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European Journal of Criminology 2011 8: 329
DOI: 10.1177/1477370811411455

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European Journal of Criminology
8(4) 329–342

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DOI: 10.1177/1477370811411455

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Zsolt Boda

Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Hungary

Gabriella Szabó

Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Hungary

Abstract

The role of the media in shaping attitudes towards crime and the justice system has been a heavily researched topic. It has obvious relevance to the procedural justice perspective, in that media representations may have a mediating relationship between the behaviour of institutions of justice and public perceptions of them. Most of these studies have used quantitative methods in order to establish a relationship between attitudes and media consumption. A relationship has been demonstrated on several occasions, but its causal nature has not been proven. However, the difficulty of identifying a direct causal media effect should not lead us to abandon completely the idea that the media have some influence in shaping attitudes towards crime and the justice system. We should look for more sophisticated theories to explain the formation of public opinion and the role of the media in it, and, in addition to the quantitative analysis of statistical data, we should move towards audience research and the use of more qualitative methods. The research reported here used focus group methods to understand how and how much people rely on the media when interpreting issues of crime and evaluating justice institutions.

Keywords

attitudes, criminal justice, focus group, media effect

Corresponding author:

Zsolt Boda, Institute for Political Science, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Országház u.
30, H-1014 Budapest, Hungary.

Email: boda@mtapti.hu

Introduction

An increasing number of sociologists, criminologists and media scholars have concerned themselves with the effect of media representations of crime and criminal justice. As Ray Surette notes, the media, crime and criminal justice have to be studied together because they are 'wedded to each other in a forced marriage' (2007: 2). The argument that crime is a heavily covered topic and its coverage has effects on public views about illegal acts and criminal justice is also widely accepted by the international scientific community (Mason, 2003; Potter and Kappeler, 2006). Research indicates that the media create a picture of a society in which crime is frequent and is constantly and overwhelmingly on the increase, no matter what statistics show. It is also argued that the media misrepresent the nature of crime. Violent crimes are particularly often presented as the norm by tabloid papers and commercial television programmes, thus providing millions of people with a daily diet of information about murder, rape and drug abuse (Greer, 2005).

However, at the same time, empirical research has failed to provide definitive evidence of a causal relationship between the media and people's attitudes – or, indeed, their behaviour. To be precise, there is some evidence, but the relationship between media consumption and attitudes towards crime and justice appears to be neither systematic nor very strong. Moreover, it is much debated whether this relationship is causal. Does this mean that the media are, in the final analysis, much less important and powerful than is widely held? That public opinion about crime and justice is only slightly influenced by television and the press?

These questions are of obvious relevance to the procedural justice perspective that is the subject of this special issue. Media representations may play a mediating role in the relationship between the behaviour of institutions of justice and public perceptions of them. And, if the media offer inaccurate or distorted images of the justice system, this could clearly have an impact on levels of public trust in justice.

Our assumption was that the media do have an effect on attitudes, but this effect is not necessarily a direct and overwhelmingly strong one: it is filtered through social and individual interpretive processes and it is, evidently, only one among the many influences that shape people's thoughts on specific issues. Using qualitative methodology (that is, focus group research), we aimed at contributing to the crime and media debate by conducting audience research, which is generally lacking in crime and media studies. We interpret our results in the light of Paul Lazarsfeld's two-step flow model (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955) and Zaller's (1992) theory on public opinion formation, because it seems to us that they are able to conceptualize the media effect in a sophisticated and flexible way.

Approaches to the media–crime–criminal justice relationship

The literature on crime, criminal justice and the media very often focuses on the question of 'effects'. The strongest media effect we can think of is on behaviour. The *criminogenic media tradition* (see Surette, 2007: 69–75) argues that, because media content is dominated by crime and immorality, it may spur deviant individual behaviour. The

psychiatrist Fredric Wertham was possibly the first to advance this 'direct effects' argument. His research, which was conducted in the mid-1950s, concentrated on the influence of crime comics and television on the minds and behaviour of children. Despite the criticisms (Schramm et al., 1961: 1; Surette, 2007: 70–1), Wertham's core concept has lived on, for instance in the campaigns against violence in the media that have been launched in several countries.

The *moral panic tradition* states that the media amplify or overstate antisocial actions; this feeds our fear of crime, which in turn may lead to more state control and increasingly punitive measures (see Altheide, 1993; Best, 1999; Cohen, 1972; Fishman, 1978; Hall et al., 1978). The term 'moral panic' was coined by Stanley Cohen (1972): it is a reaction by the majority of the population based on false or exaggerated perceptions that are fuelled by the mass media bias. Studies suggest that intense exposure to crime stories in the media is directly related to a heightened fear of crime (Cohen, 1972).

Since the criminogenic tradition deals with behaviour and the moral panic approach's novelty lies in its ability to explain the political effects of particular episodes of media coverage of crime and control, we turn our attention to a third approach, which might be called *social constructivism*. However, it is to be noted that, despite different conclusions, all of these approaches share the basic premise that the vast majority of people in Western countries have no direct experience of crime. For them, it is argued, the media serve as one of the most important information sources about what activities we believe to be illegal or immoral.

Social constructivists wish to detect social constructions and understand the way that individuals acquire knowledge and how they perceive reality. In large, industrialized and post-modern societies, the media are considered to dominate the formation of knowledge, views and assumptions about reality (Sacco, 1995). It should be mentioned, however, that social constructivists do not believe in the existence of a direct and homogenized media influence (such as that in the criminogenic media tradition). They rather say that the media provide us with mosaics from which we build our personal reality.

Still, the assumption is that the media may influence attitudes towards crime and justice. George Gerbner developed cultivation theory to describe this impact of media consumption. Gerbner's empirical studies demonstrate that heavy television viewers (those watching television for more than four hours per day) are likely to feel that they are living in a violent and crime-ridden society. Gerbner's cultivation hypothesis emphasizes media influence on attitudes: heavy consumption is seen as cultivating attitudes that are consistent more with the world of television programmes than with everyday life (Gerbner et al., 1986: 18).

Gerbner's original empirical study in support of his cultivation theory has been thoroughly scrutinized. The details of his methodology were criticized (see Cumberbatch and Howitt, 1989; Sparks, 1992; Zillmann and Wakshlag, 1985), for instance for the way in which he related the viewing of television fiction stories to the fear of crime. Both the choice of stories and the direct causation he assumed were criticized. Nevertheless, a consistent finding remains that people who watch a lot of crime on television tend to be both fearful of crime and supportive of law-and-order measures (Doyle, 2006: 873).

In their extensive review of the literature, Grabe and Drew (2007: 152) argue that, although the question of causation is still to be answered, a number of cultivation studies

have tested nonfictional genres and reported correlations between news exposure and concern about crime (Gross and Aday, 2003; Jaehing et al., 1981; Lowry et al., 2003). From these studies it appears that nonfiction genres might be more potent than fiction in cultivating perceptions of crime, fear of crime and protective behaviour. For example, exposure to televised crime drama is a weaker predictor of fear (Holbert et al., 2004; O'Keefe and Reid-Nash, 1987) and protective behaviour (gun ownership, support for the death penalty in Holbert et al., 2004) than is exposure to news. In the Holbert et al. (2004) study, reality cop shows emerged as the strongest predictor of fear and protective behaviour. Eschholz et al. (2002) also reported that cop shows shape crime perceptions: high viewership of this genre is associated with confidence in law enforcement agencies. Viewing of television news was a significant predictor of positive attitudes toward law enforcement, particularly for women. Together, these studies of television genres provide evidence that nonfiction television might have more of an impact than fiction in cultivating perceptions of crime, fear of crime and potentially defensive behaviour (Grabe and Drew, 2007: 152).

The original cultivation argument that television is most centrally positioned to facilitate cultivation outcomes has not been dismissed, but radio (Chiricos et al., 1997), newspapers (Jaehing et al., 1981), film and new media (Perse et al., 1994) have also been shown to cultivate fear and perceptions of crime (Grabe and Drew, 2007: 152). However, from comparisons between different media channels, television news emerged as more fear inducing than other media (Chiricos et al., 1997; O'Keefe and Reid-Nash, 1987; Romer et al., 2003).

In sum, the media probably have a role in shaping public attitudes towards crime and the justice system. However, this role is difficult to grasp and conceptualize. Nevertheless, data suggest that increased media consumption (especially of television news and tabloid media) is related to an increased level of fear of crime and more punitive attitudes. Unfortunately, only a few studies link media consumption explicitly to trust in justice, although some results suggest that media consumption does have an effect on confidence in justice institutions (see Eschholz et al., 2002).

In our preliminary analysis of the EURO-JUSTIS pilot survey, we were also able to establish some statistically significant relationships between media consumption, on the one hand, and fear of crime, trust in justice and punitive attitudes, on the other (see Boda et al., 2011).¹ It is not surprising that heavy media consumption had statistically significant relationships with fear of crime and punitive attitudes.² However, contrary to our hypothesis, heavy media consumption (especially of tabloid media and crime-related television programmes) was associated with higher levels of trust in the police and courts.³ We expected that respondents with a strong interest in crime-related media content would be more critical when evaluating the performance of criminal justice institutions – we expected to find the 'CSI effect': people who watch crime-related television series may develop unrealistic expectations about the work of criminal justice institutions (Schweitzer and Saks, 2007: 358). It seems that any CSI effect may work in the opposite way: crime-related fiction series may actually build a positive image around real criminal justice institutions. It is also confirmed that the values of trust in the media and institutional confidence show the same pattern; that is, those who do not trust the media tend to have less confidence in justice too.⁴

Media and public opinion: Coming to terms with a fuzzy relationship

What makes the calculation of possible media effects even more complicated is the recognition that media consumers should not be seen as a homogeneous, passive and voiceless mass. So, the circumstances of exposure cannot be irrelevant in studying media effects. This leads us to take the standpoints of the Lazarsfeldian tradition into consideration. The media, Paul Lazarsfeld argued, cannot be assessed as a system separate from the rest of society. Rather, they are connected strongly to other aspects of everyday life that shape people's thinking, attitudes and personality as whole. The stimulus that the media could generate is still the focus of this concept but, as Lazarsfeld stated, the media effects are indirect. This phenomenon can be conceptualized as a two-step flow model. The model argues that mass media information and narratives are channelled to people via opinion leaders with privileged access to media. The key point of the two-step flow model is the demonstration of the complex interplay between media content and personal predispositions in shaping attitudes and opinion on certain topics. This model emphasizes the strength of human agency and interpersonal relations in coding and decoding media messages. The theory has refined the ability to predict the impact of media messages on audience views, and it can explain why certain media campaigns may have failed to alter audience attitudes and behaviour. The original concept of the two-step flow model came from the publication of *The People's Choice* by Lazarsfeld et al. in 1948. However Lazarsfeld and his colleagues constantly upgraded their theory in the 1950s (see Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955).

There have been several criticisms of, and revisions to, the approach. A cluster of criticisms relate to the concept of opinion leaders. A study by Robert Merton (1949) had already revealed that opinion leadership is not a general characteristic of a person, but rather is limited to specific issues. Individuals who act as opinion leaders on one issue may not be considered influential in relation to others. Moreover, it is difficult to provide solid empirical evidence of who is to be considered an opinion leader (for example, considering someone to be an advice taker or receiver is highly subjective). Despite the difficulties in identifying the influential players, the theory of a group of individuals who filter the flow of media information has lived on. The advantages of Lazarsfeld's model are that it:

1. assigns greater importance to the agency of individual recipients of mass media;
2. rejects the notion that mass media messages have direct, immediate and homogeneous effects on an audience's mind;
3. designs a concept in which media consumption is not isolated from all the other influencing factors and interpersonal relations that shape human beings' behaviour, attitudes and acts.

Based on the Lazarsfeldian concept, Joseph Klapper (1960) suggested that the media are more likely to reinforce than to change people's behaviour and attitude. He believed that media consumption – and the way that media messages are consumed – depends upon a wide range of phenomena, which he labelled as mediating factors. These mediating factors include individual predispositions; group membership (peer group and family);

interpersonal dissemination of media content; opinion leadership; and the role of the media in society (Klapper, 1960: 47–52).

John Zaller's (1992) model of public opinion formation is compatible with the two-step flow model in the sense that it identifies individual and contextual variables that influence a person's exposure to, and comprehension of, messages emanating from the media. Zaller describes public opinion as something essentially unstable, fuzzy and difficult to grasp – not only because of the methodological problems of coming to terms with it, but because of the very nature of public opinion. If mass opinion is difficult to grasp, so too is the role of the media in public opinion formation. Zaller offers evidence for short-term effects of the media on people's attitudes without permanently changing their underlying attitudes (Zaller, 1992: 78). In the longer term, the media may contribute to attitude change, but they are potentially competing with other influences, and their messages are contextualized by individual and social interpretive mechanisms.

The focus group research

Our aim with the focus groups was to conduct a qualitative audience research study. Although audiences as receivers is a constitutive part of the communication process, most studies generally fail to pay attention to the ways people acquire, interpret and filter the messages conveyed by the media. This is equally true for both crime and media studies.

It is said that young people constitute the social group that is most sensitive to media effects (Laughey, 2007). The rich media world that youths enjoy so much – television, movies, video games and the Internet – is believed to have a profound influence on their views of themselves and the world around them. There appears now to be widespread acceptance that young people are fascinated by screen violence and that this prompts aggressive or antisocial behaviour, oppressive fear of crime or highly punitive attitudes. However, we have surprisingly limited empirical evidence about young people's views on crime and criminal justice. We were interested in the ways young people present and interpret issues of crime and justice. Our assumption was that there might be some similarities between their constructions and those of the media. We also asked them to talk about the media in general and what they think about the media's role in informing people.

Three focus groups were held between 15 March and 15 April 2010 in Budapest, Hungary, with participants aged 20–24. They were selected as volunteers from different types of school as representative of the post-secondary education system in Hungary (vocational education students and BA undergraduate students). In total there were 27 participants.

Group no. 1:

- vocational education students
- born in 1988/1989
- all male
- residents of Budapest and its socially deprived suburban areas
- social status: low middle class (parents: blue-collar workers or low-skilled/low-paid employees)

Group no. 2:

- BA students of a business school
- born in 1989/1990
- mixed sex with female majority
- residents of Budapest and its suburban area
- social status: middle class (parents: white-collar workers or skilled workers, employees)

Group no. 3:

- BA students of a pedagogical faculty
- born in 1989/1990
- mixed sex with female dominance
- residents of Budapest's greater suburban area
- social status: lower middle class (parents: skilled workers, low-paid public employees)

Before starting the focus group meetings, the participants were asked to fill in a short questionnaire on their media consumption habits.

Results

Media consumption and attitudes towards media

Not many types of media were consumed by our participants; the traditional news media were largely ignored and fictional crime series (e.g. CSI, Cops) were not very popular. Though interviewees spent quite a lot of time watching television (3–4 hours per day on average), they preferred sit-coms, sports, reality series and Music Television's cartoon series. Few of them were interested in politics and current affairs. Instead, they searched for entertainment. This pattern of media consumption seems to completely satisfy our interviewees; they were clear that they were not looking to the media to provide further information or knowledge.

Participants also had very little trust in the mass media. All three groups were extremely critical of the knowledge and skills, and even the moral integrity, of journalists. However, participants stated that the media could have tremendous power in influencing people's mind, with the power to manipulate audiences. Paradoxically, our interviewees agreed that the media had a direct impact on people's behaviour and thinking (especially children and elderly people). However they stated that this mechanism did not function with them; they tended to accept the validity of media content or messages only if these accorded with their existing beliefs on a topic. Such beliefs could originate from direct personal experience, but in most cases they came from interpersonal communications in which friends or family members shared experiences, opinions and views on particular issues ('friend of mine told me', 'my uncle had a case', 'as it happened to my mother', etc.). So it seems that these direct forms of communication may have rather more impact than the indirect power or influence of news media.

Fear of crime

Participants firmly stated that crime was one of the biggest problems in Hungary. They believed that violence was more frequent nowadays than a decade ago. (Serious bodily harm, murder cases and sexual assaults were given as examples.) They had a strong sense that they could easily become involved in crime, especially violent crime, as victims. Some of them had already experienced minor assaults. For example: 'I was sitting in a pub with some mates and other guys laid into us without any reason, so there was a fight with minor harm. The police weren't called.' Some of them had witnessed crimes, including drug selling, corruption and theft.

Most of our interviewees agreed that there was a link between crime and Roma people. They tended to accept extreme viewpoints about the Roma population's involvement in crime and they tended to support firm action against lawbreakers.

The police as the face of criminal justice institutions

Our participants had very little precise knowledge of the criminal justice system. Public prosecutors' and judges' work was almost unknown to them, so they did not have developed opinions on these segments of the criminal justice system. By contrast, they had very definite judgements on police work, despite the fact that – with the exception of some members of the first group – participants had rather limited personal experience with the police. They were drawing on a body of shared knowledge and beliefs based on everyday experience or stories from peers, family members or others.

Confidence

There was more or less a consensus amongst participants that the criminal justice system did not function well. They did not feel that the criminal justice system could protect them and society as whole from crime. The system was neither efficient nor effective, and worked extremely slowly. The police, they said, caught only the little fish, while the big fish swam away. The system was believed to focus on minor and 'unimportant' things, such as car and street stops and disco roundups. In more serious cases, for example domestic violence, the system was powerless.

The police, in particular, suffered from high levels of distrust. Moreover, the police had a very bad reputation because of the poor quality of the workforce ('Most of the police officers are simply dumb; those who are not, use their brain to figure out how to be corrupt') and the technical infrastructure (the poor quality of police cars was mentioned).

Issues of procedural justice were also raised. Most participants felt that police officers did not communicate with people in an adequate way or tone. The police were criticized both for using overly bureaucratic language and for showing no respect to people.

The participants also mentioned that the law and other regulations often fly in the face of common sense. They believed that laws are too lenient to deter offenders from crime. They strongly supported more punitive measures in criminal justice. An interesting – although not very surprising – set of double standards emerged: whereas participants

expressed their dissatisfaction with what they saw as excessive guarantees of offenders' rights (with overcomplicated codes of practice and legal constraints), they expected procedurally correct and fair treatment when it came to their own experience with the police.

Differences between groups

Surprisingly little difference could be detected between the groups in their attitudes to, and knowledge of, crime and criminal justice. This was despite the fact that members of Group 1 had more personal experience of crime and the police, presumably owing to their lower social status. Most of them stated that police officers 'irritatingly' often stopped them when driving or walking the streets. Some of them had been the subject of police actions. Participants from Groups 2 and 3 tended to have only indirect experience. The homogeneity of opinions across groups implies that people's views are shaped by social interpretive mechanisms – such as the media – and they do not rely exclusively on direct, personal experiences.

Discussion

Despite participants' limited media consumption and critical attitudes towards the media, our focus group participants clearly used a discourse on crime and criminal justice that has much in common with the dominant media discourse on the topic (see Szabo, 2010, for findings from a media frame analysis).⁵ All participants were clear that violent crime is very common in Hungary, and said that life is far more dangerous now than in previous decades. This was despite the fact that, according to official statistics, crime, and especially some violent forms of crime (such as homicide),⁶ have been steadily falling over recent years in Hungary.⁷ In brief, our participants to some extent seemed to echo the 'cruel world' frame of the media, which portrays life as dangerous and unpredictable, with crime as something that can strike anyone at anytime.

Another striking similarity between the ways the media frame crime stories and the participants' interpretation of crime is the importance of the 'faulty system' frame. Apart from the sporadic presence of other interpretive frames in the quality press, the conception of criminal justice as a faulty system appears to be the dominant interpretation by the media in relation to crime. And this was the dominant explanation that the focus group participants offered when they were asked about the causes or circumstances of crime. To be accurate, there was another explanation blaming Roma people – a racist frame that, obviously, is not present in the media.⁸ The perception of rising crime and a faulty system indicated participants' low level of trust in justice institutions.

However, participants very rarely referred to the media when they were asked about sources of information or knowledge. And, although they held firmly that the media manipulate public opinion, they thought themselves to be exempt from this influence. So, on the one hand we found striking similarities between the discourse of the media and the participants, but, on the other hand, people rejected the idea that the media influenced them.

The participants had very firm negative opinions about the police: they said the police were both ineffective and unfair in their operations. (Note that they wanted more

effectiveness with regard to catching criminals and more fairness in their personal interactions with the police.) But where do these opinions originate, given that the participants acknowledged that they had very limited personal experience of the police and they did not refer to the media as an information source either? And how is it that their opinions correspond so closely to media content on crime and justice: the world is cruel and the justice system is unable to maintain law and order?

We believe that these contradictions can be resolved if we consider theories that model circular, non-direct and socially filtered interactions between the media and public opinion. If we accept Zaller's argument, public opinion is necessarily a fuzzy and unstable phenomenon, but one that still has some features that change only slowly over time (Zaller, 1992). Deeply rooted convictions and values are products of many social interactions: personal experiences, interactions with peer and family, education and media consumption. If there are commonalities between media content and public opinion, this may be explained by the role of social filters and mediators (such as opinion leaders): media messages find their way into public opinion even if there is no direct influence. And we should not forget the active role of media consumers in selecting and interpreting media messages: those messages that correspond with and reinforce previous and socially accepted frames will presumably resonate more in people's minds, whereas frames that are in tension with already acquired meanings are more easily rejected.

An alternative explanation of the commonalities between public opinion and media frames would be that the media do nothing but reflect and reproduce general public opinion. This argument, stated in its strongest form, would imply that the media do not influence people, but that people influence the media. We think that this would be an overstatement. It would imply, among others, that the media have no agenda of their own at all, that they simply mirror public opinion. This runs against both the findings of media studies as such and broader opinion on the role of the media in today's society. For example, the participants in our focus groups claimed that the media indeed have an effect (on others). The statement's weak form implies that, although the media do indeed reflect and reproduce general views and stereotypes, this does not mean that the media have no effect in themselves. The least we can say is that they *reinforce* the existing frames, that is, there is a two-way relationship between the media and public opinion. This formulation allows for some media effect too.

We should conceptualize the effect of the media on people's attitudes avoiding the two extreme positions of either an overwhelmingly important influence or a non-existent influence. Future researchers should design a model of the social and individual factors that contextualize the media effect.

This discussion has obvious implications for institutional trust. General attitudes towards the justice system are shaped by many factors. A 'naturalistic fallacy' might be to believe that personal experiences are the primary sources of perceptions of institutional effectiveness and fairness. Although countries might differ in terms of the nature and frequency of, say, interactions between citizens and the police, obviously Hungary is not unique in the fact that people on average have only sporadic personal contact with the justice system. Therefore individual experience has only minor effects on trust; or, if this influence is more important, it can become so only through social mediation that

disseminates and retells individual accounts. Those accounts might in themselves be important – like the violation of basic norms – or they might acquire importance by virtue of the status of those who retell the tale as community opinion leaders.

However, it would seem that the media have only indirect and limited influence on people's confidence. Therefore it would be wrong to blame the media for contributing to the erosion of public trust; and, conversely, it would be equally misplaced to aim to use the media instrumentally to rebuild trust in institutions. As for blaming the media, our preliminary results from the pilot surveys show that heavy media consumption is associated both with higher fear of crime and with higher trust in justice. At the same time, the results of our focus group research suggest that people do not rely directly on media images when evaluating justice institutions. Therefore it would be a mistake to invest heavily in media campaigns to improve the public image of, and trust in, the justice system.

Public perceptions of the effectiveness and fairness of institutions are social constructs, originating from different information sources and shaped by social filters and interpretive and sense-giving procedures. Communication campaigns that accompany sincere efforts to render an institution more accountable and responsive might have a role to play in improving public perceptions of institutional fairness. But it seems to us that media interventions by themselves can do little to rewrite a shared common understanding of the effectiveness and fairness of institutions of justice. More research – and probably experimental research – would be needed to analyse the significance of different information sources (such as personal experience, the effect of proximate social environment, the media) in shaping perceptions of effectiveness and fairness.

Conclusion

The role of the media in shaping attitudes towards crime and the justice system has been a heavily researched topic. Most of the studies have used a quantitative methodology in order to establish a relationship between attitudes and media consumption. The relationship has been demonstrated on several occasions, but its causal nature has not been proven.

However, the difficulties of coming to terms with direct media effect should not lead us to abandon completely the idea that the media have some influence in shaping attitudes towards crime and the justice system. We should look for more sophisticated theories about the formation of public opinion and the role of the media in it, and, in addition to the quantitative analysis of statistical data, we should move towards audience research and use more qualitative methods. In our research we used focus group research and tried to understand how and how much people rely on the media when interpreting issues of crime and evaluating justice institutions. We suggest that similar research, combining content analysis of the media with focus group research, may be useful, especially if repeated and combined with panel research, because in this way changes in the media frames and/or content can be related to changes in everyday discourse. Experimental research would also be needed to assess the role of different information sources in shaping people's perceptions of institutional effectiveness and fairness, which are the basis of

a trusting relationship. Future research could benefit from using Lazarsfeld's two-step flow model or from developing further Zaller's model on mass opinion formation in order to better understand the individual and social filters, levers and obstacles through which the media may exert an influence over people's minds.

The findings presented here have some important implications for procedural justice theory. Our conclusions offer a starting point for reconciling ideas about the media's impact on public trust in justice with the procedural justice perspective, which has hitherto privileged direct personal experience amongst the determinants of trust in justice and perceptions of legitimacy.

Notes

1. In the autumn of 2010 the EURO-JUSTIS project conducted representative surveys in Italy, Lithuania and Bulgaria to pilot the questionnaire developed for measuring trust in justice. At the time of writing the data were being analysed; here we provide only the first results of our analysis on media consumption.
2. There is, however, a surprising result in the case of Bulgaria, where heavy media consumption correlates with a lower level of fear of crime. This certainly needs further scrutiny.
3. We were able to construct homoscedastic regression models to test the relationship between media consumption and fear of crime. However, for methodological reasons, we could not do so in the case of trust in justice. Here we had to limit our enquiry to simple contingency tables regarding the relationship between media consumption and trust in criminal justice institutions (police and the courts).
4. Note that the correlation between trust in the media and media consumption is very weak.
5. In a previous study we conducted a frame analysis of Hungarian media content. It shows that crime is indeed a heavily covered topic in both the tabloid and the quality press. The dominant interpretive frames of crime-related issues provided by the media were found to be 'cruel world' (crime is an irrational phenomenon; it can happen to anyone, anytime), 'faulty system' (relating rising crime to a failure of law and order) and, much less frequently, 'social breakdown' (crime as a result of a general crisis in social values – a disintegration of families and small communities) (Szabó, 2010).
6. Other widespread forms of crime that affect many people and can influence perceptions about crime, such as burglary or car thefts, have been also decreasing.
7. See http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/crime/documents/total_crime.pdf.
8. At least we could not detect it. Maybe a closer scrutiny, using the critical discourse analysis method, could demonstrate that some tacit and covert racism is indeed present in the Hungarian media.

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