

## DISCRIMINATION OF THE ROMA POPULATION IN ROMANIA

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**Abstract:** *Over time, society has faced various forms of discrimination. Since the enslavement of people of color or racism against Jews, discrimination has been and is still present in our lives and continues to influence our thinking as well as our actions. After presenting a brief literature review on types of discrimination, we focused our paper on the discrimination of the Roma population. Thus, in Romanian society, there are many stereotypes about the Roma population and their negative way of behaving such as: the Roma are poor and they like to beg for money, they lack education. In this regard, this paper aims to evaluate the way the Romanian online media presents the Roma population in order to find out to what extent does the media maintain and promote these stereotypes. Using content analysis as method of research, we conducted a research on online articles and news from the official websites of several Romanian television channels. Our findings reveal that through the news and information it circulates online, media generally spreads opinions against the Roma population. Most often Roma are referred to as "gypsies", and most news present negative information about them. Even more, our study also reveals that, in the online environment, the media scarcely pays attention to the situations in which Roma are victims of discrimination. Considering this findings, in order to help Roma improve their current situation in Romania and improve the perception about them, educational campaigns should be implemented and conducted through the help of media channels.*

**Key words:** *discrimination; Roma; online; media; Romania.*

### 1. Introduction

Even though, compared to previous centuries we can acknowledge that people have more rights and freedom of speech, discrimination is still an important issue in today's society. Whether we accept or not, people are still discriminated because of their gender, race, nationality, language, religion, age, or disability.

The act of discrimination can be determined and influenced by the entourage, the groups that individuals belong to, by values and rules imposed by family members or preconceptions. However, most often people discriminate and have different attitudes and behaviors towards each other due to certain prejudices, which are either constituted at the group level or at the individual level.

In this regard ethnic prejudice can be considered an "apathy", a negative attitude or belief that is based on incorrect generalization. It is something that people can feel or express, and can be directed towards a specific person or entire groups. (Allport, Clark and Pettigrew, 1954: 9) In time, these prejudices may take the shape of stereotypes.

Stereotypes play an essential role in the process of discrimination, due to the fact that discrimination usually lies in stereotypes related to a trait of a person or a group, whether it is gender, religion or political orientation. (Gheondea, Ilie, Lambriu, Mihăilescu, Neagu, Stanciu and Tomescu, 2010:114)

Stereotypes are considered perception schemes that produce evaluations, opinions about other people and that implicitly produce positive or negative discrimination behaviors. (Ferreol and Jucquois 2005: 628) Even more, they are the result of social categorization, and they manage to emphasize the perceived differences

between us and other groups or people. (Ferreol and Jucquois 2005: 629) When it comes to stereotypes, according to Reskin (2000) a distinction can be made between descriptive and prescriptive stereotypes. The descriptive type affects and modifies people's perception regarding the behavior of a person or a group, while the prescriptive type refers to people's generalization about how members of a group should be (Reskin, 2000: 322).

Discrimination comes in many forms and types, but since ethnic and racial discrimination is still an issue in Romania, we focused our paper on the discrimination of Roma population.

In Romania, as well as in other European countries, Roma people constantly have to face discrimination and the negative attitude towards exists because people continue to have incorrect or false conceptions and beliefs about the way Roma people behave and live their life (Maučec, 2013:182).

The most common stereotypes about Roma people describe them as uneducated, dirty individuals that refuse to work. When it comes to their identity, people refer to their dark skin or hair, and their flashy colored clothes. Even more, predominant is the belief that they live in the suburbs, in inappropriate conditions. In regards to their actions, the Roma are taught to be criminals, beggars, and their favorite activity being stealing (Maučec, 2013:185). Among these conceptions, another stereotype about the Roma was identified: the belief that they cannot exceed or improve their current social conditions (Săftoiu, 2017:7). Even more, other common preconceptions about the Roma, state that members of this ethnic group get married and have children too early, that they teach their children to steal. (Știrbu, 2015:136).

Taking into account that the information we are exposed to in our childhood is important for how we perceive things later in our life, while studying stereotypes and children's opinion about Latin, Roma and Chinese people, Enesco, Navarro, Paradela and Guerrero, (2005) found that the Roma population was the one with very few positive stereotypes, children mentioning that the Roma are "good dancers". In regards to the negative stereotypes, children aged 6 to 15 referred to them as thieves, poor, violent or dirty people (Enesco, et al., 2005:650).

A reason why the Roma usually feel offended by such opinions about them, can be represented by the fact that their description about them is very different than the one made by other ethnic groups. For example, the Roma consider themselves welcoming, decent, hard-working, united people (Lazăr, 2009:27).

Considering that discrimination of the Roma population persists in Romania, and that mass media has a major role in shaping opinions, the purpose of our paper was to evaluate the way the online media presents the Roma population in order to find out to what extent does the media maintain and promote negative stereotypes about them.

In relation to the previously described stereotypes, we started our research from the premise that attitude towards Roma people in Romania is mainly negative and that mass media contributes to the development of negative perception about them. Thus, after a brief literature review on the concept of discrimination, types of discrimination and role of mass media, we present the research methodology, results and discussion and conclusions related to our findings.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1 The concept of discrimination**

Discrimination is a complex concept that has been approach from multiple perspectives. From a social or general perspective, discrimination is seen as inequality

between people and groups that results from differences related to religion, disability, race, gender, sexual orientation (Bhugra, 2016: 336). A similar definition states that discrimination occurs every time a person or a group receives less favorable treatment because of some traits or characteristics that involve language, skin color, age, illness. (Russell, Quinn, King O'Riain, and McGinnity, 2008: 8) In a similar way, discrimination can be understood as an action through which someone makes a distinction that favors or rejects another person (Orbe and Camara, 2010: 283).

In other words, discrimination means offering different treatment to individuals because they belong to a certain group that usually represents a minority (United Nations: Commission on human rights, 1949:27). Thus, often when discriminated, groups tend to develop rebellious or negative behavior and because of such reactions people will continue to discriminate them (United Nations: Commission on human rights, 1949:28).

Even though acts of discrimination today are more subtle than they were in the past, it is easy for people to notice when other people treat them differently. Easier forms of discrimination are present in our everyday life. For example, the security guard pays more attention to certain types of people when they enter a building (Pager, 2006: 3), individuals can move away or leave the room if people of color enter, women still lose contests or promotion opportunities in the detriment of men. Even more, studies showed that, when asked about the frequency with which they felt that were discriminated, African Americans and other disadvantaged groups, mentioned that discrimination is always present in their life (Pager, 2006: 3).

While the process of classification and association that takes place in people's minds every day, can be the cause of discrimination in most cases (Strand, 2006:27), people also make discriminatory actions due to stereotypes or the prejudices they have about other individuals or social groups. In this regard, people may develop negative behavior that is either passive or active. For example, when someone is passively discriminating, it can ignore the respective person, refuse to make eye contact or integrate it in his or her group, and when is actively discriminating, it can constantly be in favor of racism, or even practice it, and can mitigate for not allowing people that have a certain nationality to immigrate (Al Ramiah and Hewstone, 2013: 897). Among prejudices and stereotypes, unequal treatment may be also caused by group competition or "modern racism" (Pager and Shepherd, 2008:193).

Discrimination may happen because of characteristics or traits that individuals possess but those traits can also be a pretext for other reasons why people are discriminated. For example, a women may not receive the job she applied for, not because it is a women and the director of the company believes that man can perform better on that specific function, but because hiring that women could also mean additional costs in the case in which she becomes pregnant. (Heinrichs, 2007: 101) Thus, in almost any situation, people have more or less well-founded reasons to discriminate and there is always "something about a person" that makes another person treat her poorly or differently (Fullinwider, 1980: 59).

## **2.2 Types of discrimination**

Discrimination can happen due to many reasons; it can take place in various situations and can affect the everyday life of people.

In a general way, discrimination can be classified as direct and indirect. Direct discrimination takes place when "a person is treated less favorably than another person who has been, is or may be in a comparable situation" (Bojarski, Chopin, Cohen, Do and Farkas, 2012: 24). In other words, direct discrimination refers to discriminatory

practices or actions of a certain individual, undertaken with the purpose of excluding other people or groups. Some examples of this type of discrimination include: refusing access to a specific person to a shop or a bar, verbal violence, or unequal payment for equal work (Lăzărescu, Panait, Iordache, Dimulescu, and Antofi, 2015:14).

Indirect discrimination takes place when rules and regulation that appear to apply in the same way for everybody, actually disadvantages certain people or social groups (Human rights and discrimination commissioner, 2015). Thus, the rules do not necessary intent the exclusion of an individual or a group, but they affect people in one way or another (Lăzărescu et al., 2015: 14). For example, we can acknowledge that the person is indirectly discriminated if she is blind and wants to purchase a ticket to a concert, the company telling her that the only way to buy tickets is through the official website of the company (Human rights and discrimination commissioner, 2015).

Another form of discrimination frequently met is multiple or intersectional discrimination. This discrimination happens in situations in which there exist multiple factors that stand at the basis of the act of excluding or offending a person. For example, an African-American women, who is not promoted in an organization in which white man and women are promoted is discriminate both because of her gender and race (Uccellari, 2008: 25).

Racial and ethnic discrimination are two of the most common forms of discrimination. Simply put, racial discrimination can be considered the differential treatment of people on the basis of their race or ethnic origin. (Pager and Shepherd, 2008: 182). At the core of this type of discrimination stands the concept of race, and the idea that a certain race deserves to have privileges over another one, privileges in the educational, health or services field (Bhugra, 2016: 337). Race is seen as a social construct and distinctions of races are made because of some traits that people have and that remain stable over time (Clair, and Denis, 2015: 857).

In similar way, ethnic discrimination means treating people unequally because they are part and belong to a specific group (Lindstedt, 2010:143). Thus, ethnic origin can include factors that offer people or groups different social identities, and in this context we can talk about the Roma population (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service-ACAS, 2019).

The Roma population is discriminated due to multiple reason, but many issue appear when we refer to their employment and desire to work. The general perception is that they are not interested in working, but even when some of them are, they receive low paid, not respected positions or jobs, that can influence their desire to work in the future (Munteanu, 2010: 18). Discrimination of Roma people can be approached in the context of education too. Often Roma people are place in special schools, and some schools separate Roma children from the other children. (Renzi, 2010: 42) Moreover, Roma have problems when trying to find a place to live, and an example of Roma discrimination can be represented by the eviction of Roma from a building in Miercurea Ciuc, a city in Romania. This action shows the little support that authorities give for the Roma in order to find housing (Renzi, 2010: 41).

Gender discrimination is another type of discrimination that frequently seen in today's society. When it comes to gender, there taught to be many differences between men and women in terms of intellectual and physical abilities. Gender discrimination also comes in many forms, and one of them is language discrimination, also known as sexism. In this regard, sexism refers to the use of words and sentences that are often offensive towards the opposite gender (Lan, and Jingxia, 2019: 156).

Women usually tend to be discriminated more because of their gender in everyday situations. A study on the causes of gender discrimination in Quetta city,

revealed that people who can be described as illiterate, tend to believe that women do not need education, while the literate people believe the opposite. However, women are taught that what is important are the men's need, that men are superior to them, and because of this treatment, women feel inferior, and their self esteem is very low (Zarar, Bukhsh and Khaskheli, 2017: 6).

Workplace discrimination is in many cases, related to gender discrimination. Discrimination in the workplace can negatively impact employees. People who feel discriminate on the job tend to be less motivated, their performance and professional development also being affected, as well as the relationships with the co-workers (Stanila, Vasilescu and Militaru, 2020: 17). Even more, a study focused on the experiences of discrimination of people from Ireland revealed that 77% of people stated that when they feel discriminated at work their life is seriously affected (Russell, Quinn, King O'Riain and McGinnity, 2008: 59).

Workplace discrimination can be considered a negative behavior towards an individual, that is motivated by the fact that the individual is a member of the group constituted on its workplace that influences its job or career (Sims and Dalal, 2008: 9). Thus, some examples of discrimination at work include promoting and offering management position only to men, people with same qualification can receive different payment: women can receive lower salaries than men (Elei, 2016: 167).

Disability discrimination is another type of common discrimination and is defined in terms of disadvantages that people with some physical or mental deficiencies have or experience, disadvantages that lead to their social exclusion (Kazou, 2017: 29). In a broad way, disability is the lack of ability to behave in a way that a normal human being, as seen by society, should behave (Retief and Letšosa, 2018: 3).

Other types of discrimination include religious discrimination, harassment or victimization. Discrimination based on religion means applying different treatment to people because of their religion or beliefs, for example, in the workplace: not employing certain people, refusing to train or promote them (Vickers, 2016:164). People can be discriminated for their religion in multiple ways, but some of the elements of this discrimination include: neglecting or discounting people's beliefs and faith, religious jokes, or lack of association with person's that are followers of a religion (Huang and Kleiner, 2001:129).

Harassment, which is prohibited by law in most countries, is a form of discrimination that refers to an undesirable behavior that people have with the intent to offend, to decrease or violate someone's dignity and create a hostile environment for that person (Waddington and Broderick, 2018: 50). Victimization is a concept that includes behaviors such as physical or verbal violence, sexual, mental or emotional abuse (Hosang and Bhui, 2018: 683).

### **2.3 The role of mass media**

In today's society mass media has become indispensable. Mass media is omnipresent, and through the information it communicates it shapes the reality and even creates a new reality, a hyper-reality (Schifirneț, 2014: 31).

Broadly, the concept of mass media refers to any type of medium or channel used in order to send information to large audiences (Pavel, 2010: 106). Together with the development of technology, new communication channels appeared, and thus we can now distinguish today traditional media from new media. Traditional channels are represented by television, radio, newspapers while new media is mainly represented by the internet and the various platforms and apps offered by it (Pavel, 2010: 106).

Mass media has an essential role in society due to its many functions. The first function of mass media is information. Through this function mass media has the role to keep people informed, and to give them updates regarding the most important events and actions that take place in society. Another function is correlation. By reporting and presenting events happening in the world, mass media contributes to the process of socialization and even education. Next, mass media has a cultural function, it ensures continuity and expresses social and cultural values, and also an entertainment function, (Moraru and Paloşan, 2012: 167). In other words, mass media presents information to the public, it interprets events and situations, but it can also shape people's opinions, perception and even influence their attitudes and behaviors (Peru-Balan and Tofan, 2017: 86).

Although there are many theories regarding mass media, one theory that emphasizes its role in shaping and influencing the opinion of the public is the magic bullet theory also known as hypodermic injection. According to this theory, mass media, like a bullet or a needle, it has a powerful and immediate effect on the public. Thus, the messages sent by mass media have direct influence on people, them processing the message as the media intended (Nwabueze and Okonkwo, 2018: 1).

Therefore, it can be inferred that through its functions mass media also manages to shape people's opinion, and sometimes even to promote or emphasize stereotypes that exist in society. While approaching the subject in the context of Roma population, mass media had and still has a "hostile attitude towards the Roma population" (Valeriu and Slavik, 2003). Thus, as an example, in 1999 a man responsible for the rape and killing of three children, was described by the media as "a rapist alcoholic gypsy" (Valeriu and Slavik, 2003), thus discriminating and creating an overall negative image of the Roma population.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Purpose, objectives and hypotheses**

Taking into account the role of mass media in society, the fact the Roma population is one of the communities most discriminated in Romania, and that the general perception about them is mainly negative, we were interested in finding out if and how mass media continues to shape the image of the Roma.

In this regard, the purpose of the paper is to evaluate the way the Romanian online media presents the Roma population in order to find out to what extent does the media maintain and promote the existing stereotypes about them.

The objectives of the research include identifying the domains in which the Roma population is mostly discriminated, identifying different types of news about Roma and identifying some differences in the way multiple channels choose to present the Roma.

While elaborating the paper we started on the premise that on their official websites, the most popular news channels in Romania mostly present news about the Roma population from a negative perspective, supporting stereotypes and prejudices regarding Roma.

#### **3.2 Sampling**

In order to conduct the research we chose to analyze the articles and news about the Roma, posted online by 5 of the most popular news channels in Romania: Antena 1, Antena 3, Digi TV, Realitatea TV and Pro TV, within a year ( January 1<sup>st</sup> 2019- December 31<sup>st</sup> 2019). Thus in order to be able to better observe if there are any differences in the

way of presenting the Roma population throughout the year, we chose to analyze one month from every season: March, June, September, and December 2019.

### 3.3 Method and instrument

Regarding the method, in order to obtain the necessary information we used content analysis while having as an instrument a content analysis grid. When studying the online platforms of the news channels several categories of information were established. Thus, the grid contains 11 categories among which are: housing, education, poverty, negative activities: violence, kidnaping, theft, begging, positive activities, free time, family, Roma victimization. Each of the channels was analyzed in relation to this grid that is represented in Table 1. ("X"- means that the post has news in that category while "-" means that they do not have news in that category)

**Table 1: Analysis grid**

Categories:	Antena 1	Antena 3	Digi 24	Realitatea TV	Pro TV
1. Education	-	X	X	X	-
2. Free time	-	-	-	-	X
3. Housing	X	X	X	-	-
4. Poverty	X	-	X	-	-
5. Theft	-	X	-	X	-
6. Violence	X	X	X	X	X
7. Begging	X	X	X	-	X
8. Kidnaping	X	-	X	-	X
9. Roma victimization	X	X	X	X	X
10. Family	-	X	-	-	-
11. Positive activities	X	X	-	X	-

### 4. Results and discussion

The analysis of the news about Roma population that were presented by 5 of the most popular channels in Romania on their official websites, revealed that most of the news tend to create a negative image regarding the life and behavior of Roma.

From the channels analyzed, Realitatea Tv is the one that has fewer negative news about the Roma, Pro TV has the least news about Roma, while Antena 1, Antena 3, and Digi 24 mostly report news focusing on negative aspects: violence, kidnaping, begging. However, the analysis revealed that, even if very scarcely, the channels presented news about the victimization of the Roma.

All the channels present news that describe the Roma committing violent acts, while Pro TV is the only channel that also reported news about activities that Roma have in their free time. Even more, very often in the news the Roma are referred to as gypsies: "Romanian and Bulgarian gypsies"- Pro Tv," when the police arrived the gypsies calmed down"- Antena 3.

When it comes to *education*, only Antena 3, Digi 24 and Realitatea TV had news that involved Roma education. Their news emphasized the fact that Roma do not usually go to school, that sometimes they are put in separated classes in order not to interact with the Romanian kids, that they are taught by less prepared teachers and thus, as one news from Antena 3 states: "even after they finish the fourth grade, they (the Roma) are not able to read or write correctly." In this regard, media supports the

stereotype that Roma children do not have the same ability as other children to learn, or develop and by having to put them in separate classes, the differences between them and Romanian kids are emphasized.

About the *free time* of the Roma only Pro Tv provided news, but also in a negative manner. For example, one article stated that people were “fed up with the parties thrown by a Roma community”. It can be inferred from the reported news that Roma are people who party, drink and dance, who are loud and usually make scandals.

News that referred to *housing*, were linked to the idea of *poverty*, describing the Roma as people who live on the streets or in very poor conditions. In this regard many news also presented the way Roma from Romania live in the countries they emigrated: “many live in improvised camps or other poor conditions”- Antena 3, they live in “isolated communities, without basic utilities”- Digi 24, they are “poor people”- Digi 24, who also “live illegally”- Antena 1

In the context of the negative activities of the Roma, news mostly describe the Roma as violent people, who steal, beg and have a tendency to kidnaping, thus supporting the stereotypes that exist in this regard about them.

While referring to *theft*, for example, Antena 3 described in one news that “ five Roma people from Romania were caught stealing”.

*Violence* however is the subject mostly discussed by all channels. The news present Roma aggressing other people, being involved fights, scandals. Digi 24 states in one article that people were “beaten, threatened and seized by Roma”, and in other news regarding a fight between Roma it is emphasized that even “children took part in the fight”. Thus, this supports the stereotype that Roma are violent, that they are aggressive even with people from their community and that Roma also teach their children to get involved in fights. Even more, while fighting they use objects such as axes, swords or wooden sticks and their lack of compassion is stated in a news that had the following title: “pregnant police women beaten by the Roma”.

Another negative activity that also outlines how they get their income is *begging*. The Roma are seen as beggars: “he lives from begging”-Antena 3, “ 160 Roma children were found begging in England”-Digi 24.

Roma are also taught to be capable of *kidnaping*, and in their articles, the channels often support this stereotype: “the attacks (against the Roma) were motivated by the online rumors according to which the Roma kidnap children”.

Even though very scarce, on their website the news channels also present information about *Roma victimization*. For example, they described situations in which Roma were beaten due to some rumors that were proven to be fake, or news in which they are discriminated at school. Other news regarding the families of Roma people, focus on highlighting the idea that teenage girls are promised to other families, or older men, and sometimes they are even bought.

Regarding the positive activities of the Roma, the only activities reported online were the ones related to the participation of Roma people to some televised shows or talent contests. For example, Antena 1 reported news about a Roma women who participated in a culinary show: “Malvina comes from a family of gypsies and she is displaying her culinary talent”.

## 5. Conclusions

In the context in which in Romania, about the Roma community many stereotypes and prejudices are stipulated (they steal, they are violent, they beg, they fight and make scandals even when they celebrate) the purpose of our paper was the



analyze how the Roma people are presented in the online media, and if in the online environment the news channels support or promote this stereotypes.

We started on the premise that the most popular news channels in Romania negatively represent Roma people through the news they present on their official websites. The results and findings of the research confirmed our hypothesis.

Thus, the main findings of the research revealed that online media presents the Roma and their day to day activities in a negative manner, that the media is mostly preoccupied in emphasizing their destructive behavior and that their positive activities are very poorly promoted.

The Roma are described as violent people, who teach their children to be violent and also to beg, that they steal and do not have properly living conditions, and their marriages are often arranged: they “promise” girls to other families, or sometimes they buy them. However, a tendency to improve the situation and to raise awareness on the matter of the discrimination of Roma people, can be seen in the news that describe anti-discrimination laws, or situations in which Roma develop positive activities.

Therefore, while the discrimination of Roma in Romania is still present and is still an important issues, in order to improve their situation and the perception about them, the media should stop portraying Roma as people with exclusively negative behavior that cannot contribute to society. Instead, some educational campaigns should be implemented and promoted through the online as well as offline mass media, campaigns whose role would be to educate Roma people, to encourage them to behave positively and to facilitate their social inclusion.

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