

The Effect of the Persistent Media Campaign on the Public Perception – MISA & Gregorian Bivolaru Case Study

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Abstract This paper presents a case study about the effects of the mass media in shaping public perception. The novelty of the research is due to the application of social cognitive theory about mass media effects and framing theory in a case study that refers to human rights and discrimination. In the case of the Romanian yoga movement and the yoga teacher Gregorian Bivolaru, 25 years of media campaigns of defamation and hate speech have a measurable effect on the public perception, as the mediated image was based on false accusations and repetitive stereotypes. The negative framing and associations of the news about MISA Yoga School had led to the marginalization and discrimination of the yoga practitioners, who are now one of the most discriminated categories of Romanian citizens. The public perception, as the quantitative research presented in this paper have shown, reproduces the mediated stereotypes. The opinion of people who know directly the yoga movement, although are not part of it, is strongly different (considerably better, according to our results) than the opinion of people who “know” the yoga movement only as a media constructed reality. Biased by the media campaign, people from the second category tend to isolate the yoga practitioners, do not trust them and are suspicious towards them. These results are consistent with the research that studied the opinion of yoga practitioners, who considered that are victims of discrimination as a consequence of the media campaign. The quantitative research consisted of a pilot survey upon 300 subjects, followed by two different researches with 1500 subjects each, that addressed the public and the persons inside the movement. Our results suggest that the two strongest effects of the hate speech and stigmatization media campaigns are the marginalization of the yoga practitioners as a social group and their discrimination in the Romanian society. The objective of this research is to better understand the social phenomena generated by the defamation of the Romanian yoga movement, in order to suggest reparatory and compensatory actions that could eliminate this case of large-scale human right violation and discrimination in post-communist Romania.

Keywords: *social cognitive theory, framing theory, hate speech, stereotypes, defamation, discrimination*

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1. Introduction

Since 1990, Romanian media constantly depicted yoga and yoga practitioners in a negative way. Journalism studies and also historical researches have proved that these media campaigns have their origin and justification in the communist ideology, that did not accept spiritual oriental practices. During the communism, yoga practice was completely forbidden in Romania, and yoga was almost never mentioned in the media. After communism, when yoga became legal, lot of yoga schools were founded and attracted thousands of students. However, conditions still remained difficult for yoga in Romania, mainly because of the aggressive defamation media campaigns.

The research presented in this paper indicates that the framing of the news about the Romanian yogis (and mainly about the MISA Yoga School) and the way media

portrayed the yogis and yoga teachers favored the negative public perception upon yogis. As a result of this media campaign, people who never met yogis and do not have any information about them considers that yoga schools should be declared illegal and that yoga practitioners should not have basic human rights as Romanian citizens, rights granted by the Romanian constitution.

In the last 25 years, several cases of discrimination of yoga practitioners in Romania were reported and documented by human rights organizations from Romania and European Union. These organizations warned that the media campaigns had an important contribution to the marginalization of the yoga practitioners in the Romanian society. This is not a singular case in European Union and in particular in Romania. It is one of the most severe, though. LAYMS (Anti-Defamation League for Yoga and Spiritual Movements) was founded with the objective to study and document the discrimination and abuses cases (of yoga and spiritual movements) in order to better understand them and to propose solutions to compensate

the effects of the defamation campaigns and to protect citizens in order to respect their freedom of belief and freedom of association.

LAYMS is guided in its activity by the “EU Guidelines on the Promotion and Protection of Freedom of Religion or Belief” [1]. Although yoga is not a religion, the freedom of religion and belief is – in present – the only legal frame for protection of yoga practitioners against discrimination. In Europe, the liberty regarding religion and opinion is protected, especially, by the Article 9 of the European Convention of Human Rights [2] and Article 10 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights [3].

The main objective of the case study presented in this paper is to investigate, to understand and to measure the effects of the defamation media campaigns against the Romanian yoga movement, in order to identify the responsible factors and to suggest reparatory or compensatory actions. Our study assumed the existence of the discrimination cases of Romanian yogis, as documented by independent investigations of human rights NGOs. However, the testimonials recorded during this research confirmed a large number of new, not previously documented, discrimination incidents and human rights violations.

The secondary objectives of the research are:

- To establish which is the public perception upon the Romanian yoga movement;
- To analyze the perception of respondents upon the Romanian yoga movement, as related to their source of information;
- To establish the correlation of the discrimination incidents reported by yoga practitioners to the defamation media campaign.

2. Theoretical Background

The study of media effects, especially about its influence upon public perception is important both for journalism’s professionals and academic journalism studies and goes back in time to the historical roots of mass media. According to Conboy (2013), the Frankfurt School and its influential critiques of the political and social power of the media (in the first half of XX century) brought to such studies an important contribution [4]. Another landmark in the studies of media effects is, according to Conboy, the research of Cohen and Young in the 1970s that “meant that journalism was being taken seriously as a mode of shaping public perception of social activity and in defining both acceptable and unacceptable behavior.” ([4], p.92)

Zelizer’s overview of theories and methods of journalism studies [5] considers the study of media effects upon public perception as a direction of scientific research that is one of the main applications of sociology to journalism studies. Between the particular studies of media effects on the public, those who attracted most the attention of researchers were, according to Zelizer, related to social and political issues, like elections, political propaganda, rallies, wars and their media coverage.

Bandura’s writings on social cognitive theory of mass communication drew attention to the (individual) psychological effects, as well as to the (collective) social effects of the mediated message. Bandura (2001)

highlights the motivational effects but also the behavioral effects of the observational learning [6]. According to social cognitive theory of mass communication, the mediated message has also the effect of cognitive construction - that mean not only that people understand a situation depending on the way it is presented by media, but also media framing can affect the knowledge based on their direct perception.

Pajares et al. (2009) goes further and analyze the media effects in the perspective of the social cognitive theory, making the distinction between intentional and unintended effects [7]. Pajares et al. analyze the different influences on mass-media upon the public perception in both positive and negative ways. While the educational and entertainment role of the media was widely use to transmit positive educational message, there is also a consistent (undeniable) negative effect on media consumption on the audience behavior. It is interesting that Pajares et al. present mostly negative effects as unintended, while positive effects as intentional, although other authors go further speaking of intentional negative effects of media.

Another important theory for the scientific foundation of present case study is the news framing theory, or simply framing theory. Framing theory, a communication theory that is often used in media studies, is based, according to Hallahan (2005) on the idea that the way a situation is presented (explained, framed) influence directly the way the audience perceive it [8]. Framing theory originated in anthropology but has a lot of applications in sociology, psychology, marketing, advertising, communication studies etc. The case study of Hook and Pu (2006) is an eloquent example of the effect of framing. According to these authors, the choices reporters and editors make among the various approaches to a news stories create persistent pattern of coverage that strongly influence the way the audience perceive the events [9].

Significant examples of case studies that use quantitative methods of sociology research and communication theories like framing to study mass media effects can be found in the work of Castells. In his volume “Power of Communication” (2013), Castells presents the results of a quantitative research that analyze the way American public understood what happened before and during the Iraqi war (2003-2006), depending on the news channels they used to watch [10]. Castells show that the Americans that watch mostly Fox News gave 80% wrong answers referring to basic events and motivation of the war, while 1/3 of them were convinced that Bush was God’s chosen one to lead the war against terror. The huge discrepancy of the opinions and knowledge of people who watch Fox News and CBS, on one hand, and those who watch CNN or read written press, on the other hand, show that, indeed, the public perception was directly shaped by the media channels. The most objective perception was found, in this case study, to be that of people that watch independent, non-commercial, news channels. Castells made similar case studies for the public perception before the 2008 US elections, showing how the framing of the electoral campaign influenced the public perception upon candidates and different political events.

In spite of the large number of theoretical studies and case studies in this field, there is quite few research of the cognitive effects of the media and also of the news

framing theory in fields different than politics (especially elections and wars) and crisis communication. The present case study shows the way public perception was influenced by a persistent defamation media campaign. The campaign was in fact a sequence of campaigns and went on for more than 25 years. Although based on false information and stereotypes, these media campaigns against yoga in Romania constructed a symbolic reality that influenced not only the perception of the public, but also the beliefs and, in the next step, the behavior of Romanians. This case study can be best understood in the perspective of the social cognitive theory of mass communication. Quantitative research methodology was used in order to obtain significant information about public perception, but the data should be further interpret in combination with content analysis of the media campaign and psychological background of the cognitive theory.

3. MISA & Gregorian Bivolaru Case: History, Media Campaign and Previous Studies

In 1984, during the communist regime, an order of the Romanian political police (Securitate) declared illegal the yoga practice, yoga teaching and dissemination of information about yoga. The documents that prove the persecution of yoga practitioners during communism are available in the Archives of the Securitate and were published by Gabriel Andreescu. Andreescu wrote two books of extensive historical research upon the yoga movement in Romania during communism and after communism [11,12].

During communism, yoga practitioners were under continuous surveillance of secret police. People who did not respect the abusive order of the Securitate and continued to teach yoga were thrown into jail or were isolated in mental facilities. According to Andreescu, between yoga teacher that were jailed, one of them was considered “most dangerous enemy of the communist regime”. This was Gregorian Bivolaru, who was targeted both by Securitate and post-communist secret services, that tried to set him up and prosecuted him for different other crimes. In 1989, he was abusively declared not responsible, and isolated in a psychiatric hospital, together with other political prisoners. Gregorian Bivolaru filed a lawsuit against Romanian authorities and obtained the legal proof that all his condemnations during communism were political.

After 1989, Gregorian Bivolaru is one of the founding members of the Romanian yoga movement MISA (The Movement for Spiritual Integration in the Absolute). The Romanian authorities and secret services remained hostile to yoga practitioners and tried to close the new yoga School under false accusations. The media campaigns were the cover-ups for the authorities’ abuses. Because of intensive media campaigns against himself, Gregorian Bivolaru resigned as president of MISA in 1996. In 2005, after several abuses of authorities and years of hate media campaigns, Gregorian Bivolaru left Romania and was granted political asylum in Sweden. The Supreme Court of Sweden rejected all the requests of Romanian

authorities for Bivolaru’s extradition, invoking as the main reason the hatred media campaigns against him and his yoga school in Romania.

Andreescu, after studying official documents and interviewing dozens of yogis, victims of repression and discrimination of Romanian authorities, has concluded that the former Securitate was responsible not only for the repression of the yoga movement before 1989, but also for the hate speech of the media against MISA after 1989. Andreescu also considers BOR (Romanian Orthodox Church) to play an important role in the persecutions and hate speech against yoga practitioners.

Karl Erik Nylund, a sociologist that studied the MISA-Gregorian Bivolaru case during the asylum trial of the yoga teacher in Sweden, also considers that BOR played an important role in the persecution of the yoga movement in Romania [13]. In Nylund’s opinion, the hate speech of the media has no real basis and no justification.

There is strong evidence that the media campaigns against MISA are not based on real facts. Investigations of several NGOs confirm that there is no factual reason at the origin of this campaigns. A survey conducted in 1996 by APADOR-CH [14] who took part as observer in the activities of the movement came to the conclusion that the “disclosures” published in media regarding immoral, illegal or occult practices of MISA were not sustained by facts.

Two studies conducted by European experts are also available [13,15]. Their purpose was mainly to establish if the Romanian Yoga School MISA is a dangerous cult, as it was labeled by media. The conclusion of the research was for both studies similar: MISA Yoga School has none of the characteristics of the “dangerous cults”.

A sociological study about MISA Yoga School was published in 1997 in the Romanian Journal of Sociology and was conducted by Carmen Mărcu [16]. The results of the study pointed out the effects of the yoga practice, but also revealed some problems that yoga students had to face – at that time – due to the hate speech of the media campaigns.

A psycho-sociological research was conducted in 2005 by members of the Yoga School, in order to establish the componse of the group and the features of yoga practitioners [17]. The results are impressive, as compared to similar statics in Romania: the number of divorces, addictions, psychic problems etc. is considerably lower in the yogis’ group than average values for Romanian society.

Two human rights NGOs, Amnesty International and APADOR-CH, documented human rights violations in Romania, regarding yoga practice, in several reports in 1996-1998 and 2003 [18].

In 2004, MISA Yoga School was victim a military attack of the authorities and accused of drug trafficking, weapon trafficking, prostitution and even human trafficking. None of the accusations was ever proven, and the huge operation of the authorities is considered to be the second biggest human rights violation and abuse in post-communist Romania. The 2004 events are mentioned in several reports: the reports on human rights in Romania in 2004 issued by APADOR-CH [19] and the report issued by SoJust in 2006 [20] are the most detailed.

In April 2016, after 12 years, according to a decision of the European Court of Human Rights, Romania has to pay Euro 300,000 to yogis, victims of abuses in 2004 attacks.

4. The Case Study: Methodology of the Research

The research of LAYMS about MISA-Gregorian Bivolaru case started in 2014 with a quantitative research about the effects of the defamation media campaigns against the yoga school. The study aimed to analyze the public perception of Romanians about the MISA yoga School as a construction of media campaigns. As shown in previous section, the mediated image is very different from reality so the effect of the media campaigns can be easily determined. On the other hand, the study examined the opinion of yoga practitioners upon the media campaigns and their effects.

The hypotheses of the study are:

- The defamation campaign of the media affects the yoga practitioners in Romania;
- The defamation campaign of the media influenced the public perception regarding the yoga movement;
- The public perception about the Romanian yoga movement is related to the channel of information;
- Discrimination of yoga practitioners is related to the defamation media campaigns.

The quantitative research was designed with two main sections (two different investigations), conducted in parallel on similar samples of over 1500 participants. The "internal research" addressed the discrimination and defamation of the yoga practitioners, as perceived by themselves. The "external research" investigated the perception of the people who do not practice yoga, about the yoga movement. The internal investigation was undertaken at public events of MISA Yoga School and at some yoga classes in different cities in Romania. The external investigation was done in the same cities as the internal investigation, on similar samples regarding the age, sex and profession.

Both investigations were based on questionnaires, applied randomly by operators in public spaces. The operators were previously verified and trained by LAYMS' sociologist. The research and the research questionnaires were designed by a psychologist and a sociologist.

The questionnaires are different and include both open, semi open questions and simple dichotomies (19 questions for the internal investigation and 22 for the external investigation). The answers of the open questions were classified in "favorable" and "unfavorable" during data interpretation. Both questionnaires were validated after a pilot survey, applied to two groups of 150 subjects each from inside/outside the movement.

The internal consistency of the tests was evaluated on the basis of Cronbach's alpha value [21]. The values obtained for the Cronbach's alpha of the pilot survey:

1. 0.925 for 163 standardized items, for the internal investigation – corresponding to an excellent consistency and
2. 0.713, for 85 standardized items, for the external investigation – corresponding to an acceptable consistency.

After the questionnaires in the pilot survey have been validated, the field research was conducted in the same manner and the same conditions as the pilot survey.

The collection and interpretation of data samples took place from June to December 2014. In order to triangulate the results of the first part of the sociological study, several different stages of the research followed. LAYMS consulted over 600 of documents (official complaints of yoga practitioners, addressed to Romanian and European authorities, related to discrimination and related situations). This study was followed in 2015 by the documentation of 20 individual case studies and open interviews with victims of discrimination, according to qualitative research methodology, as explained in classical manuals of sociological research (see, for instance, [21] and [22]).

A second large-scale investigation of LAYMS, in 2016, included the content analysis of media campaigns. The findings of this second study are important in order to verify another research hypothesis: that the public perception about the MISA yoga School is directly related to the stereotypes and framing of the news. In the first stage, the correlation of the public perception with the media construction was evaluated based on other authors results (the media campaigns are discussed in [12,13,14,18,19,20]).

5. Data Corpus

This section presents a selection of results if the quantitative research. The entire report of the study is available on the internet in Romanian language at <http://www.layms.net/documente/Cercetare-Sociologica-LAYMSprvind-cazul-MISA.pdf>

5.1. Results of the Internal Investigation

In the internal investigation, the sample dimension of 1520 was estimated as 10% of active yoga students of the movement. The sample structure is similar to the componence of the movement regarding age, sex, nationality and educational level, according to [16] and [17] and therefore the sample is considered to be significant.

Details about the sample structure:

- 42% males, 58% females;
- 95% Romanians, 4% Hungarians;
- age range 18-65, 50% in the category of 35-44 age;
- educational level: over 75% university graduates (of which 15% have also post-graduate studies, including PhD degrees), less than 1% have only secondary school studies;
- profession: 10% physicians, 10% teachers, 10% economists, 16% engineers, 23% IT professionals, socio-psychology, juridical, artistic and editorial etc. (18% did not declare the profession);
- 42% of the total number of questionnaires were applied in Bucharest and other were distributed in towns from all regions of the country.

Examples of questions of the internal investigation:

- Was the respondent subject/victim of defamation and discrimination?
- Did he/she witness the defamation or discrimination of other yogis?
- Were those incidents related to their yoga practice?

- What were the consequences on the defamation media campaigns in their family, professional life and social life? Was the responded directly affected? Were his/her family members affected?
- In what context discrimination and defamation manifested, in what way and what generated it?

Other questions asked for the opinion of the yogis:

- Do they consider their group to be subject of an unfair treatment in the Romanian society?
- Who are, in their opinion, the responsible factors?
- Did they experience themselves any kind of unfair treatment (from authorities, colleagues, teachers, employers etc.) that was, in their opinion, clearly related to their affiliation to the Yoga School?
- Is it yoga that attract contradiction, opposition and critique or their lifestyle and beliefs?

The answers revealed that the yoga practitioners in MISA almost unanimously (98.1%) consider that MISA Yoga School is subject to an unfair and defamation treatment which consisted mainly in the creation of an intimidating, hostile, humiliating attitude by mass-media/authorities. They also declared, almost unanimously (98.8%) that some of their fundamental rights were violated. In their opinion, other persons/groups who don't practice yoga at MISA are better protected by Romanian authorities.

The incidents of defamation and discrimination reported by the yoga practitioners in MISA are, according to their testimonies (see also [Figure 1](#)):

- 68.5% declared they were insulted, bullied, mocked and denigrated due to yoga practice;
- 62.4% declared being subject of negative stereotypes, suffered labeling and stigmatization;
- 61.7% reported violent discussions, misunderstandings or conflicts caused by the fact they were yoga practitioners in MISA;
- 50.7% were suspected of different offences or crimes, unfairly, because they were part of yoga community in MISA, and were interrogated;
- 44.5% reported of being rejected and excluded by relatives, neighbors or friends.

Other significant answers reveal also that:

- 27.6% of yogis were treated unfairly or infamously on different occasions, because they are yogis;
- 29.7% of yogis consider their rights were not respected;
- 24.5% said their rights were not defended;
- 21.6% of them had working conflicts because they were part of the yoga movement;
- 20% were threatened because of the yoga practicing;
- 12.7%, were victims of domestic violence, just because they do yoga;
- 11.6% were occasionally refused the access in public spaces due to yoga practicing;
- 10.4% missed business opportunities problems because they practice yoga in the MISA Yoga School.

The respondents considered, almost unanimously (98.3%), that to them were applied negative stereotypes / clichés / labels. Some of these negative stereotypes are listed below:

- cult member/sectarians: 35.8%;
- group sex: 23.9%;
- brainwashed: 20.9%;
- freaky: 10.5%.
- sexual orgy: 9.5%,
- sexual obsessed: 8.8%,
- antisocial: 8.2%,
- bivolar's (regarding to Gregorian Bivolaru): 6.7%, etc.

The labels and stereotypes applied to yoga practitioners in their personal, public and professional life are the ones that were largely presented in the media campaigns and "borrowed" by the public opinion. 88% of the yogis consider that mass-media is responsible for the creation of the stereotypes applied to them.

The defamation campaign led, in their opinion, to incidents listed above (bulling, conflicts, threats, discrimination, etc.), took place in one of those contexts:

- family 65.7%;
- within neighbours 47%;
- at work 46%;
- different public places 42.2%;
- in relation with the authorities.

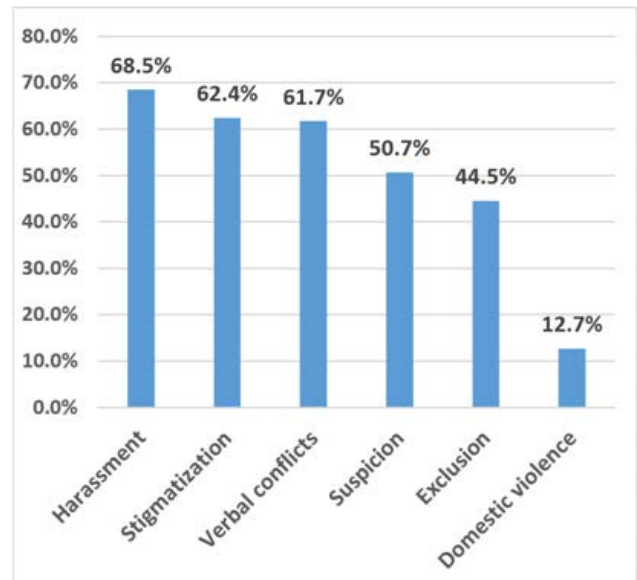


Figure 1. The incidents of defamation and discrimination reported by the yoga practitioners in MISA are, according to their testimonies

The investigation shows that yoga students consider that they are be regarded with suspicion, insulted, stigmatized, humiliated, mocked, marginalized if their family, friends, colleagues or neighbors only because they practice yoga. That's why at a certain point some yogis decided to practice yoga "in secret". 32% of those consider that they would lose their jobs/positions if their superiors would know about yoga.

5.2. Results of the External Investigation

In the external investigation, the sample dimension (1520) and structure were chosen similar to those in the internal investigation, balanced from the point of view of age, gender, nationality, but with a predominance of highly educated people, with access to information and technology. The geographical distribution was also similar: investigation was conducted in the same towns as the internal investigation, with same number of persons.

In order to gather significant data for our research, regarding the influence of the media in shaping the public perception of MISA Yoga School, the respondents were asked to mention if they do know in person yoga students of MISA Yoga School or not. Therefore, it was possible to compare the effect of the media campaigns in constructing the public perception on this movement. The analysis of the answers revealed three categories of respondents:

- 55% know personally one or many persons in the yoga movements
- 14% have never heard of MISA and
- 33% have heard about MISA and Gregorian Bivolaru, but don't know anybody from the MISA Yoga School.

The source of information about yoga, MISA and Gregorian Bivolaru is significant, too:

- News/ TV shows: 79.9%;

- Written press: 40.9 %;
- Internet: 27.9%;
- Radio: 5.7%.

The 22 questions of the external research referred mostly to the opinion of the people about the yogis. There were explicit questions regarding their acceptance (would you accept that your children/spouse/teacher/boss practice yoga?) and their willingness to collaborate with them.

The opinion of Romanian citizens about MISA and Gregorian Bivolaru revealed some of the most interesting results of the quantitative study. These results are shown in [Table 1](#). Note the dichotomy of bad-good opinion: people who know MISA students from the media have in most part (95%) a negative perception over the movement, while this percentage is lowered to 55% in the case of people who know MISA students directly.

Table 1. Public opinion about MISA Yoga School.

Opinion	People who have information about MISA only from media	People who know MISA yoga students directly
Very unfavorable	49%	22%
Unfavorable	46%	33%
Good	4%	30%
Very good	1%	15%

The Romanians who heard about the organization and Gregorian Bivolaru but do not know personally yoga practitioners in MISA, described, generally, in a proportion of 64.1%, the yoga MISA School in depreciative and negative terms such as: cult, dangerous group, people who are astray, mentally ill, must be put in mental hospital, depraved, freaks, extremist movement, crazy about sex, a bunch of losers, dissolute, dangerous, devils, odd, obscene, a crap, aberrations, dangerous organization with weapons and drugs, do "unchristian" things, a criminal organization, liars, causes scandal, libertines, depraved, people with no goal. The terms these respondents used to describe the yogis are the same stereotypes used by media.

Are the Romanians non yoga practitioners at MISA willing to have professional relations or collaboration with yoga practitioners in MISA?

- The respondents who heard about MISA and Gregorian Bivolaru (mass-media being the source) but who don't know personally yoga practitioners in MISA: No, I would prefer someone else: 40.7%; definitely no: 28.4%; Yes, but with precautions: 21.4%; definitely yes: 9.7%.
- The respondents who know personally yoga practitioners in MISA: Yes, definitely: 64.5%; Yes, but with precautions: 21.70%; No, I would prefer someone else: 9.7%; definitely no: 4.3%.

Other significant results:

- 97% of the respondents wouldn't agree that their priest practice yoga in MISA;
- 53% of them wouldn't agree for their husband and wives to practice yoga in MISA; 52% wouldn't agree for their parents or children to practice yoga in MISA;
- 40 % wouldn't agree for their children's teacher to practice yoga in MISA;
- 39% don't agree for the politicians or important officials from justice or public administration to practice yoga in MISA;

- 35% wouldn't accept for their friends to practice yoga in MISA;
- 35% wouldn't agree for their physician who takes care of their health to practice yoga in MISA;
- 26% declare that they wouldn't tolerate the situation in which their neighbor would practice yoga at MISA.

6. Interpretation of the Results

The results of the quantitative research show that the public perception about the Romanian Yoga movement and the yoga teacher Gregorian Bivolaru is strongly influenced by the source of information. People who do not know directly members of the yoga movement have in large proportion (95%) a bad, negative opinion about the movement, while for the people who know at least one student from the MISA yoga school the opinions are more balanced: 45% have a good opinion, 55% have a bad opinion. The results show that people who know directly the movement are also influenced by the media campaign, but less than people who have no direct information.

The "bad opinion" of the public is expressed in the same stereotypes and within the frames that media used for 25 years to depict the yoga movement. This conclusion can be better understood in the perspective of the framing theory. This result also shows that the image constructed by media was imposed, as social cognitive theory suggests, and accepted as a social reference.

As a consequence of using stereotypes, framing and hate speech, Romanians who have a bad opinion – shaped by media – about the yogis recognize openly the tendency to isolate and marginalize them, not accepting to work, collaborate and have personal relations with them. This lead to the conclusion that the marginalization and discrimination of yoga students in the Romanian society is a result of the persistent defamation media campaigns.

These conclusions are consistent with the outcome of the internal research: the majority of the respondents from MISA Yoga School reported incidents that they considered were caused by the persistent defamation media campaign.

The data analysis proved that Romanians who do not practice yoga in MISA and who know personally yoga practitioners in MISA are willing, almost unanimously, to collaborate with them, while those who have already a strong negative opinion about yoga practitioners in MISA due to media campaigns, are definitely against this collaboration or would prefer to work with other persons who don't practice yoga at MISA.

Analyzing the data corpus, one can identify the problems that the yoga students consider they are facing just because they follow the yoga courses of MISA Yoga Schools, the most common issues are discriminative treatment, not being defending their rights, not having their rights respected, and also hate speech.

The hypothesis of the research were confirmed. The defamation campaigns of the media affect the yoga practitioners in Romania, as 98% of them reported incidents that, in their opinion, are generated by the media campaigns. The public perception about the Romanian yoga movement is related to the channel of information, since the perception are so different for the people who know directly and indirectly the movement. The defamation campaign of the media influenced the public perception regarding the yoga movement, for the same reason as the previous hypothesis, and because the negative terms used by the public to describe the movement are those of the media. Discrimination of yoga practitioners proves to be related to the defamation media campaigns, since respondents in the internal investigation testify to be discriminated, while respondents in the external investigation recognized that they marginalize the yogis.

7. Conclusions

This case study intended to estimate the effects of media campaigns upon public perception in the case of the Romanian yoga school MISA and yoga teacher Gregorian Bivolaru.

The specificity of the case facilitates the determination of the effects of the media campaign in constructing an image and a public perception upon a large group of people. Because the media campaigns took place for a long period of time (over 25 years) and were based on stereotypes and allegations that are not real, the media construction upon the yoga movement is far from the real facts and can be easily distinguished from the information based on direct knowledge.

The perception of the public upon the yoga movement depends strongly on the source of information: people who know directly the movement and its members have, in majority, a good impression upon it, while people who "know" the movement from the media have a bad impression upon it and consider it should be marginalized/excluded from society.

Problems that yoga students say that they have, just because they learned yoga in MISA Yoga School, are multiple: from family conflicts to threats, from abuses of

authorities (illegal searches, brutality, penalties etc.) to work conflicts and firings.

The quantitative study presented in this paper provides strong evidence that the marginalization and discrimination of yoga practitioners in Romania is related to the media defamation campaigns. The consequences of the defamation campaign of Romanian Yoga practitioners cannot be ignored as a human right issue in Romania. LAYMS has the objective to identify the responsible factors and to suggest solutions for the improvement of the situation. In order to do so, the secondary objectives – to study and document the phenomena – were addressed by the research reported in this paper.

The significance of the case study is given not only by its scientific novelty, but also because of the importance of the discrimination, as a sensible issue in the contemporary society. This case study refers to the social phenomena of discrimination and marginalization of a large group of people, based on their way of life and their beliefs.

Further research will address the effects of the defamation media campaigns at the microsocial level (in the families and groups of friends, neighbors) in order to identify several elements that will allow the refinement of the understanding of the case. Another direction of investigation is the role of authorities in evolution of the case.

In conclusion, the case study proves that the way mass-media presents an organization (in this case, an entire yoga movement) not only influence the public perception about the organization and its members, but can also have social effects – in this case, marginalization, stigmatization and discrimination of a large group of people.

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