MANAGING SOCIAL COMMUNICATION. ANALYSIS OF MEDIA RELATIONS ACTIVITIES OF POLISH POLICE PRESS OFFICERS

Dariusz Krawczyk
Silesian University of Technology

Abstract:
The foundation of the social communication system of the Polish police is the press officers of district and city departments, who maintain regular contact with journalists of local and regional media, and incidentally also with national or international mass media. The aim of the 2022 survey was to determine the media relations activities, techniques and tools used by officers. All press officers in the police garrison in the Silesian Voivodeship participated in the research project. 100% of press officers took part in the survey. Responding to the expectations of journalists police officers prefer direct contact with journalists, including 52% by phone. Although press officers consider social media to be a good method of contacting the public (30%), they do not use it themselves in contacts with journalists. They prefer to use the official police website (28%). Police spokesmen, due to the information they have, gain the attention of the mass media and do not have to use modern communication techniques to attract journalists. Maintaining constant contact with journalists, press officers also assessed the level of their professionalism. According to the respondents, TV journalists are characterized by the highest professionalism (41%). In second place are press and radio journalists with a similar number of indications (27% and 24%). The professionalism of Internet editorial staff was rated the worst (8%).

Key words: communication management, media relations, police public relations, press officers

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the survey of officers' opinions was to establish the techniques of information distribution used by police press officers towards media market players. The focus was, inter alia, on the communication tools used, the forms of contact with journalists, the maintenance of feedback relations, the use of modern technological solutions, but also the opinions of police officers about the media. Another area subject to examination was the perception of the effectiveness of individual media in the process of disseminating messages addressed to the social environment of the police.

Journalists in Poland, in exercising their statutory rights to obtain information, pursuant to Article 11(2) of the *Press Law* [1]*,* may contact, inter alia, press spokespersons, who are obliged to maintain contact and provide answers. In the case of the police, the manner, scope and form of action of authorised officers or employees vis-a-vis representatives of the mass media are set out in the Regulations of the Chief Police Commander of 2018 [2] amending the norms on forms and methods of press and information activity in the police from 2007, which were also

amended in 2014 [3].

According to these regulations, those authorised to conduct communication activities are: Chief of Police, Commander of the Central Bureau of Investigation of the Police, Commander of the Bureau of Internal Affairs of the Police, Commander of the Capital City Police, and provincial police chiefs, who have full-time press officers at their disposal [4].

On the other hand, all heads of city and district police headquarters exercise these powers through press officers, who may combine tasks in the press service with other duties [5]. The group of press officers responsible for press and information activities in municipal and district police headquarters of the Silesian garrison was included in the study project described in this paper.

It is worth pointing out that, in accordance with the cited ordinance, information on police activities (within the limits of their competence, of course) may also be provided by officers and employees prepared and authorised to do so on a one-off or temporary basis by the competent press spokesman within the scope agreed with him/her. In emergency situations, directly at the place where official

activities are carried out, information may be given to a journalist – upon express request and on presentation of a press card - by an officer who is there, and in the case of an incident requiring the participation of more than one police officer, either their commanding officer or an officer designated by him or her. Such statements should, however, according to the cited ordinance, be of such a general nature as to make it impossible to identify the persons described and to make comments prejudging their guilt.

However, it is the press officers who form the basis of the system of maintaining relations between the police and its public through the mass media, as "cooperation with the media and communication with the public begins at the local level" [6]. In accordance with the current legislation, press officers at city and district police stations perform their tasks primarily by informing the mass media about the activities undertaken by the police chief they represent. Their competencies also include informing the regional media about undertakings carried out by individual organisational units of the command, as well as its subordinate units, e.g. police stations or posts. In addition to the functions of organising, coordinating and – what seems to be of key importance – implementing media relations activities for press officers, from the planning sphere in the area of police communication policy, there is a possibility of participation in shaping the strategy and concept of information activities in the area serviced by their headquarters, and relating to undertakings taken by the police to solve the most important problems in the field of social pathologies, criminogenic phenomena, prevention and broadly understood contacts with the public. In technical matters, press officers, being in contact with the spokesperson of the provincial police headquarters competent for them territorially or other structures of the ministry, may prepare and transmit, as well as post on Internet media, press releases and photographic, film and audio materials. At the same time, these powers indicate the desirable professional competences of press officers who deal with the creation, development and dissemination of multimedia materials.

The press officer, in consultation with the spokesman of the regional headquarters, is also entitled to provide national and foreign media with information on issues concerning the functioning of the district or city headquarters.

The tasks of an officer carrying out media relations activities also include responding to questions raised, as well as responding to press criticism – albeit in this case in consultation with the spokesperson for the provincial commander. This applies both to publications criticising the municipal or district department, the department's organisational units and its subordinate units. The role of the press officer is also to coordinate and provide substantive assistance when information is provided to journalists by the department's organisational units and its subordinate units.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The management of social communication is important from the point of view of various institutions operating within urban, regional, national and global structures. It is particularly important in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the shaping of the Smart Sustainable City according to the Quadruple helix [7, 8] and Quintuple helix [9, 10] models.

An important role in these models is played by the media, which are seen and defined as tools for communicating and supporting public discourse. Insofar as they fulfil their role correctly, they provide reliable and objective information. To a certain extent, they are also a channel for the distribution of knowledge and provide the necessary information needed by society to function in everyday life.

The proper shaping of information policy has a significant impact on the reception of communicated content. Information is an important component of shaping a safety culture and an essential element of early warning systems [11]. It is therefore also an essential component of a Smart Sustainable City and can influence the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The importance and value of information was already emphasised by Agenda 21 (1992) in relation to the shaping of participatory democracy.

Modern society is often referred to as an information society, info society or society of information. The basic determinant of such a society is information and modern information and communication techniques, the use of which creates a digital society. Already M. Heyer [12] emphasised that humans, functioning in an information society, use interactive information systems to transmit and receive (encode and decode) information, and L. Soete [13] pointed out the vital importance of information in improving human life and making societies function more efficiently [14]. Many papers in various approaches are devoted to the digital society. Digitalisation has already engulfed almost all areas of life [11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20]. This is a new era of information directed to a society using modern information and communication technologies. Despite the developed information channels and ICTs, access to reliable information is still not satisfactory. The spread of disinformation and the amount of fake news effectively creates information chaos [21, 22].

As mentioned, reliable information influences the formation of a safety culture. An important role in information processes in this respect is played by the police press service, to which the empirical research presented below is devoted.

In order to raise the level of specialised knowledge and skills, the press officer is obliged to participate in training courses on the officers' contacts with the mass media. The description, contained in the quoted regulations, of the duties of officers dealing with contacts with journalists indicates that press officers "are responsible for an increasing number of tasks, which is a result, among other things, of the dynamic development of new media and forms of media" [23]. Of course, it is worth remembering that the police officer, as a news dispatcher, is in a privileged

position compared to other corporate or institutional press officers, as he or she has information on matters that are usually in the focus of the mass media. Therefore, "it will be radically different for journalists to be interested in the information offer of a police press officer, a spokesperson of a struggling retail chain or a person in charge of media relations of a company that is a natural monopolist. The attractiveness of the *communication product* affects the effectiveness of the spokesperson's activities as expressed by the media presence rate" [24]. The significant demand for the news provided by the press officer determines the nature of the activities he or she must undertake to communicate it to journalists. Reaching out with information about the successes achieved in fighting crime most often does not require special efforts, unlike, for example, the activities of a spokesperson for a commercial company, who has to convey with media relations techniques data about the qualities of the products offered. In contrast, unlike many other press officers, police press officers should remain officers of an institution that functions around the clock. Hence, 'the press service in the police operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. A developed on-call system, an active mobile phone – allow journalists to verify information on an ongoing basis" [25].

By maintaining regular contact with reporters employed by the editorial offices or – which in practice is sometimes a source of additional problems – associates of the editorial offices or so-called citizen journalists, they have to represent the police while responding to the expectations of mass media representatives. The journalistic community in relation to the press officer varies in terms of size and preparation for reporting on police-related topics. Furthermore, the requirements arising from the technicalities of the individual media vary. In the case of the traditional press, these include, for example, deadlines for publication imposed by the printing schedule, and in the electronic media, for example, issues relating to live broadcasting, recording or multimedia development.

A level of competence is necessary for this, including not only an awareness of the legal norms regulating the conduct of a press officer, but also of the basic aspects of criminal, civil and administrative law. It is necessary to have knowledge of the substantive aspects of police functioning divided into the specifics of individual divisions, e.g. criminal, investigation, traffic, prevention, etc. Of course, skills in interpersonal communication, relationship building, public speaking or the ability to use modern content distribution media are useful.

An important issue is the aforementioned so-called citizen journalism. Increasingly, 'social media are a more important source and means of transmitting information than traditional websites and general-information portals – such as Onet.pl, Wirtualna Polska or Interia.pl. Of course, this does not mean that social media are becoming a monopolist for the most important information in the country, but it does mean that alternative channels of data transmission have now emerged" [26]. Article 7(2)(5) of the *Press Law* defines a journalist not only as a person who edits, creates or prepares press materials, but, particularly importantly, who is in an employment relationship with an editorial office or who engages in such activities for and under the authority of an editorial office. Although the definition excludes from the group of journalists the numerous holders of online presentations that are not listed in the court register of dailies and magazines, the facts are that they too are not infrequently an important part of the police media environment.

It seemed reasonable to carry out a research project because the dilemmas of the theory and practice of the press officer's service make it scientifically relevant to learn about the communication tools used to reach the local community with a message about the functioning of the department. It is interesting to find out how police officers involved in the media relations sphere perceive the communicative effectiveness of the mass media with a breakdown into different media categories. Conclusions from the everyday experience of the officers included in the study project also allow us to enrich our knowledge of the information preferences of journalists themselves, and in this environment of the so-called police reporters. Obtaining such data also has an application value for both information dispatchers and journalists and media managers.

METHODS

Press officers in the 32 units forming the Silesian garrison located in the southern part of Poland received questionnaires by e-mail. After typing in their answers, they sent them back to the e-mail address provided. The questionnaires were completed by all police officers who were press officers in the Silesian Voivodship at the time of the survey. The survey was conducted from 25 August to 14 September 2022.

The research project covered 13 district and 19 city police stations, which were located in the following towns and cities of the Silesian Voivodeship: Będzin, Bielsko-Biała, Bieruń, Bytom, Chorzów, Cieszyn, Częstochowa, Dąbrowa Górnicza, Gliwice, Jastrzębie Zdrój, Jaworzno, Katowice, Kłobuck, Lubliniec, Mikołów, Mysłowice, Myszków, Piekary Śląskie, Pszczyna, Racibórz, Ruda Śląska, Rybnik, Siemianowice Śląskie, Sosnowiec, Świętochłowice, Tarnowskie Góry, Tychy, Wodzisław Śląski, Zabrze, Zawiercie, Żory and Żywiec.

The research hypothesis was that press officers are holders of information that is attractive to journalists. Therefore, they do not need to make exceptionally complicated efforts to disseminate them (H1), and so they are most likely to use telephone communication without engaging in the preparation of press materials, illustrations or multimedia files, which is also due to the pragmatics of media relations activities. This is because, rather than material produced by the press service, journalists prefer to receive instant news of an event in order to make their own recording of images or sound, taking into account their own formal, technical or compositional requirements.

Fundamental principles of competition in the media market mean that journalists prefer to obtain information

without sharing the state of the art with their competitors, which implies a higher level of approval towards one-to-one contacts with a press officer than towards attending a press conference (H2). The diversity of the local media markets concentrated around the so-called urban districts and the rural districts makes the assumption (H3) that press officers of urban than of rural district departments maintain regular news relations with a larger group of journalists.

Given the increased importance of the computer network in communications, it was hypothesised (H4) that police public relations practitioners would consider online portals and social media to be the most effective medium for reaching their audiences. This implied the hypothesis (H5) that employees of these most popular media would also be best placed to interact with police spokespersons. As the journalistic profession is devoid of corporate characteristics and the situation in the media market, especially locally, has for many years been characterised by signs of crisis, it was assumed (H6) that press officers are contacted by casual employees or editorial staff rather than specialised police reporters. Problems in the media market also suggested (H7) a decline in the social prestige of the journalistic profession, and the need to clarify inaccuracies contained in media messages to the public indicated the popularity of the spokespersons' use of the statutorily available rectification (H8) as a means of correcting mistakes made by poorly prepared journalists.

The research project, which involved 100 per cent of the assumed respondents, i.e. officers with the competence to manage the social communication process in relation to the mass media, assessed the elements relevant to planning, organising, coordinating, implementing and evaluating the effectiveness of media relations activities.

The research project furthermore acquired data on the specifics of the journalistic community maintaining regular news coverage of police spokespeople, broken down by its size, media typology, level of specialisation, and assessment of substantive preparation for reporting on the events and phenomena described.

Linked to this area is the issue of the social reputation of the journalistic profession. Press officers were asked to assess the prestige of the profession, as they maintain ongoing relations with the staff of various editorial offices operating in the area of the diversified media market. In the performance of their duties, they have the opportunity to verify the quality of media messages created on the basis of data provided to journalists, and thus to form an opinion on their reliability, diligence and objectivity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Preferred communication tools
Following the survey, it was found that the most preferred form of maintaining communication relations with journalists by press officers was the telephone call. This method was preferred by more than half of the respondents (52 per cent). In second place, with 28 per cent of officers indicating this, was announcing the news they have by posting material on the website. A

communication tool dedicated to specific audiences, rather than disseminating knowledge to all users, was again ranked third. Less than one in ten respondents (9 per cent) preferred sending an e-mail to a specific journalist or editorial address. Maintaining relations via SMS or MMS messages was declared by 5 per cent of police officers. In contrast, meeting journalists in person was favoured by only 4 per cent of respondents. None of them also indicated social media as their preferred form of contact with media personnel (see Fig. 1).
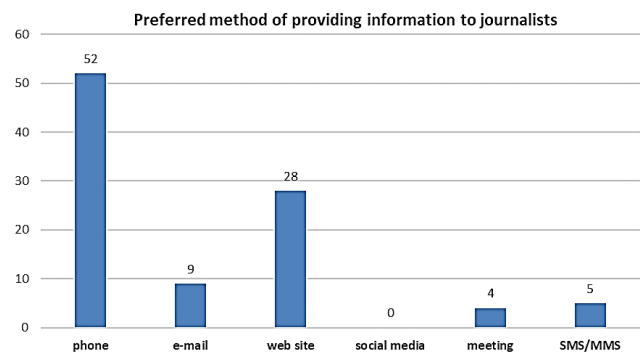

Fig. 1 Method of providing information to journalists preferred by press officers. Percentage basis

When dividing the participants of the research project into press officers of city and district departments, it can be observed that police officers on duty in larger urban centres less often prefer a telephone conversation in favour of sending text or multimedia messages to journalists. They are also more willing to meet with editorial representatives. Among police officers from city departments, there was also a higher level of approval towards publishing materials addressed to the media on the website than in the case of officers from district departments (Fig. 2).
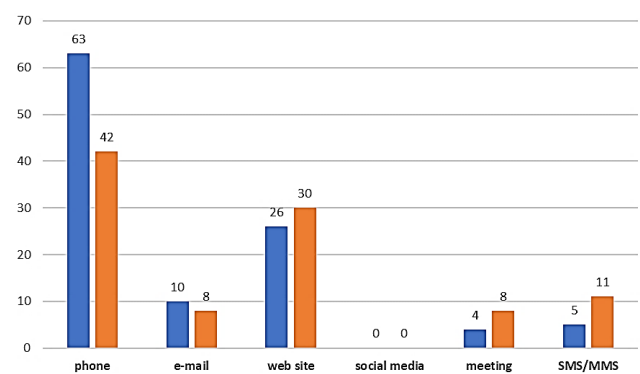

Fig. 2 Method of providing information to journalists preferred by press officers of police district departments (blue colour) against police city departments (orange colour). Percentage basis

Opinions on the media and journalists
Participants in the research project were asked for their views on the effectiveness of reaching the local community through specific news distribution channels. According to 33 per cent of the respondents, the mass media operating in cyberspace are of the greatest importance in the effectiveness of the implementation of information

policy. The next most important in this respect of communication ergonomics, in the opinion of the police officers surveyed, is social media, which received 30 per cent of indications. Meanwhile, traditional mass media, i.e. television and radio, garnered 15 per cent of replies each. The ranking is rounded off by the press in paper editions. In this context, it can be concluded that newspapers, which are recognised by 6 per cent of the respondents, are only of supplementary importance in the communication management process (Fig. 3).

Perception of media effectiveness
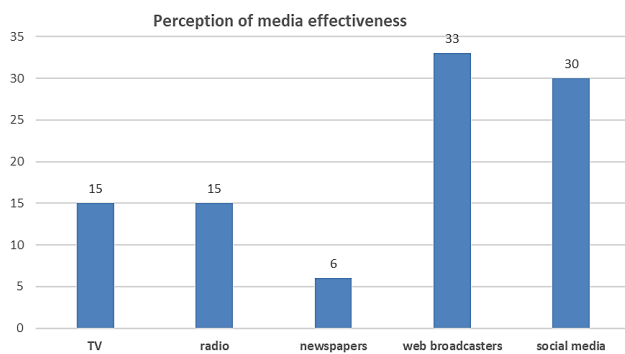
Fig. 3 Press officers' views on the media providing the most effective outreach to residents. Percentage basis

It is worth noting that among the press officers of the district departments, communication media based on the potential of cyberspace were held in much higher esteem. In this group, both web broadcasters and social media received 35 per cent of indications each. Radio also enjoyed a relatively high level of approval among them. Press officers at municipal police stations, on the other hand, were much more likely to value traditional media, with television and newspapers at the forefront, although they also chose to base the implementation of communication policy on entities operating in the computer network. It seems that the views of both groups of officers are shaped by the situation on the local media markets, where in larger urban centres commercial or local government periodicals are published that achieve a significant social reach, as well as television broadcasters that prepare their programme on the basis of concessions from the National Broadcasting Council or at least operate Internet television. In smaller localities, on the other hand, these types of media market entities are either non-existent or insignificant (e.g. only a monthly or quarterly magazine of the municipality or district office is available). Hence, there is likely to be a difference in opinion regarding the perceived effectiveness of the press, which received a 12 per cent response in the group of officers from city departments versus no indication from officers from district departments or television – 18 per cent versus 12 per cent respectively (Fig. 4).

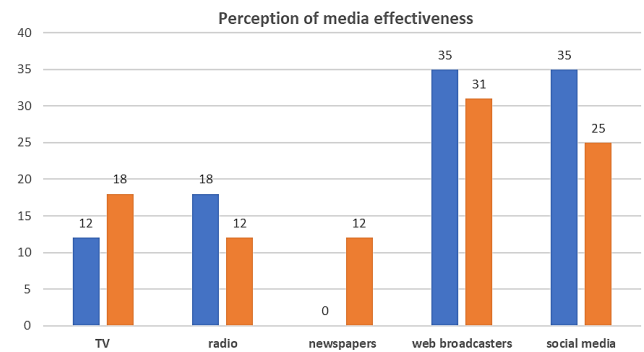**Perception of media effectiveness**

Fig. 4 Opinions of district department press officers (blue) vs. views of city department press officers (orange) on media providing the most effective outreach to residents. Percentage basis

Perceptions of journalists' preferred forms of contact with the information keeper

Maintaining relationships with the journalistic community on a daily basis, press officers have gained experience in identifying the expectations of reporters regarding the form of information provided to them. The responses of as many as 83 per cent of the officers surveyed show that media representatives prefer individual contact. This includes both direct (e.g. a meeting) and indirect (e.g. a telephone call) methods. The most important thing in this case is to isolate journalists from representatives of direct competition in the media market. A further 6 per cent of press officers expressed the belief that the form of contact is of little importance to journalists, while the remaining 10 per cent had no formed view on the subject. A significant finding is that no police officer surveyed identified the press conference, which is the opposite of one-to-one contact, as the mode of communication preferred by journalists (Fig. 5).
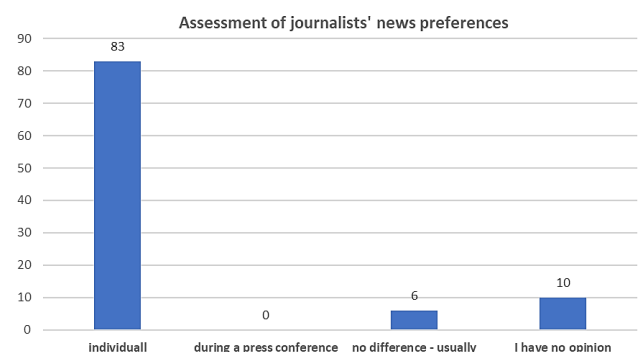
Assessment of journalists' news preferences

Fig. 5 Press officers' opinions on journalists' preferred methods of obtaining information. Percentage basis

Police officers from city departments were significantly more likely than officers from district departments to favour direct contact with representatives of the media – 89 per cent against 77 per cent of responses. Among them, there were also fewer respondents believing that the question of the form of contact is irrelevant to journalists, as well as declaring a lack of knowledge on the subject (Fig. 6).
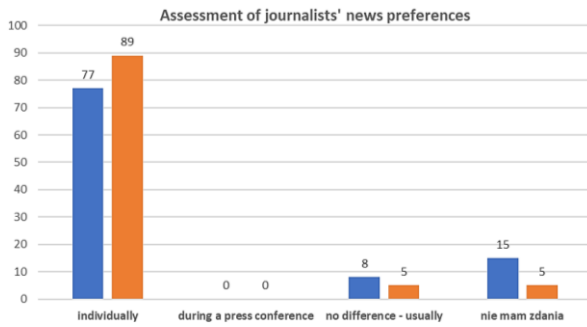
Fig. 6 Opinions of press officers of district departments (blue) and city departments (orange) on journalists' preferred methods of obtaining information. Percentage basis

Examination of the media environment of the press officer

When describing the media environment, the size of the group of journalists with whom press officers of individual units maintain regular professional relations was analysed. In the Silesian police garrison subject to the study, almost half of the officers (47 per cent) indicated a range of five to 10 persons. In second place (36 per cent of responses) were press officers who have daily contact with no more than five journalists. The remainder (17 per cent) declared interaction with more than 10 media representatives (Fig. 7).
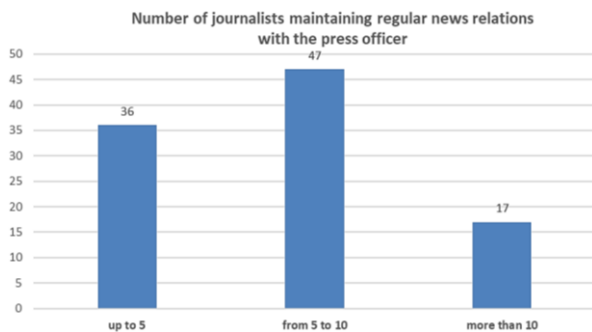

Fig. 7 Press officers' declarations on the number of journalists with whom they have regular news relations. Percentage basis

When comparing the answers of press officers from district and city departments, one can see a fairly obvious pattern concerning the increase in the number of journalists in units operating in larger urban centres. This is because indications of a group of more than 10 media employees were noted in 8% of district departments and as many as 26% of city departments (Fig. 8).
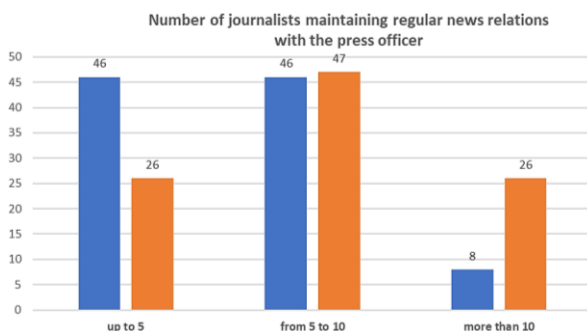

Fig. 8 Declarations of press officers of district departments (blue) and city departments (orange) on the number of journalists with whom they maintain regular news coverage. Percentage basis

Perception of the level of professional specialisation of journalists

In addition to the size of the media community, press officers were able to share their observations on the level of specialisation of the journalists working with them. The assessment referred to so-called police journalism. Reporters who cover the functioning of the law enforcement apparatus and often the judiciary tend to have greater expertise and experience in reporting on these events and phenomena. They are therefore often more demanding of press officers. Familiar with the procedures and laws in force, they can more easily, efficiently and precisely establish links between the facts reported or demand more comprehensive explanations. It is also not uncommon for them to have informal contacts among officers with operational knowledge or investigative powers. These contacts allow them to verify the news reported by the press service on the basis of confidential data. Working with specialised journalists poses a much greater challenge for the press officer. Among the officers participating in the survey, 32 per cent identified just such police reporters in their journalistic environment. In contrast, 38 per cent of respondents said that they nevertheless maintain daily communication relationships with casual staff members of the editorial offices concerned. In contrast, the remaining 30 per cent of respondents did not wish to comment on the level of specialisation of the journalists (Fig. 9).
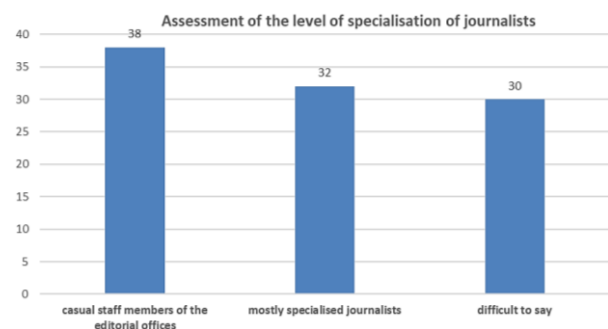

Fig. 9 Press officers' perceptions of the number of people specialising in police issues among journalists who consistently work with press officers. Percentage basis
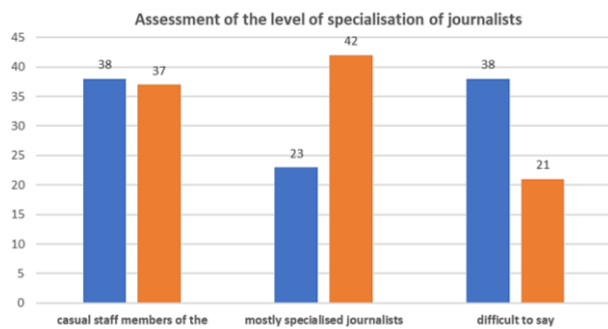

Fig. 10 Perceptions of district department press officers (blue) and city department press officers (orange) on the number of people specialised in police topics among journalists permanently cooperating with district department press officers. Percentage basis

It is worth noting the differences in the indications of officers at district and city police stations. While the

characteristics of the employees of individual editorial offices who have more or less casual contact with the police are similar (37% and 38% respectively), the disproportion in the assessment of the number of so-called police reporters is significant (23% against 42%). This may mean that larger urban centres have editorial offices characterised by a higher level of organisational development, resulting in the retention of specialised journalists instead of so-called generalist reporters. It is also interesting to note the significantly higher (by 17 percentage points) number of press officers of district departments compared to city departments who did not feel competent to assess the level of specialisation of journalists. This may indicate a greater diversity of journalistic environments in large cities, which broadens the press officers' cognitive perspective, provides opportunities for comparison and encourages the formulation of opinions.

Police officers from city departments were significantly more likely than officers from district departments to favour direct contact with representatives of the media – 89 per cent against 77 per cent of responses. Among them, there were also fewer respondents believing that the question of the form of contact is irrelevant to journalists, as well as declaring a lack of knowledge on the subject (see Fig. 10).

Opinions on the substantive preparation of journalists in the various media

Regular cooperation of press officers with journalists justifies an attempt to assess the substantive preparation of media employees to report on police activities. This concerns the awareness of the existence of regulations specifying the functioning of the law enforcement apparatus, procedures for carrying out particular activities and the scope of competences of officers, including, inter alia, vis-a-vis the public prosecutor or the judiciary. At the same time, day-to-day cooperation with journalists makes it possible to verify their substantive preparation, taking into account the distinction between particular types of editorial offices whose representatives contact a press officer. Thus, in the opinion of respondents, television journalists are characterised by the highest level of professionalism (41% of answers). This is followed by press and radio reporters with a similar number of indications (27 per cent and 24 per cent respectively). At the end of the professionalism ranking, officers placed those working for media entities available in cyberspace (only 8 per cent) – see Fig. 11.
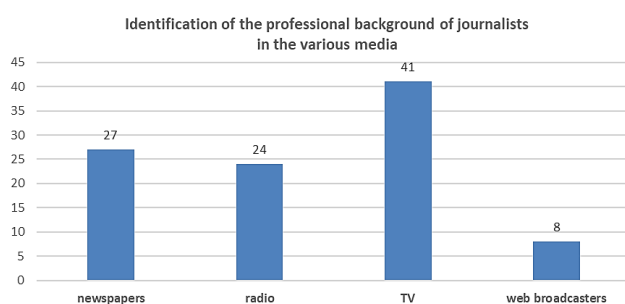

Fig. 11 Assessment of the substantive preparation of journalists to work with press officers by type of media. Percentage basis

A comparative analysis of the opinions of press officers from district and city departments shows that press journalists in larger urban centres are much more likely to have a professional reputation (35 per cent against 20 per cent). This may mean that officers in urban districts have to deal with journalists from large press outlets, which are often branches or subsidiaries of media concerns. The situation is different with reference to television, as in this case positive notes occurred far less frequently (34 per cent against 46 per cent). This may be explained by less frequent contact with employees of national or global television broadcasters, and the verification of the preparation of representatives of regional, local or Internet stations in relation to press journalists speaks in favour of the latter (35 per cent of responses from officers from city departments indicating press versus 34 per cent indicating television). On the other hand, the press officers of the city departments rated the journalists of the media available on the Internet slightly higher (9 per cent against 7 per cent), but were more critical of the professionalism of the radio journalists (22 per cent against 27 per cent) – see Fig. 12.
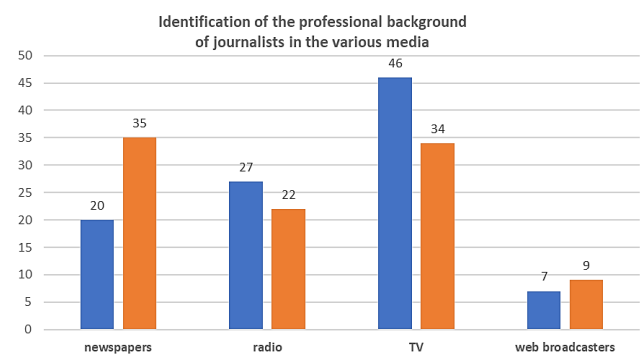

Fig. 12 Assessment of substantive preparation of journalists for cooperation with press officers of district departments (blue colour) and city departments (orange colour), taking into account the type of media. Percentage basis

Level of acceptance towards the use of official rectification as a means of responding to errors publicised in the media

In the event that an error, distortion or misrepresentation is found in press material published in the media, it is the task of the information policy manager of the institution concerned to consider intervening. In counteracting the misinformation of the media audience, the press officer can distinguish between "soft" fake news, which "is based on an inappropriate combination of content and illustration, wrong context, drawing false conclusions from true premises, mistranslation, etc.". The dissemination of untruths is then a kind of side effect. 'Hard' fake news will be a deliberately crafted lie" [27]. Depending on the discretion of the press officer, a legitimate reaction may be an action of an educational nature – talking to the journalist, explaining the reasons for the mistake and leading to the re-publication of the material once the inaccuracy has been corrected or the editorial team taking up the issue already presented factually. Another form of reaction may be to resort to the rectification guaranteed by *the Press*

Law (Articles 31a - 33), i.e. a form of compulsory and free-of-charge publication of factual and fact-related correction of untrue information. However, provoking the publication of an official clarification may provoke a reluctant reaction from the authors and sometimes a deterioration of relations with the editorial management. Another form of reaction is to take legal action, either with a civil lawsuit or a press offence. Thus, depending on the rank, importance and nature of the inaccuracy or misrepresentation revealed, the press officer may use tools of varying degrees of repressiveness. Among the officers participating in the research project, most, as many as 75 per cent, declared their approval of the use of the rectification provided by the *Press Law* as a means of correcting untrue news disseminated in the mass media (see Fig. 13).

Approval of the use of rectification as a form of response to media publications

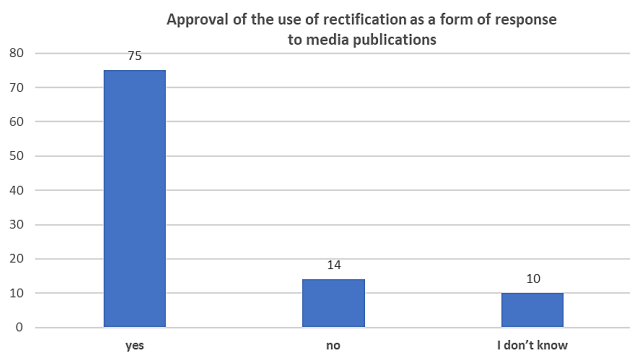yes: 75, no: 14, I don't know: 10

Fig. 13 Opinions of press officers on the acceptability of publishing corrigenda as an appropriate response to untrue content disseminated in the mass media. Percentage basis

It is worth noting that in larger cities, there was a significantly higher (by 13 percentage points) level of disapproval of the use of rectification, which may indicate differences between the media systems of urban and rural districts. It seems that in the case of an extensive media environment, which consists of many editorial teams, press officers may use a richer and more varied means of correcting errors. Given also the more numerous journalists reporting on the work of the police on an ongoing basis, perhaps not all inaccuracies are disclosed or, once disclosed, qualified for formal rectification in the media (see Fig. 14).

Opinions on the use of corrigenda

approval: 77 (blue), 74 (orange); disapproval: 8 (blue), 21 (orange); non opinion: 15 (blue), 5 (orange)
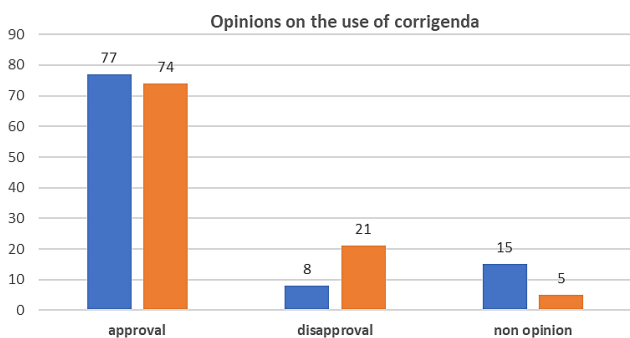
Fig. 14 Opinions of press officers of district departments (blue colour) and city departments (orange colour) on the admissibility of publishing corrigenda as an appropriate response to untrue content disseminated in the mass media. Percentage basis

Assessing the social prestige of the journalistic profession

Also linked to the analysis of specific aspects of journalists' professional preparation and working techniques was the question on the evaluation of the social prestige of the journalistic profession. An overwhelming proportion of the officers (61 per cent) stated that in their opinion the authority of journalists is average. On the other hand, among the respondents who chose to give an extreme value, those who placed the profession's reputation high (27 per cent) dominated, far outnumbering the group convinced of the profession's low social esteem (12 per cent) – see Fig. 15.
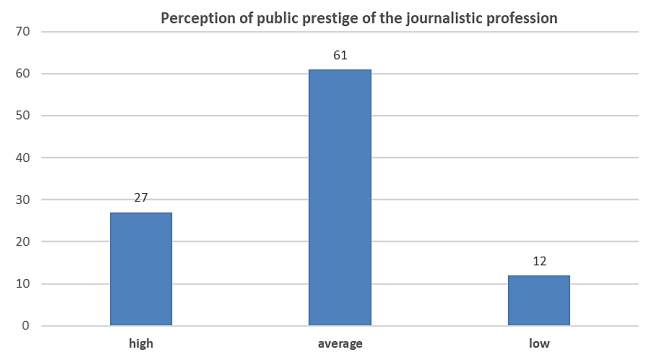
Perception of public prestige of the journalistic profession

high: 27, average: 61, low: 12

Fig. 15 Officers' identification of the social prestige of the journalism profession. Percentage basis

The results obtained further indicate that officers of city police departments were much less likely to describe their respect for the profession of journalist as average. They held more polarised views on the prestige of the profession, as they were more likely to declare both its high level (by 8 percentage points) and its low level (also by 8 percentage points) than officers in district departments. It seems that the source of such notes may be contact in larger urban centres with a much more diverse journalistic environment. Apart from professionally prepared journalists performing their duties on the basis of legal regulations and ethical standards, press officers in cities with district rights also maintain relations with reporters from editorial offices with a programme line focused mainly on sensationalism and arousing the emotions of the audience. The tabloid formula of journalism can be perceived as a burden lowering the authority of the profession (see Fig. 16).

Perception of the social prestige of the profession

high: 23 (blue), 31 (orange); average: 69 (blue), 53 (orange); low: 8 (blue), 16 (orange)
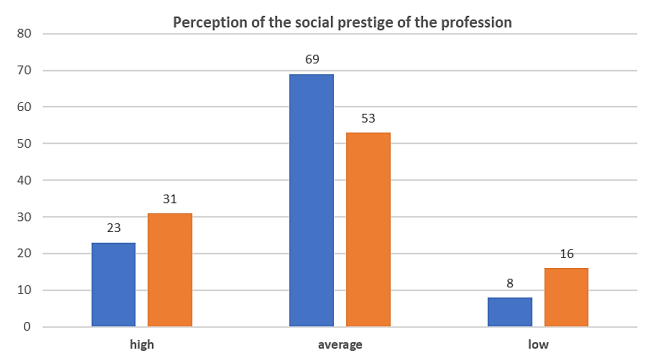
Fig. 16 Identification of the social prestige of the journalist profession by press officers of district departments (blue) and city departments (orange). Percentage basis

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the obtained results made it possible to confirm the research hypothesis (H1) about press officers' preference for methods of maintaining communication relations with journalists that ensure quick and efficient contact (e.g. telephone conversation – about 52 per cent). The following hypotheses were also confirmed: (H2) about press officers' belief that journalists expect one-to-one contact (c. 83 per cent) rather than holding press conferences; (H4) about surveyed officers' recognition of internet portals (c. 33 per cent) and social media (c. 30 per cent) as media that guarantee the most effective outreach; (H8) about police officers' high level of belief (c. 75 per cent) in the effectiveness of rectification as a form of response to errors disseminated in the mass media.

Partial confirmation was given to hypothesis (H3) that press officers of city departments maintain regular news relationships with a larger group of journalists than district departments, but with a result of only about 26 per cent against about 8 per cent, as did hypothesis (H6) that press officers are contacted by casual employees or editorial colleagues (about 38 per cent) than by specialised police reporters (about 32 per cent).

In contrast, neither the hypothesis (H5) that journalists of online broadcasters are best prepared to deal with the press officer (only about 8 per cent of responses) nor the hypothesis (H7) that the prestige of the journalistic profession is low in society (about 12 per cent) were confirmed.

In addition to the techniques analysed for maintaining relations with journalists and responding to crisis situations related to media publications, the personality of the press officer appears to be important for the effectiveness of social communication management of police departments. The ability to act in accordance with the legal norms applicable in the media space, while at the same time complying with the provisions of the police internal regulations, is important. Individual predispositions modelling the formula for performing professional duties also count.

These include responsibility, reliability, professionalism, availability and a sympathetic willingness to maintain a partnership with journalists, which is as important as the formal authority of the press officer [28].

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Dariusz Krawczyk
ORCID ID: 0000-0003-1823-0309
Silesian University of Technology
Faculty of Organization and Management
Roosevelta 26, 41-800 Zabrze, Poland
e-mail: dariusz.krawczyk@polsl.pl