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# IMPORTANCE OF THE INCLUSIVE REPORTING IN THE PROCESS OF CIVIL INTEGRATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (GEORGIAN PUBLIC BROADCASTER FIRST CHANNEL, 2021)

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## ABSTRACT

Clearly formed attitudes based on the morality and law force any citizen to respect, to recognize individualism of each person, his uniqueness and equality. Establishing of a kind of society having such democratic values and reaching of an absolute equality remains to be a key challenge in any country. Particularly, it refers to the persons with disabilities, as resolving of the given task requires overcoming of a physical resistance on top of the morality. “We are tired of being statistics, cases, wonderfully courageous examples to the world, pitiable objects to stimulate fund-raising”. (Hunt, 1966, p. 4) Reassessment of the attitudes implemented in the society is majorly guaranteed by the inclusive reporting with its specifics and characteristics. The present research, based on the example of the Georgian Public Broadcaster – First Channel demonstrates specifics of providing of the audience with the issue in a very delicate form. Legal and ethical levers, practical experience of media outlets are represented in it. In addition to the stated, ways of inclusive representing are discussed, being a method of revealing of significance and priority of the persons with disabilities.

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## Introduction.

“It is no longer acceptable to not have women at the table. It is no longer acceptable to not have people of color at the table. But no one thinks to see if the table is accessible”. (Heuman, 2019, p. 7)

It is the media who should play a focal role in overcoming of this physical or moral discomfort, which (in any case) exists in communication with persons with disabilities. The Broadcaster should give a stimulus to the society and to relevant authorities to overcome external factors preventing integration. All this must be provided in a conceptualized and accurate way.

“Inclusion” directly and indirectly means “involving” of the persons having features different from the majority, listening, sharing of their opinion, and, generally, mutually comfortable cohabitation with them.

From media's side representation of the issue in a similar way considers the following:

- Familiarizing with the groups different from majority and demonstration of their role in the process of development of the state;
- Reporting of their opinions about current actual processes.

The stated attitude will show to the auditory not the differentiated features, but a mutual (general) view, a unifiable opinion around any definite issue.

According to the data of the Georgian Statistics National Agency, as of the date of 2021, 15,945 persons with disabilities had been registered in frames of the health protection state program.

It is a part of the population, which must be able to occupy its dignified place in the community, to participate in settlement of the problems which are connected with them, or generally, exist in the country. In this process of integration, the Broadcaster is a mediator who, includes into the agenda, talks about, conducts discussions about interests of the persons with disabilities, their demands, advantages, significance and role in the process of formation of a complete society.

#### **Agenda-setting theory in terms of the "limited effect".**

A contemporary society enjoys all kinds of moral understanding and normative levers for creation of an equal environment for the persons with disabilities; however, the fact is as follows: recently, the persons with specific demands have no possibilities to exist with a full value and independently, to express their own opinion, to take a part in discussion of key issues.

The Constitution guarantees, that in implementation of the right of speech and manifestation media plays an important role, particularly the Public Broadcaster. It is the platform, which under the applicable legislation, must represent a universal space for everyone independently upon their physical abilities, or individual features.

It is the media who should play a focal role in overcoming of this physical or moral discomfort, which (in any case) exists in communication with persons with disabilities. The Broadcaster should give a stimulus to the society and to relevant authorities to overcome external factors preventing integration. All this must be provided in a conceptualized and accurate way.

While talking about media's role and influence we should name the stages passed by the media outlets step-by-step.

Theories established from the viewpoint of an impact on the audience are changed in direct proportion with the technological progress. Fields of impacts and barriers are transformed simultaneously. In 30 years of the XX century media researchers offered developed theories about mass communication means having an absolute impact, such as, for instance a model of "magic bullet/hypodermic needle". They directly talked about the fourth government which dictated rules of conduct to the society. In 50-60 years due to absence of important evidences, theorists started searching of alternative interpretations of an absolute impact on the mass communication outlets.

In the theory of the "limited effect" of an Austrian-American Sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld media is not considered as a stimulus inducing an unconditional effect. Here, attention is focused on its role, as on the consolidator of the existing belief. The stated theory in the process of obtaining information assigns a key role to the audience which controls what, why and in which form is requested.

According to Joseph Klapper in his book "Effects of Mass Communication" he states that "media should not be considered as an agent of changes. It should be deemed as a consolidator" (Klapper, 1960). According to the stated attitudes, in the contemporary informational epoch control is provided not by the media, but by the auditory.

Despite of the above-mentioned fact media remains to be a key mediator in the communication process. It may not solely dictate to the auditory how to think, but it really is capable to show to the society where attention should be focused.

The stated attitude leads us to the theory of the agenda. According to the classical understanding it means that media outlet has a skill to separate and provide the society with the issues personally that is, in its consideration, significant. It solely organizes messages according to priorities and personally determines their consequentiality.

In addition to the stated, there is the second approach according to which media may determine agenda not only by news, but by other programs as well. If we determine according to subject of our research, using different forms and genres the Broadcaster will formulate a kind of models of conduct, such as positive attitude to the groups of minority, improving of the existing values and attitudes.

Authors of the theory Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw consider that removing of any news from the agenda or vice versa, inclusion would have an impact on mods of the auditory towards the issue. In their judgements, they refer to the opinion of a sociologist Kurt and Gladys Lang:

“They (media outlets) constantly demonstrate kinds of subjects and dictate what we should think about them, what should we know and feel towards them”. (Defleur, 2010, p. 162)

Authors of the theory consider that the issues which are reported in the media with a specific accent are deemed as important by the auditory as well. Accordingly, if the media outlet is focused on diversity, particularly on the persons with disabilities, the auditory will pay attention to their problem automatically.

As it was mentioned above, contemporary society does not come under influence of media outlets. In its turn, the Broadcaster is not able to force it to think about the issue in the form desirable for it. However, the levers determined by the theory of agenda enables it to direct attention of the auditory to a definite issue. To resolve the given task the most effective is inclusive reporting.

Media in such form, without any tough message, delicately supports integration of the persons with disabilities into the society. On the first hand, it includes the issues significant for society into agenda, and on the another hand, it underscores an opinion of the part likely being in the shade of the society towards a definite issue.

In terms of the limited effect, in such form the Broadcaster will provoke reviewing of the attitudes already existing towards the persons with disabilities, public fixing of their opinions, demonstration of significance and necessity of the persons with disabilities to the auditory.

To reach the stated the Broadcaster must be ready to represent opinions of different groups while reporting of the topics determined by the agenda and in this form to show to the auditory significance of the minority in the process of formation of a civil society in efficient and disguised manner.

#### **Inclusive reporting – significance and advantages.**

Divergent opportunities, individual characteristics, differentiated attitudes are factors providing diversity.

It is the diversity that gives rise to the opportunity of a healthy discussion in a complete society. Diversity of attitudes underlies a constant drive for the truths. Providing of equal opportunities develops environment and attitudes. The stated steps, in their turn, create a socius, which adopts an individuum with a complete set of his unique features. It perceives him not as a barrier, but as a benefit in the process of formation of a desirable reality.

Despite of these deeply conceptualized and publicly recognized attitudes, there constantly exists a barrier from the majority in recognizing of the minority as a duly developed part. Without the latter one, it is impossible to talk about diversity from the viewpoint of the ethnical, religious, gender, age-related features or the persons with disabilities.

It looks like that the contemporary society is open towards the enlisted groups, but disguised walls creating a kind of discomfort in relations with them still remain and all this may be resolved by a key lever – inclusion. This term, directly and indirectly, means “involving” of the persons having features different from the majority, listening and sharing of their opinion, and, generally, bilaterally comfortable cohabitation.

In the stated process, as it was mentioned above, a relevant obligation is charged on the media. It is the media who, as a mediator, must support a process of civil integration. Taking a role of the platform completing the informational-educational function it should take care over awareness of the society. Unconditional guarantee of the given result is the inclusive reporting of the issues connected with diversity.

Such representation of the issue considers:

- Familiarizing with the groups different from majority and demonstrating of their role in the process of development of the state;
- Reporting of their opinions about current actual processes.

Such attitude will show to the auditory not the differentiating features, but a general view, a unifiable opinion around a definite issue.

Inclusive reporting considers revealing of non-dominant groups not only in news programs, but in different programs, talk-shows and entertaining programs.

A process of media representation should not refer only to definite dates connected with persons with disabilities. On top of protocolar reporting, it is important to separate relevant groups as subjects of the material, advantages of the socius, but not as the load, a subject of compassion or charity, as a medical diagnosis and others.

### **Role of the Public Broadcaster in the civil integration (Georgian First Channel – 2021).**

In any democratic state, a key lever supporting awareness and civil integration is the Public Broadcaster. In its turn (in normal conditions), the Public Broadcaster undertakes an obligation to create a kind of platform complying with the socius's interests and to become a central discussion space for each citizen.

The stated media platform, according to the indicated values, sets up program priorities. It tries to create a kind of platform where representatives of all groups are able to express their opinion. It refers to the groups whose voice is not frequent in the media. Surely, a process of separating of diversity in the society, on top of others, considers active inclusion of the person with disabilities into the program.

How can a media outlet reach the stated target? For this purpose, there exist definite tasks which are undertaken by a responsible Broadcaster and it works over them step-by-step. In this process efficiency and lack of alternatives of the inclusive approach is revealed.

For the purpose of due integration of the persons with disabilities, television must create a flexible program designated for the auditory having specific demands from the technical and content-related viewpoints. Technical part considers, for example, subtitling of transmission (for deaf and hard-of-hearing auditory) and sign-interpretation (using of sign-language).

As for the content-related part, it considers not only preparation of relevant materials about the persons with disabilities complied with standards, but their participation in discussion of different focal topics, their employment and involving in the process of creation of a content as well.

As the broadcasting institution, the Georgian Public Broadcaster makes all efforts to assign a particular role to underscoring of diversity in live and not only in live. With the account of the stated, one of the most key priority of organization is an universal service. In the stated clause on top of other groups, underscoring and involving of the auditory having specific demands is also considered (Broadcaster, 2021, p. 7)

The Broadcaster has updated its strategy and view document which includes participation of the persons with disabilities in the organizational activity. Reflection of diversity of opinions is a priority.

The Report of 2021 also reflects supporting of the persons with disabilities that considers trainings and guideline according to the reporting standards. These trainings were attended not only by employees of the Broadcaster, but by the persons with specific demands as well.

It is noteworthy that the news programs (not only in the period of elections) are constantly attached with sign interpretation. The program "Personal doctor – Mari Malazonia" is translated in the sign language on one of the Broadcaster's platforms, in live of the TV-school a special course of sign language is transmitted. Besides, since the year of 2022 the Broadcaster started subtitling of one of the programs "Master Chief" specially for deaf and hard-hearing auditory. According to them, the stated activity is aimed at supporting of due perceiving of the product and equal availability of audio-visual products for deaf and hard-hearing people". (Broadcaster, 2021)

In 2021, it was the first time when the Broadcaster, in the TV airtime, transmitted the paraolympic games with participation of Georgian Paraolympic sportsmen. It is a positive example in the context of inclusive reporting of persons with disabilities, when attention is paid not on the restriction, but on the advantage. According to the report of 2021: "Supporting of diversity and inclusivity represents a priority for the First Channel. Procurement and transmission of Paralympic games is an essential message for development of a better, inclusive society". (Broadcaster, 2021, p. 31)

On this stage, the Public Broadcaster employs five persons with disabilities. Under the submitted document, "on top of full-time employment, the Public Broadcaster develops a practice of employment of persons with disabilities in different projects".

According to the data published on the web-site of the Public Broadcaster, dynamics of reporting of persons with disabilities, in the period since 2019 – till 2021 has been increased by 44%.

Based on the data of the internal monitoring system of the Broadcaster, since the first of January, 2021 – till the 31st of June, 2022 (inclusively), on all platforms of the First Channel, in different programs, totally 499 units of materials were reported on the issues of persons with disabilities and their problems (running time 48 hours and 11 minutes).

First of all, it should be mentioned that the best example of inclusive reporting is integration of a person with disabilities, as of a participant, into the culinarian program "Master Chief".



The First Channel of the Public Broadcaster, in different talk-shows, informational-educative and educative-entertaining programs (“Real space”, “New Day”, “Day Code”, “Personal Doctor – Mari Malazonia) talks about persons with disabilities and the issues connected with them.

Additionally, a documentary sketch “Teledoc” should be noted. One of the films („On the other side of the mirror“, 06.11.2021) reflects a routine life of a young man. A main hero installs illuminating mirrors. Personage is a film director of the theater as well. In the working process, it is shown how he communicates with actors. In the period of discussions, expression of one’s opinions, adjusting of roles, expression of emotions nobody pays attention on the fact that the whole company consists of blind and hard-seeing actors.

The following factors make the documentary sketch a good example of inclusive reporting:

- Integration of persons with disabilities in differentiated theme;
- Focusing on a case (business) and ideas;
- Underscoring of opinions of personages;
- Positive context;
- Concentrating on advantages;
- Duplicating of an active life.

Integration of persons with disabilities in different materials, topically and essentially, is a good opportunity to demonstrate their intelligence, necessity in place of barriers and difficulties.

Another one material of the “Teledoc” named “With invisible threads” is based on narration of blind respondents. Activities, aims, routine life, desires and expectations of people of different professions are reflected in the sketch. Main heroes talk about their profession, how they graduated the institute, ways passed by them and what they are doing now.

In a definite part of the society there still exists a stereotype that persons with disabilities are not able to manage their own life independently and, accordingly, to be a complete member of the society”, - says annotation of the program. Films, moderately, step-by-step and easily show to the auditory that “view does not always consider seeing”.

A good example of the inclusive reporting is a program “Day’s Code” which was devoted to the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, celebrated on the third of December.

It is noteworthy that the first guest was the Chairman of the “Coalition for Independent Life” Giorgi Dzeladze. Solely being a respondent having specific demands he talked about civil rights of persons with disabilities, their activities, legal barriers and moods existing in non-dominated groups.

In the program many significant messages were sound out that will enhance reviewing of attitudes existing in the society. According to the respondent, the government (state) must not consider him as a “diagnosis. “A person must be assessed proceeding from his bio-psycho-social necessities” that is obtained almost by all citizens.

Mari Malazonia, in her program “Personal Doctor”, actively reports persons with specific demands and the issues connected with them in the health context. Topics are diversified enough and include the following issues: cerebral paralysis, hearing and sight problems, muscular atrophy, autism and others. It is remarkable that too many programs were devoted to the challenges existing in front of persons with disabilities in terms of Covid-19.

For more than one-hour the presenter of the program discusses with competent guests health-related problems, provoking reasons, rehabilitation processes, technical and material resources assisting to persons with disabilities in adaptation, current key challenges and ways of their overcoming. Physicians and sectoral experts give answers on the questions sent by viewers, using requisites available in the studio simplify understanding of significance of using of auxiliary devices and training process.

Almost all programs have a department “Parents diary” where parents share with the auditory histories of their children having specific demands. In the plot, they show family routine life, definite activities. Respondents sincerely talk about diagnoses, complications, main challenges and their own strategies of overcoming problems. Each case is shown in a maximally positive context and does not underscore a person with disabilities as a load, a subject of compassion or charity.

Another one rubric which actively passes in air is “Limited Abilities, Unlimited Skills”. In the materials, persons with specific demands personally demonstrate their own experience, activity, moods, emotions and attitude to the environment. They share with viewers details about their activities. They talk about the ways of struggling with barriers, about expectations they have. They advise to viewers if

how they should overcome fear or any kind of resistance. This rubric shows a respondent as a main hero, a subject of his/her own life and generally of the material.

It should be necessarily noted that all programs are attached with sign interpretation. Besides, the presenter, in some cases, personally uses sign language. In one of the programs, using technical means, she made viewers to feel existence with limited abilities.

### **Conclusion.**

In terms of the “limited influence”, despite of the fact that the mass media is not able to dictate to the auditory if how to perceive the issue, it is able to include the problem into agenda and society will start working over it itself. Such process of settlement of the issue particularly in relation to limited abilities, principally considers inclusion.

Georgian First Channel and Public Broadcaster make efforts to apply inclusive approach to reporting of persons with disabilities, in the context of their rights of expression and protection of interests.

- Talk-shows, informational-entertaining and educative programs transmitted on the air of the First Channel does not breach ethical standards established in reporting of persons with disabilities;

- No fact of their revealing as subjects of compassion or charity has been fixed while media monitoring;

- The Broadcaster makes an effort to adapt the broadcasting schedule with persons having disabilities that is confirmed by sign interpretation and subtitling;

- Inclusive approach is confirmed by the persons with disabilities being employed in the media organization;

- Analyze of the secondary data demonstrate the intensity of reporting of persons with disabilities has been abruptly increased in 2021 in comparison with previous years;

- Persons with disabilities and the issues connected with them majorly reported in the particular and medical context.

- We meet, but very rarely, materials where they are revealed in connection with a different topic or they are enabled, in collaboration with other bodies, to talk about key issues openly.

To improve theoretic-practical attitudes revealed in the process of research, increasing of activity in the following directions would be profitable for supporting of the process of integration of persons with disabilities:

1. Increasing of inclusion of the persons with disabilities directly in the process of a program, not only in plots;

2. Underscoring of opinions of persons with specific demands on the issues important for society;

3. Increasing of the number of programs devoted to rights and freedoms of persons with disabilities that will enhance awareness within the community and their stimulation for participating in civil activities;

4. Short video clips and social advertisements which underscore persons with disabilities not only as a barrier, but as a benefit in the process of formation of a civil society.

On the first stage of the civil integration it is important if the moderator, mainly the broadcasting institution, acknowledges a key message of the European Convention on Persons with Disabilities: “Nothing about us, without us”.

Divergent opportunities, individual characteristics, differentiated attitudes are factors providing diversity. It is the diversity that gives rise to the opportunity of a healthy discussion in a complete society. Diversity of attitudes underlies a constant drive for the truths. Providing of equal opportunities develops environment and attitudes. The stated steps, in their turn, create a socius, which adopts an individuum with a complete set of his unique features. It perceives him not as a barrier, but as a benefit in the process of formation of a desirable reality.

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