

The Public Perception and Media Campaign Against Yoga Practitioners in Romania – Case Study

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Abstract: *This case study aims to estimate the effects of the continuous defamation of the yoga practitioners in Romanian mass-media. The paper is based on the results of a quantitative research focused on the public perception about Romanian yoga practitioners, compared to their description in the media. The research also analyzed the opinion of persons belonging to the yoga movement, regarding the defamation media campaign and their testimonials about discrimination incidents. During the communism, in Romania the yoga practitioners were persecuted by the secret political police. After the communist period, Romanian yogis continue to face difficulties like media campaigns of defamation and hate speech. Our results prove that the negative media campaigns are important factors that caused the marginalization of the yoga practitioners as a social group and favored their discrimination in the Romanian society. For more than 25 years, the media constantly depicted the yoga practitioners in depreciative words. Our study proves that the perception upon yogis is very different for the people who know directly the yoga movement and its students and for the people who know the movement and the yogis only from media. The huge difference of the direct and mediated knowledge, and the fact that the words used by respondents to describe the yogis are similar to those used by press, suggest the assimilation of the mediated message by the public. There is strong evidence that this message is not true, since it is so different than the direct knowledge of people who came in contact with the movement.*

Keywords: *human rights, hate speech, stereotypes, defamation, discrimination*

I INTRODUCTION

Romania is the only country in the world where yoga practice was ever forbidden, during the communist regime. The interdiction referred to yoga practice, yoga teaching, possession and dissemination of information and written materials about yoga and was established in 1982 by an order of the Secret Political Police (Securitate) - order that was practically illegal. Until 1989, people who did not respect this abusive order of the Securitate were thrown into jail or were isolated in mental facilities. The secret police put under surveillance the persons that were known or suspected to practice yoga and conducted a lot of searches in order to confiscate books and other written materials on yoga.

When the communism came to an end in Romania in December 1989, yoga became legal. Different yoga courses started, yoga schools were founded and attracted a large number of persons. However, the yoga practitioners continued to face difficulties like discriminative treatment from the authorities and media campaigns of defamation and hate speech. From a historical point of view, we assume that the continuity of the officials in Police, Secret Services and Justice is responsible for the continuity of the persecutions of the yogis during the communism and after communism. The former elite of the communist regime found its way to leading positions in the political life of the post-communist regime. International reports and scientific studies about the situation in Romania confirm the control of the former secret services upon the “new” power structures and media system.

The media defamation campaigns against yoga practitioners is not a local phenomenon, specific to Romania. The biggest yoga schools in Europe and in other regions of the world were labeled from time to time as “cults” and subjected to media campaigns of defamation and other persecutions, including human rights violations. In order to protect the civil rights of the yoga practitioners, freedom of belief is usually invoked. The only legislation available that could protect the spiritual rights of the yogis is in the area of “religious rights”. Famous researchers like Karl-Erik Nylund point out [1] that yoga is *not* a religion, but a way of life with spiritual roots and aspirations.

In Europe, the freedom of belief and opinion is protected by Article 9 of the European Convention of Human Rights [2] and Article 10 of the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights [3]. Another important document is the “EU Guidelines on the Promotion and Protection of Freedom of Religion or Belief” [4] and was approved in June, 2013, by the Council of the European Union. The document is based on the principles of equality, nondiscrimination and universality.

The activity of the Anti-Defamation League for Yoga and Spiritual Movements (LAYMS) is inspired by the “EU Guidelines on the Promotion and Protection of Freedom of Religion or Belief”. Between the cases studied by our organization, MISA Yoga School in Romania is by far the most impressive in terms of

dimension and duration: a large yoga movement with over 30,000 followers (during the 25 years the number is estimated to be even larger) that report harassment, marginalization and discrimination incidents. If these alleged incidents had to be documented, the defamation media campaign of the MISA yoga school is a public phenomenon, well known in the Romanian public sphere. In order to understand the implications and the effects of this media phenomenon, LAYMS conducted in Romania a sociological research regarding the defamation and discrimination of the yoga practitioners from MISA.

The studies initiated by LAYMS aim to verify the discrimination of the yoga movement and to analyze its causes. The research implied a stage of quantitative research followed by qualitative research and case studies. *The research question of the qualitative research is if there is a correlation of the public perception with the content of the media defamation campaigns regarding the MISA Yoga School.* The hypotheses of the study are:

- (1) The defamation campaigns of the media affect the yoga practitioners in Romania;
- (2) The public perception regarding the yoga movement refers to the content of the defamation media campaigns;
- (3) Discrimination of yoga practitioners is related to the defamation campaign.

The present case study aims to highlight the correlation of the media constructed image of the Romanian yoga movement with the perception of the public. When asked to describe the movement or to say why they have a bad opinion on it, the public uses the stereotypes repeated by media for more than 25 years, in thousands of negative articles and news items. However, people who do know directly the movement claim that the image of the movement in the media is not consistent with their own experience regarding the movement and have a good opinion upon it. How is it possible that the public is so strongly divided? The answer should be searched in the content of the media campaigns and in the fact that they are not based on real facts (as investigations of several NGOs confirm).

Because of threats that resulted from media hate instigation, the founder of MISA Yoga School, Gregorian Bivolaru is a political refugee in Sweden since 2005. One of the reasons that granted him asylum is the hatred media campaigns against him and his yoga school in Romania.

II PREVIOUS STUDIES ON THE MISA YOGA SCHOOL

There are only a few previous scientific studies about MISA Yoga School, in spite of the large number of articles published by media (especially in tabloid media). None of these analyze the media campaign against the yoga movement and its effects. Until now, there are no anthropological studies of the movement and no studies of the organizational culture.

One of the most interesting studies about MISA Yoga School is a sociological study that was published in 1997 in the Romanian Journal of Sociology and was conducted by Carmen Mărcuș [5]. The study is a quantitative research based on 800 interviews with yoga students attending the MISA classes and was focused on the psychological and sociological effects of the yoga practice. Most of the respondents claim to have a better health and other effects of the yoga practice, like a state of harmony and well-being. The statistical analysis of the data revealed more significant result: a very low rate of addictions (to tobacco, coffee, alcohol), no drug consumptions, very good professional results and family situation. The study also revealed some problems that yoga students had to face in family and society– at that time – due to the hate speech of the media campaigns.

Two important studies that were conducted by European experts for the documentation of the asylum case of Gregorian Bivolaru in Sweden are also available [1], [6]. These are important for our case study because they prove that one of the constant theme of the media campaign against the yoga movement – the allegation that the Romanian Yoga School MISA is a dangerous cult – is false. The conclusion of these researchers was that MISA Yoga School has none of the characteristics of the “dangerous cults” and is a typical spiritual movement. According to Nylund [1], most of the hostility of the Romanian society regarding yoga is due to the Romanian Orthodox Church.

Some of the media articles claim, between other ideas, that significant facts about MISA were scientifically established – like, for instance, that MISA would be a “cult”. The reality is completely different (as shown above), but the mystification done by the Romanian media goes further. The so-called studies mentioned by media do not exist (and even the authorities that, according to media, issued the studies, do not exist). Other so-called scientific studies were done by secret services officers without interviewing not even one yoga practitioner [9].

A psycho-sociological research was conducted in 2005 by members of the Yoga School, in order to establish the compenence of the group and the typologies of yoga practitioners [7]. The results show that the number of divorces, addictions, psychic problems etc. is considerably lower in the yogis’ group than the average values in the Romanian society.

The historical perspective of the MISA case is best documented by the researcher Gabriel Andreescu who wrote many articles and two books on the subject. After analyzing the secret archives of the Securitate, Andreescu was able to prove that the same officials were responsible for the oppression and repression of

yoga practitioners in Romania during communism and in the post-communist era. He published exclusive interviews with subjects of abuses of authorities and victims of discrimination [8], [9]. Andreescu's hypothesis that the former Securitate was responsible not only for the repression of the yoga movements, but also for the hate speech of the media against MISA after 1989 is consistent with researches over media independence (or rather lack of independence) in Romania after 1989. In [10], Richard Halls explains the total control of the media after 1989 by the former secret police (Securitate), even after its legal dissolution. Another category of studies analyzes the MISA Yoga School from the perspective of discrimination, hate speech and human rights violation of its members – two examples are the studies conducted in 1996 and 1998 by APADOR-CH [11], [12].

III THE METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

The sociological research of LAYMS started in 2014 with a quantitative research (that offered the research data corpus for the case study in this article). The quantitative research had two main directions:

1. The defamation/discrimination as perceived by the members of MISA community of yoga practitioners;
2. The perception of the Romanian citizens about the yoga practitioners of the MISA Yoga School.

The research consisted of two quantitative researches (two different investigations), conducted in parallel. The "internal research" was applied to the community of yogis from the MISA Yoga School and was focused on their testimonials and perception about the defamation campaign and discrimination incidents. The "external research" had as subjects people who do not practice yoga, in order to find out their perception upon the movement. In the first stage, the pilot research was conducted in order to establish the method, the samples and the questions.

The internal research was undertaken at public events of MISA Yoga School and at yoga classes in different cities in Romania. The external research took place in the same cities as the internal investigation. The research method was similar: questionnaires. For the external investigation, the questionnaires were applied randomly by operators in public spaces, on a sample that has similar characteristics with the group of yogis from the professional point of view.

The internal investigation had 19 questions, while the external research had 22 different, specific questions. There were both fixed and open questions. The answers of the open questions were classified in "favorable" and "unfavorable". Both questionnaires were validated after a pilot survey.

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

1. 0.925 for 163 standardized items, for the internal investigation and
2. 0.713, for 85 standardized items, for the external investigation.

According to [13], the Cronbach's alpha values greater than 0.7 are acceptable for the internal consistency of the questionnaires (values greater than 0.9 prove an excellent consistency).

In the field research, each of the two questionnaires has been applied on a statistical population for the sociological research, and data samples have been processed with a predictive analysis program (SPSS - Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, from IBM). The total number of interviews in this stage was over 3000 (1520 for the internal research and 1520 for the external research). The collection and interpretation of data samples took place from June to December 2014.

In order to triangulate the results of the first part of the sociological study, several different stages of the research followed, including the case study presented here. For instance, in 2015 LAYMS conducted 20 individual case studies and open interviews with victims of discrimination, according to qualitative research methodology, as explained in classical manuals of sociological research (see, for instance, [13] and [14]).

The case study reported in this paper is part of the qualitative research and refers to the correspondence of the image of the public to the image presented by media about the yoga movement. In order to see if there is such a correspondence, LAYMS analyzed over 300 articles about the yoga movement (the study was done in 2015-2016). The results of this research are published at <http://www.layms.net/index.php/ro/documente-layms>. With the method of content analysis of the articles, the main themes and stereotypes were identified. Then, the results of the two researches were compared. The hypothesis of the research (that the stereotypes in the media campaign appear in the answers of the first research) was tested based on the data corpus.

The limits of this research are due to the dimension of the media campaign against MISA. Although the articles chosen for the content analysis are a significant sample of data, the evolution of the media campaign during time should be addressed specifically in further research.

In the next sections we offer the results and statistical data of the quantitative research that are relevant to the present case study. The entire document can be studied at <http://www.layms.net/documente/Cercetare-Sociologica-LAYMSprvind-cazul-MISA.pdf>

IV THE INTERNAL INVESTIGATION

The group of the respondents of the internal investigation (1520) was estimated as 10% of active yoga students of the movement (in March 2014, the estimated number of yoga students was 15,000 in Romania), of

which 42% were males and 58% females. The characteristics describe a complex sample, complete, balanced in terms of various demographic variables (age, gender, occupation, area of residence, etc.), which allows acceptance as a representative sample for the internal investigation. This also is the premise of the generalization of the survey results to the entire social group of MISA yoga practitioners.

The internal investigation questioned the perception of the yogis from MISA Yoga School about the defamation and discrimination they are subjected in the Romanian society. The questions that were addressed through this part of the quantitative research were, among others:

- Does the yoga practice in MISA School expose yoga to defamation and/or discrimination?
- Is there a correlation of these incidents with the media campaign (for instance, regarding the content)?
- In what context discrimination and defamation manifested, in what way and what generated it? Can these be related to the media campaign?

The participants in this study were yoga students with age from 18 years to 65 years. Most respondents fall into the age range 35-44 years old (50.70%), followed by those aged 45-64 years old (23.80%) and those between 25-34 years old (15.20%). The most poorly represented in the sample respondents are people aged over 65 years (1.40%). The age structure of respondents indicates a complete and representative sample of MISA yoga practitioners.

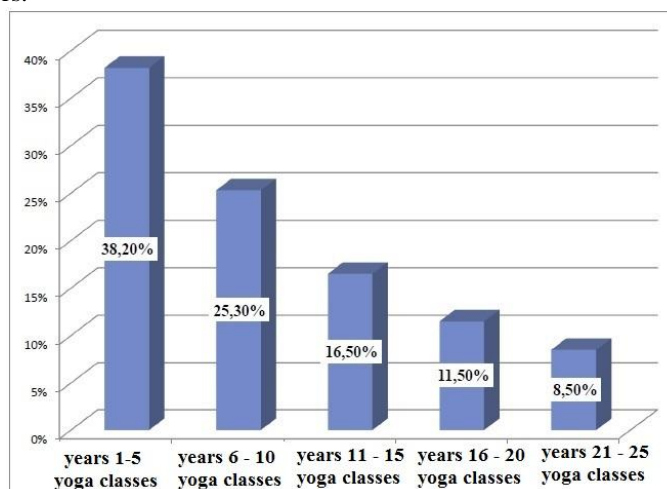


Figure 1. Internal Investigation - Sample Structure depending on the length of the MISA Yoga School

According to MISA yoga school organization, yoga classes are divided by years of study and respondents have declared the period they took these classes (Figure 1): 1-5 years of yoga classes: 8.5%; 6-10 years of yoga classes: 11.5%; 11-15 years of yoga classes: 16.5%; 16-20 years of yoga classes: 25.3%; years 21-25 yoga classes: 38.2%. One can notice that about 80% of people who took part in this study have an experience longer than 10 years in yoga classes held at MISA, which allows them to have a significant experience and opinion on the issues investigated in this study.

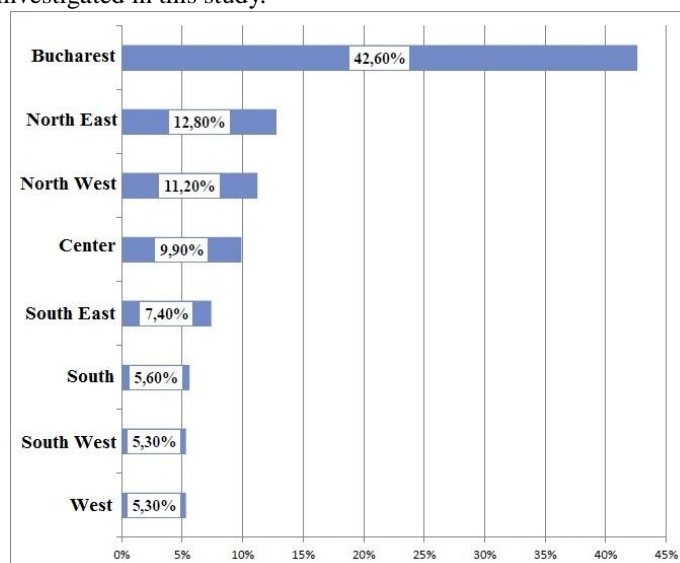


Figure 2. Internal Investigation - Sample structure according to the area of residence

The sample of respondents brings together people living in all geographic areas of the country (Figure 2):

- Bucharest (capital of the country): 42.6%;
- the north-eastern part of the country: 12.8%;
- the north-western part of Romania: 11.2%;
- central zone of Romania: 9.9%;
- the south-east: 7.4%; the south of the country: 5.6%;
- western area: 5.3%; the south-west: 5.3%;

The educational level distribution also corresponds to the average distribution of the whole group, as reported in [5] and [7], with more than 75% university graduates (according to [7], 15% of those have also PhD degrees). From this point of view, the sample is as follows:

- socio-psychological, IT, legal, artistic, editorial or are students, pensioners and unemployed: 23.1%;
- engineering or related areas: 16.8%;
- economics: 10.5%;
- medicine: 10.1%;
- other occupations (such as drivers, architects, realtors, beekeepers, bakers, dispatchers, cooks, security agents, tailors, various operators etc.): 9.3%;
- education: 8.9%;

The questionnaire was applied by operators and included 19 questions of different types: open, fixed, simple dichotomies. This section reviews only few examples of questions and the results of statistical analysis of the answers. The MISA yoga practitioners interviewed said almost unanimously, with a percentage of 90.3%, that they are exposed to defamation / discrimination in their daily life in Romanian society. Only a percentage of 9.7% of yoga practitioners of MISA claimed not to be exposed to defamation / discrimination.

The standard deviation for this question is reduced (0.297), indicating a greater uniformity of responses in the sample studied, confirming previous findings, namely that yoga practitioners of MISA expressed almost unanimous the opinion that they are exposed to defamation / discrimination in their everyday lives in a high degree.

When questioned on the context of defamation / discrimination, MISA yoga practitioners found that the following are the most common contexts:

- In family: 65.7%
- In relation with neighbors: 47%
- At work: 46%
- In public places: 42.2%
- Between friends: 35.6%
- Relations with the authorities: 34.2%

About the family context, respondents claim that their relatives are influenced by the media campaign and address them insults and ask for explanations. MISA yoga practitioners questioned stated almost unanimously (92.6%) that there are risks of defamation which, in their perception, are related to the media campaigns. Detailing the risks and types of incidents they were subjected, the yoga practitioners mentioned:

- 76.8% were bantered, mocked and denigrated;
- 69% were applied negative stereotypes, labeling and stigmatization;
- 68.1% were rejected / excluded by relatives / neighbors / friends;
- 67.9% had discussions, disagreements, quarrels;
- 60.7% were suspected and were asked for explanations about actions that they have not done;
- 56.9% had conflicts at work;
- 54.8% were subjected to an unjust or degrading treatment;
- 51.1% say their rights were not protected;
- 48% say their rights were not respected;
- 43.5% were threatened;
- 26.9% have experienced domestic violence;
- 26.3% have been refused access to public spaces and services;
- 24.8% missed some business opportunities;
- 2.8%, by other types of defamation / discrimination.

Another comment is necessary for the domestic violence that the respondents associate to the media campaign against MISA. The interviews with yoga practitioners revealed that the incidents are part of the pressure of the family to give up the yoga practice. In several cases, their family members were themselves victims of defamation and discrimination related to the MISA case, including work problems, conflicts with the neighbors etc. Therefore, they put pressure of the yogis to leave the movement in order to get rid of the problems. In other situations, typical conflicts between generations were intensified by the media campaigns (in both senses).

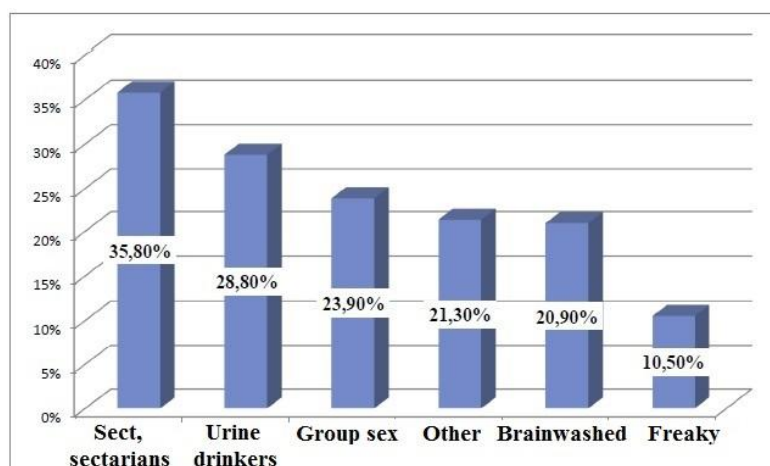


Figure 3. Internal Investigation - Stereotypes / negative labels applied to yoga practitioners of MISA

Figure 3 is a simple statistic of the stereotypes reported by the yoga practitioners – the insults or labels that they confessed to be subject to. There is no surprise that some of the yoga students decided to practice yoga in secret as much as possible. They made this decision because they consider that they would be regarded with suspicion, humiliated if their family, friends or neighbors would know that they go to yoga classes. 32% of the persons who prefer to keep their yoga practice secret consider that they would lose their jobs/positions if their superiors would know about yoga. They report a close connection between the incidents they suffered and the media campaign: the stereotypes, the quarrels and suspicions were directly related to the articles and news in the media.

V THE EXTERNAL INVESTIGATION

The sample of respondents participating in the survey consisted of 1520 persons, Romanian citizens who do not practice yoga at the courses organized by MISA and live in the cities where there are yoga classes (and the internal investigation was done). For sampling, non-probabilistic method was used, using a mixture of the types of samples described by Henry (1990) [14]: convenience, typical cases, critical cases, and the "snowball". The sample of respondents consisted of the following categories: male 55.1% and female: 44.9%. The sample is balanced in terms of gender respondents. The participants in this study are aged from 18 years and up over 65 years. Most respondents fall into the age range 35-44 years old (27.6%), followed by those aged 45-64 years old (21.7%) and those between 25-34 years old (17,2%). Sample respondents between the ages of 18-24 (12.2%), 55-64 (10.9%) and over 65 (10.3%) are approximately equally represented in the questionnaire. The age structure of respondents indicated a complete and representative sample of Romanian citizens who participated in external investigation.

97.1% of survey participants declared their profession. From this point of view, the sample is as follows:

- socio-psychological, IT, legal, artistic, editorial or are students, pensioners and unemployed: 42.8%;
- other occupations (such as drivers, architects, realtors, beekeepers, beauticians, bakers, dispatchers, cooks, security agents, tailors, various operators etc.): 22.2%;
- economics: 10.9%;
- engineering or related areas: 8.5%;
- education: 6.9%;
- medicine: 5.9%;

The sample of respondents brings together people living in all geographic areas of the country:

- Bucharest: 42.6%;
- North - East: 12.8%;
- North - West: 11.2%;
- Central: 9.9%;
- South - East: 7.2%;
- South: 5.5%;
- West: 5.3%;
- South - West: 5.3%.

In order to gather significant data for our research, regarding the influence of the media in shaping the public perception of MISA Yoga School, the respondents were asked to mention if they do know in person yoga students of MISA Yoga School or not. Therefore, it was possible to compare the effect of the media campaigns in constructing the public perception on this movement. The analysis of the answers revealed three categories of respondents: 55% know personally one or many persons in the yoga movements, 33% have

heard about MISA and Gregorian Bivolaru, but don't know anybody from the MISA Yoga School; 14% have never heard of MISA. The high percentage, 86% of Romanian citizens who have heard of MISA demonstrate the intense media coverage of the MISA case, that has impacted the population of Romania.

The Romanian citizens who have heard of MISA Yoga School, but do not know personally MISA yogis have information about them in the following media channels:

- News / TV: 97.60%;
- Newspapers / magazines: 52.60%;
- Internet: 26.90%;
- Radio: 5.00%.

This subset of respondents said almost unanimously (97.6%), the most important source of information about the MISA case is television news, certifying thus the major influence that media has in shaping opinion, particularly in this case, the Romanian society in shaping the perception of MISA yoga practitioners.

Other sources of information for this category of respondents, on the subject of MISA are newspapers / magazines (52.6%), the Internet (26.2%) and radio (5%). A percentage of 6.3% of respondents claimed to hear about MISA as a topic of conversations with neighbors or coworkers etc. without interacting with yogis of MISA.

The 22 questions of the external research referred mostly to the opinion of the people about the yogis, their acceptance and their willingness to collaborate with them. Also we were interested to find out if people consider that the MISA group is somehow treated different in Romania. The opinion of Romanian citizens (non-yoga practitioners in MISA) about the organization revealed some of the most interesting results. It was realized a parallel statistic analyze of the answers, regarding the two subcategories of respondents who heard about MISA and Gregorian Bivolaru: those who know and the others who don't know personally the yoga practitioners in MISA.

Table 1. Romanian public opinion about the MISA yoga School.

Opinion	People who heard MISA students but does not personally know	People who know MISA students in person
Favorable description	17,50%	67,60%
Unfavorable description	64,10%	19,60%
Other	16,50%	9,00%
“Don't know”	6,90%	6,90%

The results are shown in Table 1. The respondents who have heard about MISA yoga school, but not know the MISA yogis personally, described generally in proportion of 64.1%, the MISA Yoga School in derogatory terms, in a negative manner; 17.5% described it in appreciative, positive terms; 16.5% other descriptions; a rate of 6.9% declared they did not know.

The respondents who personally know yogis from MISA described in a proportion of 67.6% the MISA Yoga School in appreciative, positive terms; 19.6% described it in derogatory terms, negative; 9% gave other descriptions; a rate of 6.9% declared they did not know.

Note the dichotomy of bad-good opinion: people who know MISA students from the media have in most part a negative perception over the movement, while this percentage is lowered in the case of people who know MISA students directly.

The Romanians who heard about the organization and Gregorian Bivolaru but who don't know personally yoga practitioners in MISA, described, generally, in a proportion of 64.1%, the yoga MISA School in depreciative and negative terms such as: cult, dangerous group, people who are astray, mentally ill, must be put in mental hospital, depraved, freaks, extremist movement, a bunch of losers, dissolute, dangerous, devils, odd, obscene, a crap, aberrations, dangerous organization with weapons and drugs, do “unchristian” things, a criminal organization, liars, causes scandal, libertines, depraved, people with no goal. This results are consistent with the results in Figure 3.

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

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

VI INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS

The yogis that took part in this survey consider almost unanimously that they were subjected to (victims) of discrimination and defamation. They consider, also, that the discrimination and defamation incidents are related with the media campaign. They have noticed that other people (their families, their neighbors, their coworkers) tend to believe the facts presented by media and to adopt the opinion induced by media. They

have been insulted and verbally aggressed by people repeating the words of the media – the labels in which the media describes the yoga movement. They have been mocked, questioned or threatened, regarding the facts presented by the media. They agree upon the idea that the “facts” and general image presented by the media regarding the yoga movement are false.

In order to have a significant data interpretation, before comparing these results with the results of the external investigation, it is important to mention that there is strong evidence that, indeed, Romanian media published false information about the yoga movement. Apart from the testimony of the yoga movement members (that should not represent the only source of information about this issue, because of the personal involvement), there have been official investigations at the activities of the yoga school. For instance, in 1996, APADOR-CH took part as an observer in the activities of the movement and came to the conclusion that the “disclosures” published in media regarding immoral, illegal or occult practices of MISA were not sustained by facts [11]. Evidence pointed out that all accusations in media were calumnies. The fact that a lot of yogis were under surveillance of the Romanian Secret Service since 1995, together with the fact that no evidence of illegal activities came out of these surveillance activities, is consistent with the argument.

The data collected in the internal investigation are consistent with the results of the external investigation. The persons outside the movement who do not know yogis directly are very suspicious and reluctant toward them. This confirms the hypothesis that the defamation campaign of the media affects the yoga practitioners in Romania. The yogis claim that occasionally other people insult them – and the people outside the movement, although they were not asked if ever insulted a yogi, speak of them in the very words the yogis mention – which are the stereotypes published in media.

Results are also consistent with the answers of the people who know yogis directly, at a certain extent. These respondents have a significantly better opinion about the yoga movement (than those who heard about them only from the media) and they declare to be willing to cooperate with the yogis. This category of respondents is also, at a certain extent, influenced by the media campaign. They are reluctant in some directions towards yogis, but they are aware that there is a defamation campaign that is not based on real facts.

Is there a contradiction here? If the people who know the yogis have a better opinion and attitude towards them, why the yogis claimed to be persecuted and insulted by the people in their entourage? Who are the persons who discriminate and persecute them? And if lot of yogis declare that they prefer to practice yoga in secret, how can they be discriminated as yogis if the people around them don't know they practice yoga?

These seemingly contradictions were understood during the semi-open interviews with yoga practitioners. For instance, somebody who was fired because the boss found out that she practices yoga explained that she had not spoken directly to that boss not even once and the only reason invoked was the fact that she is a yogi. Somebody else narrated that he did not receive a promotion because the policy of the company did not accept yogis on leading positions. Another person told us that she was harassed by a teacher when she was in school about all the articles that appeared in the media on this subject. Another one confessed that his fiancée's parents did not agree with the marriage because he practices yoga in the MISA Yoga School. All these persons chose to continue the yoga practice but to keep it secret. Therefore, when analyzing particular situations, we discovered that there is no factual inconsistency about these results.

In previous sections several comments were made about the family incidents reported by yoga practitioners. How can be such incidents considered to be discriminations? The answers revealed that the family members of the yogis are often subjected to discriminations themselves. Therefore, they put pressure on the yogis in order to solve these problems. In other situations, family members were afraid for the integrity of their relatives who do yoga and try to force them out of the courses. Both situations are obviously the effect of the defamation campaign and of the discrimination caused by the campaign.

The strong cognitive influence of the media campaign is proven by the fact that there is a huge discrepancy of how people who really know yogis think about them and the way yogis are judged by people who never met anyone of them in person. One can conclude that the very detrimental image of MISA yoga School and its founder, Gregorian Bivolaru, among the Romanian citizens (yoga non practitioners at MISA), was generated and maintained by the media presentation (and especially by the broadcasted news which, according to statistics, represent the main source of information for Romanians). This also confirms the hypothesis that the defamation campaign of the media has an effect on the public perception regarding the yoga movement. Romanians who heard about MISA only from media have an overwhelming negative opinion about yogis, whilst the opinions are balanced for people who know directly the movement. The answers reflect the strong impression of the mass-media discourse and the mediated stereotypes. Therefore, the research hypothesis were confirmed as the stereotypes in the media campaign appear in the answers of both people who are subject to them and of people who use them.

VII CONCLUSIONS

The research presented in this paper use the results of a quantitative research regarding the public perception upon the Romanian yoga movement and compares it to the content analysis of the media campaign. The case study revealed the correlation of the stereotypes used by mass-media with the public opinion upon the subject.

The case study confirms the hypothesis that the public perception upon the yoga movement is related to the media defamation campaign. The consequences of the defamation campaign of Romanian yoga practitioners are the marginalization of the yogis group in the Romanian society and different particular discrimination incidents. Almost every single person that took part in the internal investigation of the quantitative research and all the subject of the qualitative research has been victims of discriminative actions (treatment) and/or have witnessed such situations in the case of the colleagues. It is interesting the fact that the members of the yoga movement chose to continue the yoga practice, in spite of all difficulties. Further research should address the internal psychological mechanisms that can explain this situation.

The different perception of the persons who know directly and indirectly the yoga movement is a proof of the media influence. The fact that the respondents refer to the yoga practitioners in the term used by media (for instance, calling the yoga movement a cult) shows the extent of this influence. On the other hand, the better (favorable) perception of people who directly know the movement and the yogis, shows that mass-media constructed an altered representation of the reality in the case of MISA Yoga School.

Much more research is needed in order to fully understand the phenomenon. Further study should also address the family conflicts generated by the media campaign. The data corpus from the quantitative research is not sufficient in order to explain the interactions at the family level. Further research should also address the cases of the yogis who claim to suffer a psychological trauma because of the media campaign. As previous studies suggested, the case of the Romanian yoga movement can be considered as a wound of a society that seem unable to reach a functional democracy.

The yoga students say that they have problems, just because they learned yoga in MISA Yoga School, both in family and at work. Our study revealed a large number of implications, personal drama and injustices at personal level that are perceived by the subjects as a direct consequence of the defamation campaigns in mass media. Therefore, their perception as being the most discriminated group is in the Romanian society is sustained by evidence and should be treated with appropriate attention by both researchers and authorities.

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