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**Juvenile Offenders' Audience
Preferences**

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Albania**

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Juvenile Offenders' Audience Preferences

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Abstract

As all types of arts and communication, without audiences, it seems that all performed its wasted. That is one part of the story, the other one is to discover what are the audience' preferences. Measuring audience preferences in Albania, perhaps like in many other countries, it's a real challenge. Various media institutions, agencies, or scholars have conducted several studies on general audience preferences, but there is no study focused on juvenile offenders' audience.

This paper will be focused on the juvenile offenders' audience preferences that are treated within the Albanian Penitentiary System. Through the use of communication research methods, this study will address the following questions:

1. What are the characteristics of the juvenile offenders' audience?
2. What are the psychographic and life style of juvenile offenders?

Using communication methodologies, combining three elements that of theoretical, analytical, intertwined with empirical data via anthropological elements like conducting interviews, some of the characteristics of the juvenile offenders audience, and the importance of determination of communication for specific audiences will be revealed. Of course that will be viewed with interest to discover whether media, especially TV, has affected or promoted delinquent and aggressive behaviors to juvenile offenders. Through the case study of juvenile offenders' in Albania, this paper will outline the various ways media serve as a relationship building function, without considering its audiences. As media agencies face increasingly complex situations, is central to see how various programs are negatively affecting potential audiences. The increasing interdependence of juvenile offenders and the growing demands on cable and digital platforms within the prisons' cell, raise the question if audience preferences are previously settled or modified.

Statistics that will be presented in the paper, but that would constitute an essential part of it include: a) percentage of juveniles offenders placed in prisons; b) number of media and digital platforms in prisons; c) types of the programs in the Albanian broadcasts.

Keywords:

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Introduction

After the fall of communism in 1991-1992, the transition from a centralized economy to a developed one and a free market brought about major social, political and economic changes. Albania entered a new reality in the domain of communication, a reality which was very different from the one experienced during the communist years. This period was characterized by continuous attempts to establish a democratic system, and of course part of this new system would be the development of communication means. In post-communist Albania, the first language transmitted by the media was freedom of expression and liberation from the anxiety of expressing what one thought and felt¹. After the year 2000, there was a major trend – besides the development of communication means and other aspects – among the media in the country to increase the number of programs with the aim of increasing the number of viewers. In fact, as the head of the Union of Albanian Journalists has stated “oftentimes the decision of the kinds of programs that will be offered by a particular medium is presented as a service to meet the needs of the audience, just like politicians express themselves during electoral campaigns.”²

Researchers from different fields of study have brought various arguments concerning the media, their effects and the audience’s reaction. Katz draws attention by highlighting that the focus should be on what people do with the media instead of what media does to people.³ In a more in-depth study, Schramm (1961), while trying to shed light on the relation of television with children, reached a common approach with Katz, in which the main aspect to be studied was understanding what children did with television. Based exactly on the views of Katz and Schramm, this study will analyze and focus on the trends among juvenile offenders and their relation with communication channels. According to official data from the General Directorate of Prisons, there has been during the last four years an increase in the number of juveniles who are confined in penitentiary institutions.

The number of juvenile offenders in penal institutions can be seen in two directions, on the one side they can be an indicator of the effectiveness of the work of police forces against the increase of crimes from this grouping. Statistics show that in 2008 the Prison System has treated 87 juvenile offenders; the number went up to 90 in 2009, 100 in 2010, and 113 in 2011 followed by a light fall to 102 in 2012.⁴ Studies of data on crimes in Albania and other countries in the world show an increase of the number of children involved in crimes, both as perpetrators and victims of crime. In European countries, an average of 1.2% of the total number of the imprisoned population is made up of children less than 18 years of age, with a fluctuation from zero to 6.2%.⁵ Whereas convicts of the ages 18-21 years old make up 6.3% of the total,

¹Fuga, A., “*Media, Politics and Society*”, pg. 22

²Personal Interview, 10.02.2013

³Balle, F., “*Media and the Societies*”, pg. 631

⁴Statistical data refer to 1st September of each year

⁵Council of Europe Annual Penal Statistics, year 2007

with a fluctuation from zero to 18.3%. Based on statistics from the year 2011, in Albania there are 2% prisoners under 18 years old and 6% of the 18-21 age range group.¹

Even though other studies have brought findings on personality characteristics among these juveniles in order to understand the antisocial and delinquent behaviors among them, a intertwining of personality characteristics of the juveniles in our prisons with the time spent in media consumption and adaptation of their needs to what they watch and listen to is new to the Albanian reality, and perhaps even wider. Measuring the preferences of juvenile offenders is the first study of its kind in Albania. This study has investigated preferences during infancy and before the criminal act as well as while in prison, which allows for finding out favorable characteristics of juvenile offenders in prison. Based on findings of this study, there will be a discussion on whether there is need for a particular “dose” on the time these children spend consuming media messages from the mass communication channels.

Prisons and detention centers are places where one is deprived of his/her freedom and restricted in communication with the outside world. This communication is limited because there is lack of activities organized in daily life, and rituals that used to be organized have to be adjusted to the prison regulations, which determine the behavior limits in prison. Considering the fact that these children are in prisons and detention centers² the time they spend consuming communication media, as that for other activities, is limited, their preferences take another direction. Psychologists at The Juvenile Offenders Institute in Kavaja – where all juveniles that have received the final verdict are put – say that their preferences include books, with the most predominant genres being religious books and novels.

The detailed empirical analysis is based on interviews with a sample study group. The method used is that of selection of a study case, as is the case of juvenile offenders who suffer their punishment in Albanian prisons and detention centers and then comparative analysis with the aim of concluding with the preferential characteristics of the audience of juvenile offenders. As a result, a group of 107 juvenile offenders was selected from penitentiary institutions in the country, and the educational and social assistants who work directly with this category of people. The interview was performed in the form of standardized interviews with open questions for the social workers and

¹The Albanian Prison System, April 2012

²There are approximately 4750 convicted and detainees in one year in Albania. The imprisoned population compares with the free one at a rate of 141 prisoners for 100.000 inhabitants (December 2012). There are 22 prisons and detention centers, of which:

5 Institution of High Security

5 Institution of normal security

9 Detention institutions

Special institutions

1 Hospital Prison Center

1 Institute for Juveniles

1 Special Institute for treatment of persons with mental problems and the elderly

closed questions for the juveniles; all the questions were asked to the interviewees to stimulate quick interviews which can be analyzed and compared easily. The list of questions was compiled in accordance with the object of this study and specifically with the major thesis: Preferential characteristics of the audience of juvenile offenders change during the time in prison as a result of limitation of communication means, lack of alternatives to choose from and freedom of action.

Basic Characteristics of Juvenile Offenders

All the juveniles in the penitentiary institutions are males. The factor that may have contributed to this could be the fact that Albania is a closed and traditional society where the role of females, especially at an early age, is very limited and under strict parental control; however, a separate study is needed to confirm this. The juvenile offenders are put in categories of convicted offenders who are kept at the special Institute of Juveniles in Kavaja¹, with a section for detention, and detainees who are kept in special sections in three penitentiary institutions in Lezha², Vlora³, Korça⁴. Out of the 107 juveniles who are kept in the prison system, 12 are convicted offenders and 95 are still under process⁵. The data collected shows that 46% of the juveniles have committed or are alleged for theft, 15% of them for robbing, 11% as drug dealers, 7% for injury, 2% for murder and 19% for other criminal acts.

Grouped according to age, 48% of the juveniles are 17 years old, 42% are 16 years old, 8% are 15 years old and 2% are 14 years old. Most juveniles in prisons come from the northern part of Albania, 49% of them and 29% of the juveniles live in major cities of Albania, Tirana and Durrës after having moved from their birthplaces. The remaining part of the juveniles come from the southern and southeastern part of Albania.⁶ Among the main reasons mentioned for moving away from their hometown to the central part of Albania, these juveniles point out poverty and unemployment of their parents, divorce, remoteness from educational institutions, as a result of which they cannot continue their education, and the fact that their families are involved in

¹Central part of Albania. The opening of the Institute of Juveniles in Kavaja was the most ambitious project of year 2009 for the Albanian Penitentiary System. This investment was funded by the European Commission, with a total amount of 2.4 million EUR. The Institute serves as a rehabilitation, correctional and consultation centre for juveniles. The maximum capacity of this institution is 45 juveniles.

²Northern part of Albania

³Southern part of Albania

⁴Southern Eastern part of Albania

⁵Statistical data of the Prison System, February 2013

⁶As a result of social occurrences like internal migration, poverty and unemployment, divorce, family members deprived of freedom and the possibility of feud and revenge crimes resulting from a crime committed by a convicted or alleged family member, there is a tendency of an increasing number of people moving to various towns. Official data point out the important role migration plays on the dynamics of regions, promoting Tirana and Durrës and leaving behind regions like the South or more so the North.

the feud, which probably results from the criminal act committed by the head of the family who is either alleged or convicted.¹ The most recent study released by the National Institute for Procession of Statistics about internal migration indicated that there is a major pull to Tirana and Durrës and a very slow demographic growth of regions, like the South, and even more so the North.² Assumptions of this study have not specifically dealt with any possible influence this demographic movement could have on the juveniles' antisocial and delinquent behavior. However, it should be kept in mind that stability of the recent trends remains an open issue.

The data collected about education of the juveniles indicates that the majority of them 49% had completed elementary education (grades I-IV), 10% had entered the secondary level of education (grades V-IX) but had dropped out. 12% had completed the nine-year primary and secondary level. The remaining part of juveniles, 19% of them, had started the high school level but none of them had completed it. The other juveniles were illiterate, or part of them did not want to answer this question. Based on these particular characteristics of juvenile offenders, it can be seen that schools are not the primary sources of their education. The family, on the other hand, as the other key factor in their education, according to information collected from the juveniles, as a result of social occurrences in the country, has had a minor influence in their intellectual, spiritual and educational upbringing. As was confirmed by the assisting staff, the social workers in prisons and detention centers, specific programs are created to preserve close contact with the family while they are in these centers. "However, there are families that cut ties with their children when the latter are imprisoned for various reasons."³ Analyzing these facts, it can be assumed that provided the lack of control from their parents and lack of involvement in educational institutions, there remain two other sources that can serve to "educate" these juveniles; communication means and society. Researchers emphasize that "children in Albania spend at least three hours a day in front of television. If we add up the hours they spent on internet, than it becomes an alarming problem, although this in not only an Albanian problem."⁴

¹On the northern part of Albania, the feud or revenge crime is widespread. Based on customs of Albanians living in Northern Albania, they commit murders for feud because of some hostility created between two families for various reasons.

²INSTAT "Movement toward urban centers", Original Title "Lëvizja drejt qendrave urbane", September 2009

³Personal Interview, 12.02.2013

⁴Nathanaili A., "Children and television in the light of the legal framework" Original title, "Fëmijët dhe televizioni në optikën e kuadrit ligjor" Medi@link, Online Magazine, No. 2, Winter 2012-2013, Albanian Media Institute, <http://www.institutemedia.org/fokus-a-nathanaili.html>

Prison and Communication Means

The communication means that are allowed in prisons and detention centers are provided in the law no. 8328 dated 16.04.1998 "On rights and treatment of convicted prisoners and detainees in pre-trial detention centers", amended. Article 41 of the law provides the right to get informed based on which "the convicts are allowed to keep newspapers, magazines and books found in the market outside prisons and to use other media allowed." In a total of 1380 prison cells, there are 1086 TV sets, 515 cassette players and 813 digital platforms. This means that there is at least one radio or TV set per cell. Periodic newspapers and magazines as a result of geographical spread of prisons as well as factors of system management (interior and exterior) of subscription and delivery have a lower availability in prisons. Based on current legal provisions, internet and mobile phones are not allowed, and interpersonal communication can be done only through payphones. If communication researchers in the world are discussing the era of digital media and the influence of technological developments, Albanian prisons offer the primitive or aged form of communication, letter writing; television as a primary source of information and the book as a "reliable friend." The conflicting appearances that sociologists viewed the society before the 60s, in the image of a mass society of a large number of individuals isolated from each other and exposed to media influence, Jean Stoezel labeled them as "thrusting in terms of information and ideas".¹ Based on this point view, individual opinions were not created as a result of interaction in small groups, but it was the mass media that had the role of exclusively creating an opinion. Together with the model of Laswell's syringe on the effect of media, seen from the point of view of research, this theory can further be developed in the juvenile population of convicts and detainees in prisons.

The hierarchy of creating an individual's opinion in isolated conditions depends on meeting the primary needs the individual wished to have. In this aspect, the role of media and specifically that of television as the primary means of consumption in prisons has to do with providing information about events that occur outside the prison. Based on interviews with juveniles, this aspect is fulfilled with visits of family or phone calls with relatives.² The other factor in media use is that of entertainment, or as a pastime, which is a separate issue among prisoners. The interesting part of this aspect is that the decision to attend a certain TV channel, or a specific program, is not an individual one. It is a collective decision and in some cases juveniles have to subdue to the desires of one person, who is labeled "the head of the group." In the special Institute for Juveniles in Kavaja, the TV set is found in a common environment and it is not allowed in their rooms. This means that the institution plays the

¹See *ibid* 3, pg. 230

²Based on The Comprehensive Prison Regulation, article 61, juvenile offenders are allowed to have telephone conversations 16 times a month. These cannot be longer than 10 minutes, and they can have 8 family visits.

regulatory role of choosing the program to be watched. In this case there is an adjustment of the following kind:

Program of the Prison Institution → Group Hierarchy → Type of Program

Based on this perspective, preferential audiences of juveniles in prisons, although in isolation, are filtered by means of groups the individual is part of, where the individual gradually socializes, and is identified, although this process is contradictory. This is a consequence of basic characteristics the individual presents, without disregarding the kind of crime committed.¹ Since possibilities to choose the favorite program on television are limited, the book becomes a priority.

Juveniles in Conflict with the Law and their Preferences

Preferences of the juveniles are changeable and depend on the environment that surrounds them. Which are their favorite programs; to what extent do they use communication means; why and where; these are general questions that aim at collecting information about the main trends of this audience. The functional theory supports the idea that something can be better understood by studying the way it is used. On the other hand, the user-beneficiary approach considers the fact that people are well aware of their needs and they can articulate them.² This theory brings valuable messages. However, the question that arises is: does the audience analyze the messages it consumes, especially if this audience is composed of juveniles. From interviews with juveniles, 67% of them did not think at all about the way they were using the media before they went to prison. This was also due to the lack of parental control. For 45% of the interviewees, the maximum time of using one medium was 4 hours a day. The medium that was more popular and consumed most frequently was internet 67% with television taking second place with 29%. The interesting fact was that other communication means like the book, newspapers or the cinema did not appear in the list of preferred media for juveniles. They mostly used internet in the mornings and afternoons in *Internet Cafes*. Based on their accounts, internet met all the needs they had, such as listening to music, meeting new friends, and creating a reality – and one of the juveniles expressed it as “feeling master of the world.” Bandura (1986) reinforces this by stating that internet has become a socializing platform, with a much more active pace than can be imagined.³

The preferred programs on television were action movies and TV shows like “Big Brother”, as well as other entertaining programs. They frequently used the midnight hour to watch their favorite movie because during the late

¹In the prison system, prisoners and detainees are classified not only based on personal characteristics but also on the kind of act that have committed or are alleged to have committed.

²Dominick R. J., “Dynamics of Mass Communication, Media in digital age”, pg. 88, 96.

³Bandura, A., “Social Foundations of Thought and Action”, pg. 36

evening hours they were obliged to watch TV programs set by preferences of one of the parents. 38% of the juveniles admitted they were free to watch their favorite program after midnight without any parental control or interference. 42% of the interviewed group had had arguments with their parents concerning watching TV after midnight. The researcher of Albanian media, Professor Artan Fuga explains that “hearing a variety of news saturates an old shortage by giving the individual a new dimension, away from forced collectivism, while inviting the desire to fulfill the gap with all kinds of information, be they necessary or unnecessary.”¹ Referring to this professor’s philosophy for the long need of the individual for information which is twined by the statements of juveniles, it is possible to explain the reasons for this acceleration of the process of socialization with the internet, as compared to more traditional media. Once again the “ego” and desire for self-fulfillment becomes central, which in the concrete case is done through the internet.

Preferential “stories” of the media consumed and the most popular one among juveniles have changed after the crime. However, 56% of juveniles believed that the kind of media they choose had not affected at all in the wrong act they had committed. 23%² of them, with a predominance of those who had stolen, reported that at moments when they watched a movie on television, especially action movies, they imagined themselves at the moment of arrest or while doing the theft. From these statements, it can be stated that children have the ability to adjust their needs with what they watch and listen to in the media. However, more profound studies are needed in this direction.

During their time in prison, the communication they missed most was the internet. Because of the discipline in the institution where they were put, as well as benefits³ they could earn by taking part in educational activities while in prison, juveniles are getting involved in reading and art activities. Among the most popular activities in prison stand out art therapy, in which juveniles are involved in art work and painting, as well as reading different books. 34% of the juveniles stated the first time they had read a book was in prison. The most frequent books read were religious books and novels. From a more comprehensive perspective including all age groups in prison and based on previous studies, there is some stability in the trend of reading these kinds of books in prison. There are different factors contributing to this, but juveniles put on top the argument that they find themselves by creating an individual reality. This approach is consistent with the tendency of using internet when they were free. 45% of juveniles believed that the book was the best alternative offered in prison, a tendency which was of course urged by psychologists in the institution. There is limited data on whether this trend continued after completion of their sentence or after they were released from detention centers. However, from the interviews with juveniles the major trends stand out. 41% of them were not sure on whether the book would continue to be a preference

¹See *ibid* 1, pg 22-27

²10% of these juveniles were recidivists and had repeated the same offense

³Positive evaluations help prisoners for confirmation of rewarding permissions or involvement in activities outside the penal institution.

after they left prison, 12% believed they would change, 18% admitted that it would be so if they went back to school, 14% did not answer this question and the rest thought they would continue at the same pace.

Discussions and Recommendations

Juvenile preferences can change and adapt to the environment where they live, the group they belong to as well as the alternatives they have been offered. Various studies have found out that a long period of time spent in front of the TV contributes to making children and teenagers antisocial and aggressive. Other approaches provide that the effect of television and other communication means should not be increased in the effect those have on children behavior. Based on empirical data collected in this study, despite the number of interviewees for specific reasons like the case of juvenile offenders alleges for theft, television awakens the imagination and reinforces certain behavior patterns. However, determination of preferences is not sporadic; instead, it is a social process and one connected with personal and interpersonal communication which is accompanied by some interior and exterior contradictions. Lack of freedom has limited the juveniles' preference and has directed them towards a different communication medium as compared to what appears on top of their list of preferences. As a result, a question arises: is it limitation of communication means for juveniles that has to be taken into consideration or establishment of regulatory sanctions on the information offered to juveniles? International organizations for protection of children's rights have set the alarm that children in Albania are exposed to every kind of abuse with media messages, especially of the social media and internet.¹ Since they are considered juveniles, their parents should be more active and alert in identifying their children's preferences, modifying them by adapting them to the needs. This decision should be a mutual one and based on agreement. For this reason, attention should be paid to positive measures that involve complete mobilization of all the possible sources, including regulatory institutions for media programs, volunteers and other community groups as well as the opinion of juveniles.

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