median.sk/na_stiahnutie.php.

⁹ Source: <http://medialne.etrend.sk/vlastnici-medii.html>

also argued that the goal of new owners in fact seems to lie in achieving an influence over public opinion, and not making money in the media sector.

It should be also mentioned here that the Worlds of Journalism Study (WJS)¹⁰ does not sufficiently differentiate among different types of ownership (question C15) as well as does not directly focus on impact of changes in ownership on journalistic work (C18, closest indicators are competition, advertising consideration and profit making pressures) which is a potentially serious analytical shortcoming affecting this project and leading to eventually inaccurate comparative conclusions. Even the differentiation among private, public and state ownerships and their combinations cannot be seen as entirely satisfactory solution for further analysis of impact made by media owners in WJS (question T-9). In general, the cumulative research suggests that business owners are capable of influencing the freedom of speech by influencing the media they control, even though modus operandi in practice might differ from country to country (de Beer, Láb, Strielkowski, Tejkalová, 2015, 226).

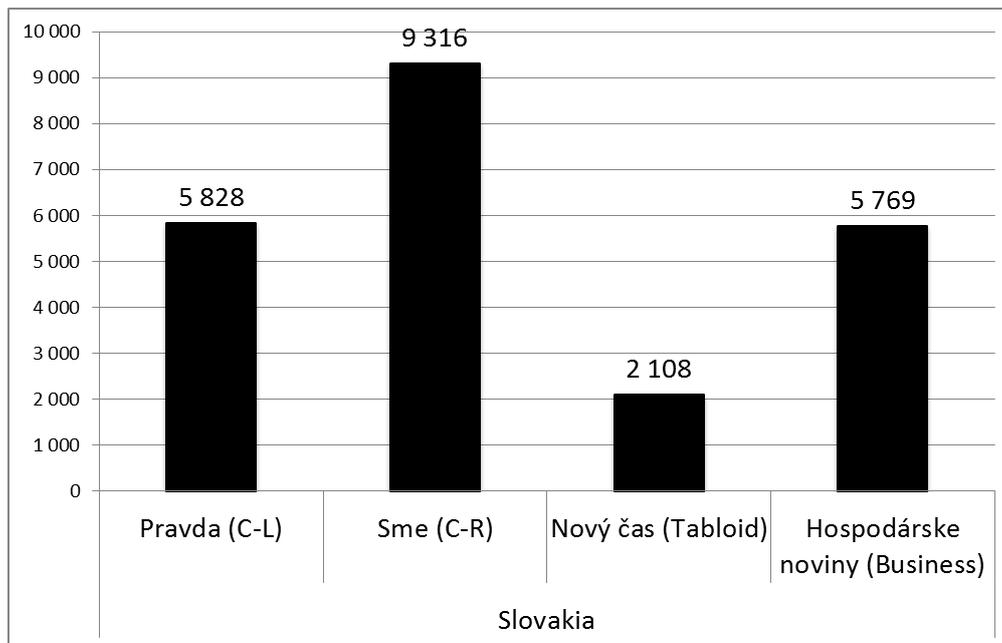
3. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE FOUR NEWSPAPERS – GENERAL PARAMETERS

The data displayed in the figure 2 below shows clearly that the largest number of corruption-related articles published during the period of 2004-2013 appeared in the liberal daily *Sme*. This is not surprising due to a general recognition of *Sme* as both an agenda-setting as well as intermedia agenda-setting newspaper (see Galmišová, 2015; Čikovský, 2015, Kernová, 2014, for international comparison see Entman, 2012, 68).

The number of corruption-related articles published by the two other serious dailies, *Pravda* and *HN*, were approximately the same.

Figure 2: Number of Articles per Selected News Outlet

10 See Master questionnaire, 2012-14, version 2.5 consolidated, retrieved from <http://www.worldsofjournalism.org/download.htm>



The tabloid *NČ* published considerably fewer reports on corruption issues, possibly due to its compactness: the tabloid is relatively smaller in page size and with fewer pages. Moreover, the main focus of its subject-matter relies on concocting an attractive medley of scandal and gossip, which is not necessarily related to corruption. To review the displayed data from a global perspective, it may be said that the topic of corruption received “standard” coverage in the liberal-left daily *Pravda* as well as in the business daily *HN*, and “modest” coverage in the daily tabloid *NČ*, which might have performed better if it had had a more generous format in the number and size of its pages. The agenda-setting daily *Sme*, true to its reputation, did indeed set the leading agenda both by launching a larger number of stories on one specific topic, and furthermore, by following them up in a systematic and organised manner, even in comparison to the other two serious newspapers.

A compilation of the frequency in using particular words by the four analysed newspapers (Table 1) revealed that ‘corruption’ was the most frequently employed term. However, an analysis of the media coverage of corruption in these newspapers further indicated a ‘bribe’ as the most commonly occurring word among the more specific terms. Such a finding actually implies that the Slovak media generally covers the most obvious aspects of corruption, which are, however, at the same time the least relevant ones from a social and political point of view. Bribery is probably the most notorious form of corruption. In fact, even official reports by the authorities and researches

based on perception, including media reporting, may not occasionally portray the real situation: and this is particularly true in the case of corruption (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2013). It is also legitimate to believe that only a fraction of committed corruption actually gets to be reported, and these instances are not necessarily the ones of the biggest importance. Indeed, the hundreds of minor (or relatively minor) corruption cases are heard before the Slovak courts every year, whereas very few cases of large-scale corruption do not even go beyond a disclosure (Transparency International Slovakia, 2014).

4. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE FOUR NEWSPAPERS – SPECIFIC INDICATORS

A detailed comparative analysis of four selected newspapers is reported in this section. First, we focused on specific types or categories about corruption, which were present in our sample (Table 2). All of the four examined news outlets mostly contained articles about ‘corruption in general’, and about cases of ‘bribery, kickback, or pay off’. However, we can see that the biggest variety in types of corruption was covered by the daily newspapers *Sme*, *Pravda*, and *HN*, whereas *NČ* showed the lowest variety of these types. *Sme* covered the relatively widest variety of categories in corruption, while *HN* focused more on corruption related (directly or indirectly) to business activities and roles of civil servants, such as ‘fraud’ and ‘clientelism’. *Sme* also covered more corruption cases than the tabloid *NČ* and any of the two quality dailies combined.

The aggregated and adjusted data has suggested that ‘bribe, kickback, or pay off’ were the most often covered types of corruption (of those that we were able to categorise in our selected sample). The second most frequent type was the general topic of ‘corruption’. Again, an issue of ‘clientelism’ has emerged as an important problematic factor in Slovakia.

The puzzling phenomenon of the non-occurrence of any case identified as a ‘revolving door’ (a movement of personnel between legislative and regulative roles, and the industries affected by the legislation and regulation) may be considered to be the result of either a strong legislation that prevents this potentially corruptive behaviour from happening or, more likely, as a phenomenon

which is not seen to be corruption in Slovakia (or at least, not identified with the help of our key words). In fact, this is probably a rather specific term, often misplaced by the term ‘conflict of interest’ (or a similar term, such as ‘abuse of discretion/power/office’) in the local conditions.

Table 2: THE MAIN TYPES OF CORRUPTION PRESENTED IN THE SELECTED NEWSPAPERS

		Sme		Pravda		HN		NČ		Summary		
		cases	%	cases	%	cases	%	cases	%	cases	%	Valid %
1	Bribery...	124	35,6	91	41,2	54	28,3	58	54,2	327	37,7	38,43
2	Embezzlement	8	2,3	5	2,3	10	5,2	0	0,0	23	2,65	2,70
3	Illegal funding of political parties	6	1,7	4	1,8	3	1,6	0	0,0	13	1,50	1,53
4	Solicitation	18	5,2	2	0,9	4	2,1	3	2,8	27	3,11	3,17
5	Abuse of discretion	8	2,3	13	5,9	6	3,1	4	3,7	31	3,58	3,64
6	Collusion, cartel	1	0,3	0	0,0	7	3,7	0	0,0	8	0,92	0,94
7	Clientelism	39	11,2	38	17,2	26	13,6	8	7,5	99	11,42	11,63
8	Revolving door	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,00	0,00
9	Conflict of Interests	23	6,6	6	2,7	11	5,8	3	2,8	42	4,84	4,94
10	Fraud	8	2,3	4	1,8	29	15,2	2	1,9	20	2,31	2,35
11	Corruption in general	108	31,0	54	24,4	35	18,3	27	25,2	260	29,99	30,55
	Other	0	0,0	1	0,5	0	0,0	0	0,0	1	0,12	0,12
99	Not applicable	5	1,4	3	1,4	6	3,1	2	1,9	16	1,85	-
	Total	348	100,0	221	100,0	191	100,0	107	100,0	867	100,0	100,0

Secondly, the researchers used the principal-agent-client model. In this model (see e.g. Groenendijk, 1997), a client (e.g. a businessman) – as an initiator of a corrupt transaction – acts as the briber and offers a bribe to the agent (e.g. a public official). In return, the client procures an advantage in an illicit manner (e.g. obtains an unauthorized permit).

In most of the news outlets (*Sme*, *Pravda* and *HN*), the most frequent position of the agent was ‘unidentifiable’, meaning there was no category applicable to the position mentioned in the case (Table 3). Considering this objection, the most frequent agent position in *NČ* was a ‘sport actor’ (16%). ‘Sport actors’ were also identified in the other news outlets, however, with considerably lower frequency. The other news outlets focused more on the cases of ‘government or high state representatives’ and ‘public officials’ (and ‘mayors or local administrators’ in the case of *Sme*), or

'politicians' (HN) in general.

		Sme		Pravda		HN		NČ		Summary		
		cases	%	cases	%	cases	%	cases	%	cases	%	valid %
1	Government or state high represent.	108	10,3	65	9,8	32	5,6	12	3,7	217	8,34	23,09
2	Public official (middle and low level)	65	6,2	33	5,0	35	6,1	23	7,2	156	6,00	16,60
3	Public relation officer, press officer	0	0	1	0,2	1	0,2	0	0	2	0,08	0,21
4	Politician	36	3,4	28	4,2	35	6,1	4	1,2	103	3,96	10,96
5	Mayor, local administrators	43	4,1	12	1,8	18	3,1	9	2,8	82	3,15	8,72
6	Businessman, CEO...	23	2,2	4	0,6	26	4,5	5	1,6	58	2,23	6,17
7	Citizen	0	0	0	0	1	0,2	2	0,6	3	0,12	0,32
8	Judge, Prosecutor, Inspector	28	2,7	20	3	8	1,4	10	3,1	66	2,54	7,02
9	Policeman	27	2,6	2	0,3	1	0,2	8	2,5	38	1,46	4,04
10	Lawyer, legal adviser	7	0,7	2	0,3	1	0,2	1	0,3	11	0,42	1,17
11	Journalist, Editor, media man	5	0,5	2	0,3	1	0,2	0	0	8	0,31	0,85
12	Medical doctor, nurse	24	2,3	11	1,7	7	1,2	1	0,3	43	1,65	4,57
13	Professor, teacher, Principal	5	0,5	3	0,5	2	0,3	0	0	10	0,38	1,06
14	Banker	6	0,6	0	0	3	0,5	1	0,3	10	0,38	1,06
15	Professional lobbyist	1	0,1	0	0	1	0,2	0	0	2	0,08	0,21
16	Sport actor	32	3,1	21	3,2	10	1,7	50	15,6	113	4,34	12,02
17	Trade-unionist	0	0	0	0	1	0,2	0	0	1	0,04	0,11
18	Religious figure	1	0,1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0,04	0,11
19	Representative of NGO or civil society	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0,3	1	0,04	0,11
20	Member of the organized crime	1	0,1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0,04	0,11
21	Other position/role	2	0,2	3	0,5	1	0,2	1	0,3	7	0,27	0,74
22	Relative	4	0,4	2	0,3	0	0	1	0,3	7	0,27	0,74
99	Not applicable/not possible to determine	626	60	454	68,5	389	67,9	192	59,8	1661	63,86	-
	Total	1044	100	663	100	573	100	321	100	2601	100	100

The aggregated data suggested that 'religious persons', 'trade unionists' and 'representatives of NGOs or civil societies' seemed to be the ones that were least likely to be involved in corruption scandals. By contrast, 'government and high state representatives' seemed to be the most frequent

1	Just allegations of corruption	92	26,4	46	20,8	36	18,8	14	13,1	36	21,68	33,63
2	Investigated	77	22,1	35	15,8	46	24,1	30	28	46	21,68	33,63
3	Arrested	18	5,2	9	4,1	14	7,3	11	10,3	14	6	9,3
4	Taken to trial	13	3,7	14	6,3	4	2,1	14	13,1	4	5,19	8,05
5	Judged as free of charges	5	1,4	4	1,8	5	2,6	4	3,7	5	2,08	3,22
6	Judged as guilty	30	8,6	8	3,6	5	2,6	9	8,4	5	6	9,3
7	Mistrial for procedural reasons	0	0	3	1,4	0	0	0	0	0	0,35	0,54
8	Other	2	0,6	1	0,5	1	0,5	0	0	1	0,46	0,72
9	Cooperate with the police	2	0,6	0	0	1	0,5	1	0,9	1	0,46	0,72
10	Termination of criminal proceedings	5	1,4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0,58	0,89
99	Not applicable	104	29,9	101	45,7	79	41,4	24	22,4	79	35,52	-
	Total	348	100	221	100	191	100	107	100	191	100,0	100,0

Furthermore, the identification of a base transaction in corruption cases (Table 5) in each outlet was, in almost half of the cases, not applicable. However, when applicable, a majority of cases in three out of four analyzed outlets concerned ‘licenses, certifications or positions’. Only in *Pravda* were other cases equalled in this number and concerned ‘public procurement’ (19%). Interestingly enough, a higher percentage of articles in the daily *Pravda* also dealt with corruption affecting ‘access to services that someone is entitled to’ (11% in comparison to 5%, 1% and 4%, respectively, in other outlets). This suggests or even confirms the more liberal-left position of *Pravda* among the analyzed newspapers.

The aggregated data further confirmed that the object of exchange given by the client to the agent was in almost half of the cases not identifiable. When identifiable, half of cases concerned ‘licences, certifications and positions’, followed by 30% of ‘public procurement’. Only about 11% of cases dealt with ‘access to services that someone is entitled to’.

		Sme		Pravda		HN		NČ		Summary		
		cases	%	cases	%	cases	%	cases	%	cases	%	valid %
1	Public procurement	52	14,9	44	19,9	37	19,4	11	10,3	144	16,61	29,75
2	Licences,	99	28,4	43	19,5	68	35,6	36	33,6	246	28,37	50,83

	certifications, positions											
3	Access to services that someone is entitled to	18	5,2	24	10,9	8	4,2	2	1,9	52	6	10,74
4	Inspections, neutralization	18	5,2	3	1,4	8	4,2	7	6,5	36	4,15	7,44
5	Other	4	1,1	1	0,5	1	0,5	0	0	6	0,69	1,24
99	Not applicable	157	45,1	106	48	69	36,1	51	47,7	383	44,18	-
	Total	348	100	221	100	191	100	107	100	867	100,0	100,0

Finally, it is important to note that - when identifiable in the article - the implications of corruption (Table 6) were in the majority of cases ‘political’ in the serious news outlets *Sme*, *Pravda* and *HN* (7%, 18%, 15% respectively), and ‘economic’ in the tabloid daily *NČ* (8%). The second most frequent implications in *Sme*, *Pravda* and *NČ* (4%, 10%, 3% respectively) were ‘social’ issues, while the second most frequent implications in *HN* were of ‘economic’ nature (13%).

The aggregated data further suggested that implications were simply missing in three quarters of reported cases. However, when they were mentioned, political implications represented almost half of all identifiable ones, followed almost equally by economic and social implications. In other words, the media correctly identified the roots of the problem in politics. Again, politics and adopted policies are key factors both to an identification of the roots of corruption as well as to its eventual solution.

CONCLUSION

Corruption is clearly an important topic (not only) in the Slovak media. However, the exact impact of corruption reporting on politics in general is difficult to reveal by scientific analysis such as HACA. Moreover, reviewed literature further revealed rather confusing and partially contradictory results regarding the potential impact of the media reporting about corruption on good governance and corruption perception – at least in the short term. Another problematic issue (or question) has risen with apparently missing correlations among the perception of corruption as projected by media coverage, actual level of corruption in a country, and trust in the media reporting on corruption in the political and public sector. Furthermore, no clear correlation between the freedom of the press and the level of corruption has been observed in Slovakia, either. Neither

qualitatively better and more extensive or even more scandalous coverage of corruption contributed to higher readership of newspapers in the long-term (although such an observation is weakened by impact of online publishing). Even the media ownership issue seems to be analysed from a wrong angle in some of the major related studies. It is important to differentiate among various types of media owners, which many influential theorists do not take into account. Moreover, the traditional opinion of the media's role as the state's fourth power is also questioned by the relevant theories about their actual agenda setting and inter-media agenda setting power and hierarchy of influences within their organisational networks. The media aim on extremely variable public demand and are subjected to different interests coming from their ownership, therefore, they cannot enact an equally important watch-dog role in the coverage of corruption. It is thus rather obvious that many problems in this area still have to be detailly researched.

Although HACA is a very useful tool for comparative analysis, especially in international comparative studies, its national utilisation - particularly in the case of languages with grammatical case systems - must be done very carefully (and that is why we have also presented adjusted aggregated data here) and various language specificities should be also considered. Nonetheless, the HACA approach may bring important results, or rather indicators, in long-term historical and broader perspectives. It can thus become a very useful analytical tool for those who are not familiar with local developments, including all types of international audiences as well as local analysts from various scientific fields (sociologists, political scientists, etc.) and, in future, historians. In every respect, a diligent interpretation of the data naturally makes an important difference and thus forms an essential part of any such analysis. However, a possibility of multiple and chain-like drawbacks within the pursuit of data collection, such as the incorrect selection of key words, unrepresentative sample selection, mistakes of coders, also has to be carefully considered during the conduct of a specific analysis.

Nevertheless, HACA revealed that the best coverage of corruption was provided by *Sme*, distantly followed by *Pravda* and *HN*, and finally by *NČ*. The results of our analysis have suggested that the largest number of corruption-related articles published during the monitored period

appeared in the liberal daily *Sme*. This is, however, not surprising due to the general recognition of *Sme* as both an agenda-setting (including investigative journalism), as well as intermedia agenda-setting newspaper. The relatively widest variety of different types of corruption was covered by *Sme*, whereas *NČ* employed the lowest variety of these types (which were mostly about criminal aspects of corruption). In most of the news outlets (*Sme*, *Pravda* and *HN*), the most frequent position of an agent involved in any corruption story was unidentifiable, or there was no category applicable to a position mentioned in the case. The selected Slovak media thus reported rather vaguely with regard to the status of an agent in articles on corruption-related issues or about allegations and investigations. Nevertheless, an involvement of public administration and public procurement officials clearly appeared to be the most problematic cases (among those identifiable transactions). Our analysis on the media coverage of corruption has also boldly indicated that politics and adopted policies are key factors both to an identification of the roots of corruption as well as to its eventual solution.

While covering corruption related stories, each type of medium also fulfills its role in the society, or rather, in the various segments of society, with different degree of scope and quality of coverage, as well as with distinct focus on topics and issues.

However, for the future, it would seem that the ownership of the media will play the most important role in the practice of media coverage (or non-coverage) on corruption in Slovakia, at least in the cases related to these owners and their business allies (or enemies).

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