

The impact of entertainment television: Political communication in *Big Brother Bulgaria*

Master Media Studies: Media, Culture and Society

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1. Introduction

“Despite the aim of the reality show *Big Brother*, and notwithstanding the fact if it is admissible or not to have political debates, this total censorship of specific political opinions states, that the television channels in Bulgaria are afraid of the political elites, and at the same time this demonstrates that entertainment programs are part of the game” (*Big Brother* 2012 contestant).

The role of the entertainment industry and the television as a central source of information in people’s everyday lives has transformed the traditional methods of socio-political representations in the modern day society. Nowadays, the television programs have a complexity of roles, not only to entertain, but also to be socially responsible mediums for the distribution of information. This fascination, excitement, and richness in the variety of television formats, as well as the references they make, which attract a diverse audience, transforming them into a central informational force, deserve significant attention, and a serious approach of investigation. In this sense, the transformation in the entertainment reality industry into a politically oriented medium as a new phenomenon in the media world has to be investigated and analyzed in contribution to the existing academic studies. As Philips (2005) and Winslow (2010) argue, the new types of entertainment television shows, initiate a style that unifies both political education and entertainment in an entity. Television shows such as *The Daily show*, *Big Brother*, and *The Simpsons* address a variety of political issues, such as social and power inequalities, same-sex marriage, political corruption, minority conflicts, and political elections. This positive aspect of the television medium has to be appreciated and celebrated due to the immense number of people attracted to it that are exposed to its influence, and at the same time its values have to be questioned for the same reasons.

These days the viewers are confronted with an almost unlimited number of political representations, moderating their personal opinion, attitude, and behavior on the basis of what they see and how they see it. In this sense, van Dijck (2009) argues that the new media and the television have transformed the audience into active and selective users. The references addressed on television and entertainment shows in particular often are related to the political sphere, and this close and almost inseparable interrelation between politics and popular culture, as Van Zoonen (1998) argues, now is unified in the dimension of the

television sphere. The question about the role of popular culture and entertainment media products in the political life and the other way around has been an issue in a large number of studies, which investigated the values, the influence, and the consequences of these media texts on the public sphere, the society, the citizen, and the ordinary viewer. Thus, a number of authors (Andrejevic, 2002; West, 2005) focus mainly on the types of political representations, the way they are encoded as a message to the audience, and the way the viewer decodes these messages as a text. However, the communication of political talk on entertainment programs, and especially in *Big Brother* is an unexamined phenomenon in the academic sphere.

The existing scientific literature examines shows such as *The Daily show*, a modern American talk show, and *The Simpsons*, a sitcom animated comedy, that have proven to have the power and the role to reflect socio-political themes and issues, and at the same time to entertain the audience. In episode of *The Simpsons* "Mr. Lisa goes to Washington" the audience is exposed to a diverse and complex mixture of entertainment and political references, the latter of which are due to the social responsibility of the show to expose political issues such as corruption. Nonetheless, entertainment television not only exposes the issues of the society, but also opposes to the organizational, institutionalized structure of the same society.

The most often representation of entertainment, though, is seen in the light of reality television. A new genre, a format related to the voyeuristic demand of the audience to watch someone else's life, to observe it, to criticize it, and mostly to feel part of it. The reality television has opened up new possibilities for the ordinary viewer, for the passive audience in front of the screen to become an active participant. In addition, reality television not only provides this opportunity for self exposure, but it uses it for its own prosperity. Most of the biggest media companies continue to produce and advertise formats featuring ordinary people, because it is cheap and it has great popularity among the public (Giles, 2002). Andrejevic (2004) argues that entertainment based on reality is "as old as human society itself", followed back in the history of the Roman society, in which people were watching other people at the Roman circus and coliseum (p. 65). This type of amusement is not alien to humanity and during the years it finds expression in different forms and genres. These days it is more than a fictional television drama, a daytime show, or a sitcom comedy, the reality TV genre is politically loaded, and has a privileged position with its references, as

representations of the reality (Winslow, 2010). In this sense, television has always been serving as a medium for information procurement, social communication, and entertainment for the public, but these days it can also be seen as a source for political education.

Reality television is a sophisticated and unordinary medium that unifies a complexity of roles and aims, valuable for the modern day society. Moreover, reality television is a bridge between the state and the public, the information and the viewer, and between the political sphere and the citizens. Nonetheless, some changes and transformations both in the political and the public sphere have appeared after the intervention of entertainment television within politics. First, the entertainment industry creates a desire in the public to become an active participant with a demand for fame, self exposure, and self expression. Second, the increasing power of the entertainment television and its influence on the society have provoked a wave of democratization of popular figures, and “celebritization” of politicians as a new form of political culture (Andrejevic, 2002; Mazzoni & Ciaglia, 2013; Van Zoonen, 1998). Due to the role that the entertainment TV plays in the public sphere, a number of academic studies are dedicated to investigate the transformations in the society, based on the influence of modern culture and entertainment industry on the behavior of young adults. However, the examined political talk on different entertainment formats, such as *Big Brother*, is insufficient, while in most of the academic studies the focus is on the effects of the entertainment industry over the attitude and the activities of the audience.

The entertainment reality format has an extreme success and popularity among the audience, and as outlined above it is an international phenomenon. Nonetheless, in some countries the success of the format attracts a bigger audience, and while in most of the West European countries shows such as *Big Brother* are already cancelled, the Eastern European media industries continue to use them as a main prime time television amusement. As Imre (2012) states, the television medium is a central source for political education, and formation of the nationalistic identity in the young democratic nations in Eastern Europe. However, after the changes in 1989, the transition from state controlled to democratic political system was incomplete, and led to the powerless position of the state, providing the opportunity for corruption and manipulation in the political, economic and media sectors (Barnes, 2007). Thus, this was followed by privatization and marketization of most of the business sectors in the Eastern European nations, but mainly by a globalization of the media

industries. In this sense, as Stetka (2012) argues, this was the time of internationalization of the television medium in terms of ownership, schedule, and presented content, which were extremely influenced by the Western media standards. In addition, the Eastern European audience was a witness of an explosion of new channels and programs, and mainly an invasion of reality formats (Stetka, 2012). Thus, Havens and Imre (2012) and Stetka (2012) argue that the interest in popular entertainment television in the young democratic East European nations is increasing these days, due to the important role of the medium to inform the viewer. However, research on political communication in entertainment formats is still extremely insufficient.

The presented academic background follows an interesting line that leads to the scientific importance and need for an investigation in the communication of political talk on entertainment reality formats in East Europe. In the present thesis the main focus is on *Big Brother* and its franchise in Bulgaria, due to my personal interest as a Bulgarian in the media systems there, and due to my advantage to examine in depth the political representations as a national citizen. In addition, as Stetka (2012) states, no extensive research devoted to the political and media interrelation in Bulgaria after 1989 is done. In this sense, there is a big gap in the academic literature, based on entertainment media and political communication, in East Europe. Due to this, the present research pursues to answer the following question: 'How are political issues communicated in *Big Brother Bulgaria*?' I will pursue this question based on a qualitative approach examining the way the public is confronted with socio-political themes in the reality format. The social and political issues communicated through the platform of this show are the main focus. In this sense, to exemplify in detail the significance of programs such as *Big Brother* and to make obvious that this specific phenomenon is relevant for an academic research in the light of Media studies, I present in detail the specific political situation, together with the transformations in the media industry in Bulgaria in the theoretical part of the thesis.

1.1. Research questions

As mentioned in the introduction, the existing bond between entertainment television and politics is the main interest and focus of investigation in this master thesis. Philips (2005) and Winslow (2010) argue that a new style was “developed” that unifies political education in a medium that tends to entertain. However, the media systems and the role of the entertainment television in the Eastern European countries have not been examined. To illustrate the scientific relevance of the examined phenomenon, Van Zoonen (1998) argues that there is an inseparable interrelation between the political sphere and popular culture unified in the television medium which these days is seen in the entertainment reality format, while Winslow (2010) states that the reality television genre has a stable position in the life of the ordinary, active citizen and at the same time is politically loaded. In this sense, Imre (2012), investigating the Eastern European television transformations after the communist period, points out that entertainment television is the main educational medium for the formation of the national identity in the first years after 1989, illustrating the importance of the medium. These studies examine an interesting social and political process, but still there is an absence of studies that investigate how the entertainment reality format communicates and presents political issues, especially on Eastern European television. The position of Stetka (2012) in terms of the insufficient research on media systems and television industry in Eastern Europe demonstrates a research gap and a need for extensive academic investigation. The main focus of the present thesis is on the values and the types of political representations in the entertainment reality format *Big Brother Bulgaria*. Due to this, the present thesis investigates and answers the following question:

RQ 1: How are political issues communicated in *Big Brother Bulgaria*?

I focused on the types of political representations and the political issues directed within the entertainment program. This unexamined trend of the reality television format *Big Brother* to communicate political issues is the main focal point in the present master thesis. Based on the existing literature I examined the interrelation between politics and entertainment television, in Eastern European media systems. While a lot of studies investigate the nature of television shows such as *Big Brother* and the representations they direct, fewer studies analyze the possible political nature of the show as a new phenomenon

in the media sphere. The following second research question investigates the types of media frames that form the political content within *Big Brother Bulgaria*.

RQ 2: What types of media frames are communicated in different political debates and discussions in *Big Brother Bulgaria*?

This research question is a sensible extension to the main research question that contributes to answer what type of political agenda is communicated within *Big Brother Bulgaria*, and the way it is framed and presented to the audience. The academic relevance of investigating media frames on entertainment television, as de Vreese (2003) states, is hidden in the formation and moderation of the public opinion through media frames projected on entertainment television. In addition, the audience interpretation of the political issues presented on television is formed exclusively by the utilized media frames (de Vreese, 2003), serving as a meaningful tool in making sense of the political actions and issues (Snow & Benford, 2000). In this sense, the media frames communicated on the platform of *Big Brother Bulgaria* contribute to form an understanding of the methods for moderation of political issues on entertainment television.

2. Theory and previous research

2.1. The new media environment and entertainment television

After its invention and vast popularization among the audience during the 1950s, the television has become the most prominent source for amusement, information, and education. Presented officially on the market during the 1920s, the television set in 2009 is owned by 78% of the world's households and this number is still increasing (Bilitewski, Darbra, & Barcelo, 2012). In this sense, Stevenson (2009, as cited in Harrison & Wessels, 2009), states that, despite the interactive nature of new media technologies, the traditional media systems are the main informational medium that demonstrates the increasing interest towards television as an influential source for education and entertainment.

The dramatic and exceptionally fast improvements and developments in the technological world have led to transformations in the media sphere as well. As Dahlgren (1995) examines, the media industries and the television itself have changed dramatically after technological innovations and new policy regulations, which in turn have improved the access to socio-political information of the citizens. Authors such as van Dijck (2009) investigate the changes of the media world as a consequence based not only on the technological development, but also on the interactive, active, and selective nature of the audience. In essence, van Dijck (2009) and Livingstone (2004) argue that the television user these days has an active participating role within the sphere, involving his personal identities, taste, values, ideologies and lifestyle in a shared mediated experience. According to research in the 1980s about the role of the audience, "people in front of the screen are indeed active" and "they generate meaning from what they see on TV" (Dahlgren, 1995, p. 121).

Some scholars claim that the main aim and most significant role of television are to entertain the viewer in front of the screen. As Van Zoonen (2005) states, "entertainment functions to entertain the citizen" and it is a term related to the notion of "pleasure and fun" (p.4). It is also related to the psychological need for enjoyment, which people have developed and satisfied through entertaining themselves with a diversity of activities well known from ancient ages. To illustrate this, Andrejevic (2004) presents early reality based entertainment as a main tool for amusement in the Roman society, and at the same time as a platform for social, cultural and political debates. In other words, entertainment "indicates

specific industries, genres, and products, as well as an overall cultural condition” (Van Zoonen, 2005, p.9). On the other hand, Huston, Zillmann, and Bryant (1994) argue that entertainment has to be investigated both as a media effect, and as an effect of media consumption, but not as an independent new genre. It is an interesting position which examines a human psychological need that has turned into a lifestyle, then to a genre, and at the end to a dimension, not just physical or mental, but a dimension that unifies the cultural habitus of the social sphere.

The television, as Dahlgren (1995) states, might be examined on the basis of two diverse, but interrelated levels. The two dimensions of television – entertainment and information are increasingly unified in infotainment programs such as talk shows and late night shows (Dahlgren, 1995). In the same way, the reality television format as an extension and new form of infotainment television programs is an adopter of the model of political discourse and amusement, constructed in talk shows.

To illustrate this bond, Van Zoonen (1998) uses a story telling model to examine the close, diverse and almost inseparable connection between popular culture and politics, which is now unified in the dimension of the television medium. Furthermore, Van Zoonen (1998) examines this relation between politics and television as a double-sided bond in which popular culture ‘hates’ politics exposing and ridiculing the foundations of the political sphere in different genres such as comedy movies and reality formats on the one side, and, politics which ‘hate’ popular culture and “treats pop culture /.../ with distrust” (p. 185) on the other side. To illustrate this, Rhodes (2001) states that television as a main political and cultural medium has the role to represent organizations in the contemporary commercialized society but outside of their physical existence. In this sense, this representation refers to socio-cultural institutions, but also to the foundations of the political system itself. However, Rhodes (2001) argues that entertainment television is an educational medium that teaches the public and the society how these organizations exist, and that moderates an understanding in the mind of the audience about the organizational life. However, this aim of the television seems to have a positive influence, and serves as a tool in strengthening the political ideologies and values.

The entertainment television often critiques and tends to exaggerate the political life and its activities, transforming them into more sensational stories. Due to this, Van Zoonen (1998) states that the gap between popular culture and mainstream politics might be

explained “from their origins in two closely related dichotomous social traditions /.../ ordinary people vs the power elites or the power bloc” (p. 187). Hence, Boyle and Kelly (2013) argue that “there has always been tension within television culture between the role of television as an entertainment medium, and its functionality” to educate and politically inform the audience (p. 64-65). This role though is dependent on a number of other factors and institutions, which have influence on, and to some extent control over the type of materials, and messages represented on television.

On the other hand, this complexity, duality and sometimes uncertainty in the authenticity of television representations have been a subject of investigation of different studies. Van Zoonen (1998) argues that the mixture of political discourse and popular culture within television is a part of modern political culture, but since television tends to exaggerate, it is potentially a threat to the quality and the value of serious politics. Moreover, she states that “commercial television /.../ is seen as politics worst enemy” (p. 194). However, Boyle and Kelly (2013) state that “even in the digital age” television is still the main medium and most substantial “entry point into debates about the relationship between /.../ civic and political culture” (p. 62). In this sense, entertainment television not only provides diverse and complex political messages for its audience, but the entire media industry has influence on public opinion, moderating it through a civil responsibility (Holbert, 2005). Thus, television is a powerful medium that communicates political issues and provokes socio-political debates.

The media industry and mainly entertainment television therefore affect the audience’s attitude and understanding of the presented political agenda. In this sense, West (2005) states that the influence of the entire entertainment industry is so impressive that it has the opportunity to create new political issues and changes that sometimes have more influence than serious journalism news. To illustrate this interactive connection between political communication and audience, Hoffman and Wallach (2007) argue that mainstream media’s usage of different frames could affect and influence public opinion, and make the audience to trust the political system. On the other hand, the entertainment industries have the responsibility to communicate political issues in a fair mode due to the fact that they stimulate the audience actively to engage in the political life, through identifying themselves with the framed and presented characters on television (West, 2005).

2.2 Entertainment television – media production and television frames

Some scholars have attempted to peer behind the shining and glamorous television productions of a team of producers, writers, and editors, to examine the possible aims set by the power elites. As Tracey (1978) argues, in its existence the media industries are thought to be part of the ruling and elite class institutions, in which sense they serve as a mechanism to encode and transmit the ideologies set by the elites, and to make them dominant.

In addition to the examined scientific literature, investigating the political communication in *Big Brother Bulgaria*, the framing theory is used as an additional theoretical approach. The television communicates at different levels with the audience, but mostly with a set of codes, preferred by the elites and familiar to the viewers (Fiske, 1987). The media frames and the framing as a theory serve as a main journalistic tool to moderate the public opinion and understanding of different political events. Thus, as Scheufele (1999) states, the media industry possesses the influence to create and transform the existing social reality, and framing is the essential part of this practice. Media frames are the direct and inevitable tool of the media text that emphasizes issues and aspects of different political events in order to facilitate a more salient viewing among the audience. The most important tool of the aesthetics of television production is the “effective control and manipulation of screen space”, accomplished by the adoption of techniques and codes in order to portray an image similar to the real environment (Barker, 1985, p. 236). According to Fiske (1987), the codes adopted by television have the role of signs, shared by the members of a society, and intervened into the culture of the same society. These codes are the interconnection between the media industry and the producers, the editors and the texts, and the media text and the audience (Fiske, 1987). The main types of codes, examined by Fiske (1987) are *natural* – the surrounding social world and culture, manifested with a diversity of patterns, such as the presentation of specific food, clothing, setting, notion of speech etc., *technical* – the television production, position of camera, lighting, and editing as clues to the audience what to focus on, and *ideological* – the dimensions of television discourse, which determine the social positions and orders. In addition, in terms of perception, the media users do not perceive the framing codes, but they see through them the message preferred by the elites. To illustrate this, Tracey (1978) states that the media tend to favor the elite groups and to impose the status quo through supporting and exposing existing moral values and ideologies. In this sense, media production “is a social construction /.../ that takes place

within institutions that possess their own goals and needs" (Tracey, 1978, p. 14). This statement not only demonstrates the interrelation between the media, the power elites and politics, but also refers to the agenda setting and framing theories which are the invariable feature in the production process of television.

In its essence, framing theory "refers to the packaging of information that takes place in the newsroom where journalists must unavoidably select and prioritize to tell a story in the news" (de Vreese, 2003, p. 5). This process refers to the organization and presentation of a message about a specific event or issue, significant for the well-being of the citizens, and to an emphasis on the patterns that serve to make meaning of these issues (de Vreese, 2003). In addition to this, de Vreese (2005) states that framing and frames are a communication source that have the role to determine and present a specific issue with a significant value for the society. Thus, the importance of the frames as a social practice in the media, and a device for moderating political issues is hidden in the nature of the frames, examined by de Vreese (2005) as direct media effects, in which sense "framing involves a communication source presenting and defining an issue" (p. 51). This, however, refers to the communication process between the power elites, the media as a main institutional medium, and the audience, as an influential practice in which frame building and frame setting are involved (de Vreese, 2005). In addition to this, Scheufele (1999) examines four main practices in terms of framing – frame building, frame setting, individual level effects of framing, and a line between individual and media frames (p. 114 – 115). *Frame building* is considered as the moment when the journalists take the decisions which story to present and the way they will moderate and frame that story. In this sense, de Vreese (2005) states that the way in which frames are developed as a media production mechanism is related directly to frame building. In fact, frame building is outlined as the factors that influence the structure of the frames in the interrelation between the journalists and the power elites (de Vreese, 2005). In addition, the selection of frames is based on variables, such as ideologies and preferences, reflecting the journalist's choices and in turn the entire media message (Scheufele, 1999). The interrelation between media frames and the existing attitudes and expectations of the audience is studied as the process of *frame setting* (de Vreese, 2005). Scheufele (1999) states that frame setting as an interaction between the set media message and the individuals' understanding of the present issue is a process of emphasizing that issue and making it more salient to the audience. In this sense, media frames become an inevitable

part in the future perceptions of the audience in terms of political issues and events presented in the media. The *individual level effects of framing* refer to the personal attitude, behavior, and emotions of the journalists and the viewer, which may affect the meaning construction and interpretation of the media message (Scheufele, 1999). In the end, in the *individual versus media frames*, Scheufele (1999) investigates the differences in terms of hierarchy between media journalists and audience, and states that both are dependent on the effects of the media frames. In this situation, it is possible to argue that media frames, set by the power elites, influence both media journalists and the audience's attitudes and perceptions of political issues.

2.2.1. Types of frames in the media

The meaning of a single frame may be determined as "an emphasis in salience of different aspects of a topic" (de Vreese, 2005, p. 53). In order to understand the function of frames, Snow and Benford (2000) state that frames serve as a tool of mainstream media to understand and make some social or political events meaningful for the audience, and at the same time to organize and lead to an action. This feature of the frames to moderate, transform, and to some extent to control the public opinion and desire sometimes is not enough. They function in order to control the attitude and the actions of the citizens, which can lead to an interpretation of the media message that is preferred by the power elites. Media frames, as de Vreese (2005) argues, are the feature of diverse political statements and arguments formed by the journalistic norms. Indigenous to the political world, they serve to be the alternative solution of the social issues. In other words, media frames are "specific textual and visual elements" that enhance social and political issues (de Vreese, 2005, p. 54).

Authors such as de Vreese (2003, 2005) and Gamson and Modigliani (1989) investigate the nature of frames, and the process of framing inside the media. While the media serve as the modern 'foundation' and institution of the democracy, the most influential way in which public opinion and attitude are moderated by the media is through the usage of frames (de Vreese, 2005). In addition, de Vreese (2005) states that the frames utilized by the media industry affect the audience's understanding and lead their perception of political issues in a specific direction. In this sense, it is important to mention the distinction of Scheufele (1999) who defines two concepts in terms of framing – *media*

frames and *individual* frames. The individual or audience frames are studied by authors such as Scheufele (1999) as an outcome of the individual perceptions and understanding of the audience, in which sense the audience creates its own codes in order to read the message in the media. In the present thesis media frames communicating political talk in media texts, are considered as the more important variable, while the individual frames are not considered. In essence, a *media frame* is “a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events /.../ the frame suggests the essence of the issue (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, p. 143). Therefore, the media frames as devices of the media text form the message and distribute it to the audience. While most of the audience relies on mainstream media for political information, framing is the main inevitable tool to form, moderate, and present opinions about the political agenda (de Vreese, 2003). As a socio-cultural interaction and experience, the television provides specific, but diverse images for the audience, which has to serve as signs for understanding the surrounding world and making sense of it (Dahlgren, 1995). In this sense, framing in the media is a way of emphasizing an aspect of an issue and distributing it among the audience with a specific definition.

The diversity of frames utilized in the media industry is immense. In his study de Vreese (2005) focuses on two types of media *frames* – the generic and the issue – specific. Issue – specific frames present issues and events from the society, which provide a limited ability for general conclusions. *Generic frames* present a diversity of issues from the society, such as politics and culture in a more general sense in terms of media news. In this sense, the present research focuses on the generic media frames utilized in the communication of political talk within *Big Brother Bulgaria*. However, the discourse used in the media to emphasize an issue and to form an understanding of that issue is based on the specifics of certain media frames (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). In addition to this, Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) investigate the most commonly observed generic frames in the media, namely the *conflict frame*, the *human interest frame*, and *attribution of responsibility* (p. 56). The conflict frame presents news and issues about politics in the media as a disagreement between political parties and different individuals (de Vreese, 2004). In this sense, Gamson and Modigliani (1989) examine the *conflict frame* as the main frame, used in the television news to present specific and newsworthy political issues. The *human interest frame* moderates news through the emotions of individuals and their personal stories about an

event, which lead to a greater identification with the news and a better understanding of them (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). The final frame, *attribution of responsibility* has the ability to form an accusation against a specific person or institution based on an issue in the society (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). In addition, the attribution of responsibility frame may find the cause of the effects of a political issue and to provide a solution for it.

In their study Jebiril, Albæk, and de Vreese (2013) examine the values of soft news in entertainment television programs, the importance of media frames, and the influence they have on the political knowledge of the audience. Examining the diverse aspects of different scientific reports investigating the influence of soft news and entertainment oriented programs, the study of Jebiril et al. (2013) outlines that “there is empirical support that soft news can be beneficial for inattentive audiences” (p. 204). In this study, the authors investigate the effects of two popular soft news media frames, the conflict and the human interest frames. Both frames rely on the emotional, personal perspective, describing a political issue as a personal conflict between different political figures or applying the emotional story of an individual (Jebiril et al., 2013). In addition, “these two frames can therefore be used by journalists as tools for softening the news” (p. 206). Thus, the human interest and conflict frames serve as informational facilitators of political communication in the arena of entertainment oriented programs. In addition, their analysis of the influence of these two media frames on the motivation and the knowledge of the audience about politics found that less interested viewers are more vulnerable to the manipulation of frames in the news. Moreover, Jebiril et al. (2013) outline that media frames utilized mainly in entertainment formats have in fact positive effects on the motivation for political education of the audience. In this sense, the study undermines negative attitudes towards the abilities of soft news and entertainment programs to be informational mediums and provides important findings in terms of framing theory, soft news media, and politics.

2.2.2. Identifying media frames

To investigate media frames, different scholars have argued for the best and most reliable method for defining the frames set in media texts. As outlined by de Vreese (2005), both inductive and deductive methods can be utilized in the investigation of media frames, in the process of which the frames emerge as media devices during the analysis. In this sense, Cappella and Jamieson (1997) argue that each single frame has to follow four criteria

– it has to be identifiable with linguistic characteristics, it has to be commonly observed in journalistic practices, it has to be distinguishable from other frames, and it has to have representational validity. Furthermore, frames are developed and distributed through three sets of processes, conceptualized as *discursive* – talks and conversations, speech and acts, *strategic* – utilizing, trying to achieve specific aims, and *contested* – the development and distribution of frames (Snow & Benford, 2000). In this sense, the frames as a socio-cultural process in media construction of issues have some consequences for the audience's interpretation of media messages. According to de Vreese (2003, 2005), media frames affect the audience on the levels of *individual* and *societal* consequences. The individual may alter a specific attitude towards an issue based on exposure of specific frames (ibid). The societal – frames may lead to shaping, and moderating a social process such as political talk, debates, decision-making and collective actions (ibid).

In terms of media texts, and especially in the case of television, the utilized media frames may be difficult to investigate due to the immense number of aspects of media messages. A number of different approaches in the scientific sphere are presented in order to examine the communication of media frames. Gamson and Modigliani (1989) present an easy and clear line in investigating the frames in the media text. They state that frames are the devices that form the media text and that transform it into a message through epithets and metaphors, and that frames have to be identified as such verbal and written signs. Moreover, Entman (1993) states that media frames can be investigated through certain keywords and phrases, together with different stereotyped images. In this sense, “frames emerge from the material during the course of analysis” as obvious and identifiable verbal and written devices (de Vreese, 2005, p. 53). The best and most reliable method for frame investigation in the media sphere is through content analysis, in which the frames emerge in the analysis process (de Vreese, 2005). However, most of the academic studies, based on frame investigation utilize quantitative content analysis, in which sense they measure the number and the types of emerging frames, and not the in depth sense in the context of the media text. Thus, the qualitative approach of investigation would be more reliable in terms of examining the meaning and the construction of the media frames employed in the entertainment format.

2.2.3. Television production

As Tracey (1978) states “there is a /.../ belief that the nature of /.../ television is a function of its domination by a particular set of political ideologies” (p. 17). In this sense, the nature of the media and of the television itself is closely interrelated with the political sphere, which serves as an instrument of the state to educate the audience in desired ideologies. Although, the production of television has been changing, and as Jones (2005) argues, the “politics is now /.../ an integral part of entertainment programming these days, and as such its cultural location has broken the traditional bounded nature of programming assumptions about politics” (p. 7). According to Dahlgren (1995), by the 1980s most of the national television channels in the US have lost one third of their audience due to the increasing popularity of cable network channels. Therefore, the budgets of the television stations were cut off and the style of presentation has dramatically changed to a more sensationalist one, with lower or no social value (Dahlgren, 1995). As Baldi (1994, as cited in Dahlgren, 1995) finds, infotainment channels in Europe that unify both reality formats and talk shows have the biggest growth and popularity among the audience. However, when it comes to the production, Jones (2005) argues that two major changes occur in the production of politically oriented entertainment television, especially when it comes to the role of the audience. First, the audience has a more active role expressed through a freedom of speech on different television platforms and therefore influences the programming style. Second, the appeal of the television is transformed, and these days the audience perceives it in a different, more complex way. Finally, “in addition to this increasing competition, the industry was also experiencing changing production factors, such as advances in the audio – visual technologies and changing costs of production, both allowing for new presentational aesthetics and altered appeals to audiences” (Jones, 2005, p. 45).

2.3 Political discourse and entertainment reality television

The television as a powerful medium offers the capability to stimulate a political discussion and political talk (Landerville & LaMarre, 2011). These days the same ability is possessed by the entertainment media and the reality television formats (Landerville & LaMarre, 2011). A diversity of representations, complexity of images, and participation of (nonprofessional) actors together with political figures are some of the few features that present the nature of the modern entertainment television and its subgenres. The most

significant field in the media-politics bond is the role of the entertainment television within the political life (Herkman, 2010), as well as the other way around, in which the political discourse is strongly embedded into the television in order to satisfy the preferences of the power elites. To illustrate the intervention of the entertainment medium within the political sphere, Holbert (2005) examines the 2004 elections in America, “supported” by entertainment media programs, such as daily and late night talk shows (*The Tonight show*) (p. 436). In addition, Jones (2005) states that political figures such as Senator John Edwards and the future governor Arnold Schwarzenegger had announced their candidacies on *The Tonight show* and *The Daily show*, illustrating that after 2004 *The Daily show* was the main political tribune for most of the future presidential candidates. This relationship between the two spheres is not alien in the past years, but as Holbert (2005) states, “2004 was the year that entertainment media became a permanent fixture of the American political landscapes” and since then has been an inevitable part of it (p. 436). In this sense, these studies illustrate the present orientation of the entertainment industry in terms of political communication, and exemplify the evident interrelation of the political sphere with the media industry.

The interconnection between popular culture and politics examined on a more pragmatic level is based on the changes of the communication practices that television employs in order to facilitate a better mediatised political discourse (Herkman, 2010). In this sense, “popular now is seen as political” (Herkman, 2010, p. 704). It is not just a mixture of political content and entertainment, but also a homogenization between pure entertainment practices and political discourse, embedded in the dimension of the television medium, and mostly on entertainment programs. Entertainment television not only represents but directs socio-cultural and political messages to the audience and serves as a main platform for political communication. This sophisticated role of television is examined by a number of authors (see Van Zoonen, 1998, 2005; Andrejeviic, 2002; Warner, 2006; Boyle & Kelly, 2012) who explore in depth the values and the ideologies of the entertainment medium as a socio-political platform in the age of modern media.

Due to this, the increasing, limitless demand of the audience to consume entertainment television has led to the development of a diversity of new formats and genres. Reality television is this ‘modern’ format which is an embodiment of entertainment, surveillance, personal identification, simple design and complexity of familiar to the natural life stories and affairs. This genre is also a main focus of a number of authors such as

Andrejevic (2002), Bratich (2007), Giles (2002), and Van Zoonen (1998, 2005) who extensively explore the values of these shows, the types of representations, and issues they direct to the audience, mainly in terms of effects over the audience's behavior and attitude. Andrejevic (2002) states that reality television is a television genre that is based on the culture of surveillance, through which the media moderate and transform the audience into an active consumer with a role within an interactive economy. This interactivity is based not only on multiple forms of participation from direct consumption to paid voting, but also on the necessity of the viewer to identify himself and to participate within the television sphere. To illustrate this, Giles (2002) examines the role of the participating audience in television formats, reality shows, talk shows, and lifestyle programs, and states that the lifestyle format tends to unify both ordinary people with experts or celebrities in similar activities which attract the audience's interest. However, most of the academic research on reality television investigates only the prime layer of the entertainment format, focused on the media's effects on the viewer. In this sense, this illustrates the existing theoretical gap related to the in depth investigation of programs such as *Big Brother*, and the communication of political talk in shows with an entertainment nature. Nonetheless, the model utilized by the entertainment television in terms of cast members, featuring celebrities, and leading to a celebritization of existing political and social figures is an interesting and important aspect of the possible political communication.

Dryer (2011) argues that shows such as *Survivor* and *Big Brother* involve ordinary people who are eliminated through elections, they make coalitions, precisely form their strategic decisions, present themselves in simulated campaigns, and stimulate their supporters (audience) to vote for them. All of these actions of the contestants are strongly influenced by the already established political model in the real life. Nonetheless, Dryer (2011) states that "most of the viewers often do not make connections between the "politics" of reality television and the politics of national state governments" (p. 409). These days the nature of reality television is changing, moving from a more uniform and monotonous, to a more sophisticated and complex model of subgenres mixing entertainment and education (Murray & Oullette, 2008). In this sense, celebrities and even political figures can use infotainment formats and reality programs for political talk and debates related to the political life.

2.3.1. Entertainment television – ordinary people and celebrities

The entertainment media and reality television itself offer something more than pure, serious political discourse – it mixes popular television personalities, ordinary people, and politicians who possess the so-called celebrity status. The entertainment industry has a permanent demand for new television personalities, based on the necessity of the audience for various experiences and for new, more intriguing stories. On the other hand, the political figures have faced the new opportunity for self expression and additional visibility in the face of the television medium, on which they can find the platform to send their message to an ‘unbounded’ audience. To maximize their visibility, the political figures have adapted to the interests of the industry and the audience, and have started to follow the tendencies set by the media (Karvonen, 2009).

The personalization of politics is a trend, a fabulous new wave of representation and dedication to the figures of the political elite (Bennett, 2012). In this sense, the political actors are searching for the right paths into the media industry, providing an open access to their life with the aim to achieve more popularity, in order to facilitate a stronger public image. This new trend is promoted by transformations of the modern society, and the decreasing interest of youths in mainstream news media, which has led to an increasing interest in more entertainment oriented programs. To attract the interest of the audience, and to achieve the aim of being politically informational medium, the new style of infotainment programs is structured as celebrity-oriented talk shows, in which the politicians are interviewed and therefore they mix serious news journalism with entertainment (Dahlgren, 1995).

As Bennett (2012) argues, the new generation of politics in the media world can be seen as a ‘me’ generation, in which the personal ambition, possession, self-expression, and authorization are the most important constituents of the political figure. A mass narcissism among the audience, the public, and the political elite is seen as a degradation of the public and the civil life (Bennett, 2012). In this sense, Dahlgren (1995) states, that it is interesting to observe that the political elites appear as media celebrities, and are part of entertainment formats more often than they are part of serious journalism news. The new models in the media systems, and the preferences of the citizens, motivate the political endorsement of entertainment formats. This contribution between media channels and political figures can be investigated in the sense of the “propaganda model” (Herman & Chomsky, 1988) based

on which, the mass media supports the political sphere and serve the special needs and interests of the political elite in the US. This model demonstrates the view that mass media and news journalism are the main instruments that support the political agenda and a mechanism to control the socio-political beliefs of the audience. In addition, the propaganda model examined by Herman and Chomsky (1988) illustrates that the political discourse in the entertainment media is neither indigenous nor a new phenomenon, especially not in the movies. This illustrates that a lot of academic studies examine the interrelation between entertainment media and politics as an existing phenomenon in the media, but less research is devoted to the reality format, and especially *Big Brother*.

In their study, Mazzoni and Ciaglia (2013) examine the transformation of the political figure in the modern media age, in which visibility and self-exposure guarantee authenticity and self-realization. The most visible part of the media these days are the tabloid press and the entertainment television shows, and due to this, the mediatization and the public monitoring of the life of political figures are an inevitable feature of the political authenticity (Karvonen, 2009, as cited in Harrison & Wessels, 2013). "The celebritization of politics is a process that depends on both the mass media's need to find new stories to cover and new stars to build, and the politician's need for new forms of visibility" with the aim to reach additional public supporters (Mazzoni & Ciaglia, 2013, p. 1). To illustrate this, Karvonen (2009, as cited in Harrison & Wessels, 2013) states that "politicians, like other celebrities are used as a raw material for the fabrication of entertainment public drama" (p. 103). On the other hand, the media are adopted by political figures as a platform for the distribution of political content, presented as an entertainment show. Furthermore, as Jones argues "politics is now appearing on numerous and disparate channels /.../ in a variety of formats and genres, including sitcoms, satires, parodies /.../ and viewer – participation programs" (p. 4).

These days the audience is a witness of the socio-political engagement of a number of celebrities on different political issues, such as the legislation of same-sex marriage, environmental issues, elections and political campaigns (Boykoff & Goodman, 2009). The celebrity endorsement is a modern practice of the media industry to facilitate a higher popularity, but is also used for political communication and political talk. In the entertainment business, stars and famous figures attract a diverse audience, interested mainly in the activities and the personal life of the celebrity. In addition, "the monitoring of

celebrities has a parallel phenomenon in the contemporary society, namely reality television programs like *Big Brother*, which are based on observation” (Karvonen, 2009, as cited in Harrison & Wessels, p. 118). The political sphere now is an integral part of the entertainment business, and the entertainment industry supports that bond. In this sense, the presence of political figures on entertainment formats such as *Big Brother* is the main constituent that transforms the visible entertainment side of the show into a prospective politically oriented medium. Thus, this aspect of reality programs and especially of *Big Brother* is an interesting phenomenon in the media in terms of political communication that has not yet been investigated.

2.4 Television- Eastern European television. Entertainment and politics within *Big Brother*

Television has acted as a mediator between politics and society in most of the developed Western countries since its introduction in the late 1950s. The same function was applied to the Eastern European nations since the 1960s and the relation between the media and the politics is still visible today. To illustrate this, Havens and Imre (2012) state that the appeal of television and its influential mediating role were used as a tool of the communist political leaders to control the masses. Television, in this sense, was a ‘modern’ platform for political propaganda of specific ideals on the one hand, but, on the other hand, it was a threat to the foundations of the strong socialist society due to the informative and effective potential that it poses (Havens & Imre, 2012). The nature of the medium as a new democratic phenomenon was used by the political elite as a demonstration of the prosperity of the communist society, and at the same time had the role to affirm the superiority of the political leader.

From the 1960s and the 1970s until the changes in the late 1980s the “television became a national medium in the Soviet-controlled region” providing the audience the freedom to switch on and off, but not a lot to choose from (Imre, 2012, p. 120). The limited possibilities and strict control over the media production and television imports describes the situation in the communist countries before the 1990s. As Imre (2012) states, in the totalitarian state-controlled television the imports and the schedules were monitored exclusively by the state in order to preserve, and affirm the ideological set of values that the socialist citizen has to enhance during its leisure time. In most of the Eastern European

countries before the 1980s, media products imported from the Western nations were considered as an extraordinary threat for the ideologies of the socialist society (Stetka, 2012). As a result, the absence of these international programs was used to serve as an additional time for political, communist propaganda (Stetka, 2012). At that time the challenges and the opportunities that the new medium was able to provide, have assured a full political control and influence over the attitude of the socialist audience. Most of the state socialist parties have seen the “benefit from the propaganda potential of television” as a newly developed during the communist regime style of edutainment (Imre, 2012, p. 120). These opportunities have led the media to become the main fundamental cornerstone of the socialist states, while the nationalism was adopted as a major principle in the functions of the communist regime, in which sense the television has become “the key instrument of nationalist edutainment” (Imre, 2012, p. 120).

Despite the totalitarian communist regime, and the imposed influence of the Soviet Union, the 1960s and the 1970s were a period of change in the nationalist socio-political world. As Imre (2012) states, by 1960 the influence of the Marxist-Leninist principles and the communist utopia for a brotherhood society were lost and a new door was opened for the national regimes to affirm their power. This period is an end of the extreme control of the Soviet Union over the political systems, and the cultural institutions in the East European nations. At that moment, the television as an edutainment source was the main medium to strengthen the bond between the nation state and the citizens, to develop new connections, and to demonstrate the independent power of the national governments (Imre, 2012). In terms of the role of entertainment television, Imre (2012) presents the term edutainment as a mixture of education and entertainment. In this sense, television in most of the communist nations after the 1960s was transformed into a national form of entertainment, allowing the socialist governments “to expand and solidify their educational propaganda mandate through entertainment” (Imre, 2012, p. 122).

After these transformations in the media industry, the television was seen as a “main institution for implanting patriotic, socialist democratic values within entertainment” (Imre, 2012, p. 123). As no exception to the political, social, and cultural processes in the ex-communist bloc examined above, Bulgaria was a country with state-controlled media, and a state extremely influenced by the Soviet Union for more than forty years. Despite the fact that Imre (2012) states that Bulgaria along with Serbia, Hungary, and Russia during the

totalitarian period had a television systems with more liberal regulations, Stetka (2012) argues that from the entire bloc only the German Democratic Republic and Bulgaria used to rely on imports mostly from the Soviet Union. In other words, the Bulgarian audience was culturally and to some extent politically dependent on the Soviet Union's television formats.

The fall of the communist regime in the East European nations in 1989 set "the beginning of /.../ transition from authoritarian regimes and state-controlled economics towards democratic and party pluralistic political systems, civil society, and market economy" (Stetka, 2012, p. 109). In order to examine the changes in the society after the late 1980s, Gross (2003) argues that the collapse of the communist regime has had several political consequences. First, a complete changeover of the political system with the evolution of new and more political parties took place, and second, a full and influential control of the political parties on the media systems was established, despite the democratization of the political situation (Gross, 2003). However, the transformations after the fall of the regime in the late 1980s were followed by dramatic improvements in technology and in the media systems, transforming Eastern European societies into "information-based societies" with a commercialization and privatization of the television channels (Stevenson, 2009, as cited in Harrison & Wessels, 2009, p. 106).

According to Imre (2012), Stetka (2012), and Havens and Imre (2012), there was an explosion of a diversity of television channels after the end of the regime in 1989, and many Western programs were imported with the aim to inform the 'new' and young society in the ways how citizens can form the identity of their democratic citizenship. Despite the cultural flow, the television medium ironically has preserved the same educational role and influence on society, but under the control of different political elites. The transformations in the East European countries and their political agenda, the mass media and especially the television have remained framed and set by the political sphere in a controversial time of changes, in which politics and economy were controlling the media in order to favor their own power. The media industry in the young democratic state in Bulgaria was faced with major political transformations that have affected the television production and imports from the West. To investigate these changes, and to make sense of the nature of the television after the period of communism, Barnes (2007) examines Bulgaria and its public and political spheres after 1989 as a place of political and economic reforms with a transition from full political control to an entire freedom of citizens' voice and activities. However, when it comes to the media

systems in Bulgaria, in the first five years after the transition, the media industry was entirely controlled by the political system, and at the same time was absent from any professional journalistic standards and traditions (Gross, 2003).

The political situation inside Bulgaria during the 1990s was as in most of the post-communist countries part of an incomplete transformation, positioning the state and the power elites in a powerless position, providing the opportunity for corruption and manipulation within the economic and political sectors based on the political strategy of marketization and privatization (Barnes, 2007). Thus, the formation of new political elites and parties in the East European nations is mainly based on 'transformations' of the old communist elites and sometimes from anti-communist groups in these countries in which the anti communist movements have existed (Gross, 2003). To illustrate this, Barnes (2007) outlines that, based on the reforms in the Soviet Union after the 1980s, in the early 1989 the foreign minister of Bulgaria has received a permission to push the former communist leader into retirement and to change the name of the communist party into Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP). Otherwise, behind the new facade of "immutability" in the next few years they (BSP) "would undermine any post-communist Bulgarian government's ability to shape the political economy in the new era" (Barnes, 2007, p. 76).

When it comes to the media systems and the television industry, Milev (1998) examines the situation in Bulgaria after the fall of the communist regime, and points out that it is one of the last Eastern European countries to pass a Radio and Television act in 1996. This entirely political decision about the media and the television system was criticized from the opposition and from scholars due to the close connection of the state with the media, and due to the state's obligatory monitoring of the mass media systems (Milev, 1998). However, Milev (1998) states that the Bill had a short life. After the fall of the socialist party (BSP) in 1997, the new conservative-liberal government has decided to make a new law and to provide the power and the supervisory to a newly created Media Commission. The institutions controlling the media industries after 1992 in most East European nations were very limited, transforming the television medium in independent and less politically oriented (Gross, 2003). On the other hand, in Bulgaria, Albania, and Romania the political discourse continued to be embedded in the media industry after the communist rule. Moreover, the television was still affected by the nature of different political parties and political figures, adopting the medium as a new form of facilitator of political propaganda (Gross, 2003).

Furthermore, Barnes (2007) argues that the post-communist period in Bulgaria is tied up with interrelations between the private (privatized) sector and the political elites, in which the criminal business was in power. As a result, a number of privately owned companies have turned into empires with multi million dollars profit, establishing new banks, and in turn purchasing one of the most mainstream media channels in Bulgaria (Barnes, 2007). This period in the political and cultural systems in Bulgaria ranges from the fall of the communism in 1989, until the new political order in 1997.

On the other hand, Milev (1998) states that some of the biggest media channels after 1997 were bought and fully controlled by Western and American media companies. According to him, the biggest Bulgarian newspaper company is entirely owned by the German company WAZ, which also owns 70% of the second largest newspaper, while private television channels are owned by Swedish and American companies, and privately owned television channels by Bulgarian companies exist only on the local level.

In order to focus more specifically on the private media channels in Bulgaria in present days, and the popularity they have among the audience, I will refer to Stetka (2012) and Milev (1998), who examine the two most popular, mainstream television channels, one of which is Nova TV, the presenter of *Big Brother*. The private channel Nova TV first belonged to a Serbian businessman, often accused in the press of laundering money through the television channel (Milev, 1997). In addition, the channel's connections with the political world were more than visible. During the socialist government Nova TV was run by a person close to the socialist political party (BSP), but when the political situation changed in 1997 (a new democratic party took over) the owner decided to choose an ex-politician from this party as head of the station (Milev, 1997). Thus, as Milev (1997) examines, this game at the private channel Nova TV is an example of the most obvious type of political intervention into the media, the public and the private spheres.

On the other hand, when it comes to the style of television adopted in Bulgaria, Stetka (2007) argues that while most of the Eastern European audiences rely on entertainment formats that are locally produced, for countries such as Bulgaria and Latvia there was a dramatic transformation in the media from the popularization of domestic productions to imported programs. Thus, in Bulgaria the American dominance is the most visible – almost any of the most popular television programs and movies until 2007 were American (Stetka, 2007). The reality formats have experienced an amazing success and *Big*

Brother, the most popular and famous one of them, remained for more than 4 seasons in Bulgaria, scoring a share of 52.5%. (Stetka, 2007).

The mid 1990s were the period in which the production of local television products in the East European media experienced an amazing success followed by an increasing interest in the entertainment formats (Stetka, 2012). To illustrate this, Stetka (2012) states that in 2007 the most popular entertainment formats in East Europe were either domestically produced or localized and adapted to the national standards. Due to this fashion and model set in some countries, the popularity of the entertainment formats that tend to amuse and inform the audience such as *Big Brother* is huge, attracting a diverse attention (Warner, 2006).

However, Frau-Meigs (2006) finds that the circulation of entertainment formats is low in most of the Western European countries. Most of the movies, series, and shows are imported from America, but despite the Americanization and the global cultural flow from the States, the Europeanization is visible only with reality television formats (Frau-Meigs, 2006). The reality format, as Murray and Oullette (2009) argue, is adopted in most of the East European countries as a “financial survival mechanism” (p. 10). The low production cost and the free labor of the participants have attracted the television channels that were struggling with the expensive local productions and imports from the West. The popularity and the success of the reality format in Eastern Europe, as Frau-Meigs (2006) examines, is hidden in the way reality television frames and positions the participants in passive activities, associated with the housewife model. The reality television as a genre developed in the past twenty years has opened up numerous debates about its nature, its values and the effects it has on the participants and the audience. The aim of shows such as *Survivor* and *Big Brother* is examined from the position of the academic spheres of psychology, media, sociology, and even politics. Reality television is a pervasive and inevitable feature of popular culture (Dryer, 2011) as a development in a media convergence of interactivity, self-actualization, user generated content and the involvement of the viewer into the television production (Murray & Oullette, 2008). The modern wave of reality television pretends to possess ideologies and values of the real life that in their nature might be considered as educational (Murray & Oullette, 2008). Despite this, Dryer (2011) argues that the surface of the entertainment reality programs most of the time is not filled with valuable information, but beneath this surface the reality format is politically loaded and full with representations

of the political world. In addition, *Big Brother* has the role to include people from ethnic minorities, to communicate social inequalities, and different socially responsible themes, such as racism and discrimination, directly related to the political system. As an example, Palasinski, Riggs, and Zebialowicz (2011) examine *Celebrity Big Brother* in UK (2009 edition) as an arena of racist discrimination and ethnic intolerance that has provoked a political debate and discussion in the society after the end of the show. Moreover, in terms of Eastern European politics, Hajdinjak, Kosseva, and Zhelyazkova (2012) and Filipescu (2009) examine the importance of the ethnic debate, and the issues related to the integration of the minorities as one of the main political themes, portrayed in the media. Thus, the presence of ethnic minorities in a diversity of media channels is an observed trend, while in reality they often are rejected and excluded from the national population (Hajdinjak et al., 2012). In this sense, ethnic minorities in entertainment programs might facilitate tolerance and integration of the different ethnos.

2.4.1. The genre of *Big Brother*

The wave of lifestyle, talk shows and entertainment formats with a mixture of serious political issues can be examined through the representations that shows such as *Big Brother* direct. The new type of formats is examined by Baym (2005) as a “hybrid blend” without strict boundaries between entertainment and political discourse, pop culture and journalist news (p. 259). A commercial genre, facilitating less aesthetic rules with a fusion of popular, mainstream ‘real life’ entertainment, *Big Brother* is an international marketing phenomenon (Murray & Oullette, 2009). Thus, when it comes to the conceptualization of the genre of the show, Mikos (2004) presents a diversity of options, from a television game show to a “psycho-show”, and from reality format to docu-reality soap (p. 96). As “one of the most successful franchises in television history” this homogenized medium can be seen as a documentary movie, a psychological experiment or just as the next television game show (Mikos, 2004, p. 96).

The television format *Big Brother* has a diverse and complex role to entertain the audience, to attract the viewer, and to create a necessity for active participation, but at the same time it has to direct a number of issues and often leads to debates related to the political sphere. As Hill and Palmer (2002) argue, after its invention by Jon de Mol in 1999, *Big Brother* “has become that rare cultural phenomenon that brings the role of television”

into the dimension of the public and social sphere (p. 251). Due to this complex nature, the definition of *Big Brother* is complex too. The participants of the format generalize it as a game, the producers as a reality show, and the political figures define *Big Brother* as a social reality seen in the life and the interactions inside the house and the perceptions of the social world outside that dimension (Mikos, 2004). Nonetheless, *Big Brother* has shown its stable position as one of the most popular shows on air, with a simple formula and ‘pure’ reality based entertainment. Andrejevic (2002) examines that the format’s popularity is based upon the desire of the audience for natural voyeurism and attraction to watch, identify, examine, debate, and discuss other’s life and stories. However, Berg and Tobin (2007) state that entertainment television is more than just amusement – it is a mirror of the social and the political life. *Big Brother* is more than just voyeurism and surveillance culture, it is a deed of the homogenization of entertainment reality television and the political agenda (Berg & Tobin, 2007). In this sense, these studies illustrate the scientific importance of entertainment programs such as *Big Brother*, but as Stetka (2007) outlines, the extensive research based on entertainment television in Eastern Europe is not applied in any other study.

In addition, the first prime-time day to day reality show in the US was *Survivor*, but *Big Brother* was the first of a kind entertainment reality format, presented and originally developed in The Netherlands, which makes it a unique European – based format. A lot of studies investigate the nature of entertainment shows and the representations they embody, with a focus on America and Western Europe, but less academic effort is devoted to the possible political nature of *Big Brother*. In my research I explore the political nature of *Big Brother Bulgaria* as a new phenomenon in the media sphere that demonstrates the bond between politics and the entertainment industry and at the same time presents a new model with a focus on the Eastern European media systems that has not yet been examined extensively.

2.4.2 The politics in *Big Brother Bulgaria* – “*Vip Brother. I was there*”

In this chapter, the autobiographic book of the political journalist and contestant, devoted to the life spent in *Big Brother Bulgaria* is presented and examined as a focus of the conducted research.

The presence of a political journalist inside a reality television format such as *Big Brother* has brought up numerous questions about his position and role in the show.

Furthermore, a documentary and autobiographic book devoted to the time spent in the house, including a chapter about the political talk between the contestants, have the ability to reveal more about the director's decisions, and the framing in such a show. The infamous Bulgarian journalist Kristina Patrashkova is one of the first invited and presented guests in the Vip house. In her book "*Vip Brother – I was there*" (2012) she explains that she was invited to be the "story teller" in order to analyze the scandals inside the house (p. 3). The tribune of *Big Brother* is seen by the journalist as an opportunity to expose the "secrets of the power elites" (2012, p. 4). Furthermore, the format is examined as an experiment, in which the attitude and the behavior of the contestants sometimes are less interesting than the positions of the audience in terms of voting. To illustrate this, the journalist states that "the audience that votes for the winner in the show is the same, that votes for the politicians" (2012, p. 5). The show is not just seen as a political and social experiment, but also as a miniature of the national attitude towards the institutions.

The presence of the superstar Pamela Anderson is examined by Patrashkova (2012) as a sensational hit that has attracted an immense interest. Surprisingly interested in Bulgarian history and politics, the attitude of the supermodel is presented as honest and straightforward, but following the set of the directors' scenario (Patrashkova, 2012). In terms of politics, the journalist states "Yes, we talked about politics in *Big Brother*", and the political talk is not considered as an issue for the scenario of the reality format (2012, p. 159). An interesting statement of the political journalist is that "Despite that it is not a political debate /.../ *Vip Brother* 2012 hit a huge slap in the face of the politics" (p. 160). It affirms to some extent the non – political nature of the reality television, but at the same time illustrates the political responsibility of the format. In addition, *Big Brother Bulgaria* demonstrates that politics are not a serious fundament of the society, because everyone sees the corruption and the personal interests inside the attitude of the Bulgarian politicians (Patrashkova, 2012).

In terms of framing, the show is examined as a manipulation in which the directors' decisions make the story line a preferred message (Patrashkova, 2012). In addition, the author states that the story line mainly focuses on the conflicts, but that the details are sometimes missing. In this sense, the framing is an inevitable part of the format, but the following analysis reveals interesting features hidden in *Big Brother Bulgaria*.

3. Design and method of analysis

In order to investigate the political communication within *Big Brother Bulgaria* in depth, and to provide a sensible and clear answer to my research questions, I used qualitative content analysis as a method. In this research the studies of Fields (1988), McKee (2003) and Teo (2000) and their models, which present a similar method of qualitative content analysis related to the fields of media and television studies are utilized. As Fields (1988) states, a message in the television is presented through facial expression, voice, words, and visual symbols. In this sense, the main and most significant variables taken into account in the present thesis are the verbal expressions – words and voice, and visual symbols – videos and pictures. The above listed variables present a constituent part of the media textual message, and as Livesey (2002) states, the media text is a social practice, formed by the social life. As such, the media text has to be investigated as a social practice. In this sense, Livesey (2002) examines the Foucauldian style of textual analysis as an easy and sensible process for an in depth exploring of media messages. To utilize and present themes into categories, such as institutions (political and social), social functions (present, former actions of the social and political institutions), and language forms (metaphors and patterns, such as irony), is a way through which to define and analyze a social practice, as such the media text is (Livesey, 2002).

The qualitative approach tends to investigate the construction of television as a source of data, and at the same time to interpret this data (Fields, 1988). In addition, the qualitative method of analysis presents detailed information about the investigated data (Patton, 1990). In the present thesis, I have followed the steps of qualitative content analysis proposed by Fields (1988), as follows: unitizing the content, transcription, developing categories, verbal analysis, interpreting the message elements, and at the end, explanation (p. 184). In the following sections these steps are examined in depth.

In the present thesis, I have analyzed data gathered from selectively chosen episodes of *Big Brother Bulgaria* in order to develop an answer to my main research question. The investigation of political content, communicated within the show was accomplished through a qualitative textual content analysis (Philips & Jorgenson, 2002; Teo, 2000; McKee, 2003). This type of qualitative instrument of analysis provides a sensible and critical approach in investigating the nature of both audio and visual texts, in order to obtain a better

understanding about the message within this media text (Philips & Jorgenson, 2002; McKee, 2003).

First, I have focused on the types of political issues communicated and presented on the show. In this sense, political content is determined as any verbal expression related to a political notion, as follows: names of political parties, political leaders and figures, former and present politicians, protests, social movements, different laws and legislations, environmental issues, religious and social minorities. This list served as a preliminary framework, based on which the political content in the show was determined.

Second, to investigate the political issues communicated within *Big Brother*, I examined the types of frames used in the production of the show. As Snow and Benford (2000) wrote, frames are used in order to make sense of specific issues and to present them in a more understandable to the audience way. In this sense, the agenda setting model and the frames used in the media are considered as something natural in the processes of development and shaping of these stories (Groshek, 2008). Nonetheless, while agenda setting tends to expose issues in more salient way, frames aim to present and to form an understanding for the viewer about these issues (de Vreese, 2005). Furthermore, frames and framing are related to the selecting and forming of the story elements, and to their presentation in the media. In this sense, frames are the most visible aspects of the media message, positioned by the media specialists into familiar for the audience framework (de Vreese, 2005). The types of frames that are the main focus in the present thesis, as examined in the theory chapter, are the conflict, the human interest, and attribution of responsibility frames.

3.1. Qualitative textual content analysis

In the present research I have used a qualitative content analysis, which provides a number of approaches to investigate the relationship between discourse and socio-cultural changes. I focused on *Big Brother Bulgaria* as a media text, and not just a television product. In this sense, the present thesis intends to deal exclusively with the daily interactions of the participants inside the house, the live night editions, and the game missions set by *Big Brother*. The live episodes at the studio and the guests that participate in different discussions are used as additional data to form an understanding about the political issues presented in the format. In the process of transcribing and analyzing the data, the emerging linguistic practices have provided the possibility to examine the process, in which the text is

produced, consumed, and interpreted by the audience (Philips & Jorgenson, 2002). Nonetheless, the main aim of the qualitative content analysis to reflect the linguistic-discursive dimensions considering the socio-cultural and political talk helped to examine the role of the entertainment industry, and the homogenization of politics and entertainment as a social phenomenon in *Big Brother Bulgaria*. The possibility to analyze written and spoken language and images in an entity was useful in the present analysis of *Big Brother Bulgaria*. In addition, as Philips and Jorgenson (2002) argue, the analysis of images is a delicate and difficult process due to the special interrelation between visual and linguistic text that needs to be considered, and also the tendency to analyze images and pictures as a linguistic text. In terms of investigating media frames communicated in the television show, de Vreese (2005) states that media frames emerge as verbal characteristics of the media text. In this sense, the key words and themes that relate to political content in the data analysis have formed a basis in the present research to examine the communicated in the media message frames.

3.2. Validity of the method

In terms of validity, the qualitative content analysis is a naturalistic method, in which the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the data and the setting (Patton, 1990). To demonstrate the validity and the authenticity of the research, different tables presenting the systematized data into non professional statistics with direct quotations from the data are presented. In addition, Sandelowski (2000) states that the validity of the qualitative research is based on the subjective understanding and interpretation of the researcher. In essence, the researcher has the role of the instrument in the qualitative analysis, in which his interpretation and vision about the message in the text are unique (Patton, 1990). In addition, Patton (1990) states, that the qualitative content analysis is a naturalistic investigation, in which the researcher as an instrument of the analysis is “studying the reality” (p. 39).

3.3. Units of analysis

The present thesis examines the political content communicated during the 4th season of *Big Brother Bulgaria*. This choice was determined on the basis of two main reasons. First, the analyzed 4th season (2012) of the show is relatively new and communicates important and topical issues from the Bulgarian society, forming an interesting and newsworthy view of the political situation in the nation. Furthermore, before

the start of the show, Nova TV announced that this season of *Big Brother Bulgaria* will be bounded with social responsibility and political communication. Thus, the 4th season of the show is the first season featuring a number of politically oriented national stars, such as two political journalists and the son of the most famous communist politician. In addition, the authenticity of the communicated political themes is affirmed by the presence of more than ten active political figures as guests in debates and discussions during the live night episodes. Second, the end of the 4th season of *Big Brother Bulgaria* was followed by a book published by one of the political journalists in the house, about the conflicts inside the house and the political debates within the show. In this sense, these two features distinguish the 4th season of *Big Brother Bulgaria* from other seasons of the show, forming an essential need for academic investigation, and transforming the season into a unique example and great source for data collection in terms of political communication. After attentive watching of the entire 4th season, twenty episodes emerged as units that communicate relevant and topical political issues from the Bulgarian political spectrum. Thus, in the present thesis these 20 episodes from the 4th season of *Big Brother Bulgaria* (Vip edition) that represent and direct political issues were selectively chosen, transcribed and analyzed.

The entire population size of *Big Brother* (Vip edition) is four seasons in total, of which each season has between 30 – 42 daily episodes, of which almost 10 live episodes and 32 daily episodes. Additional late night episodes are presented to the audience. However, the expectation about the content of the late night episodes is that they present uncensored moments, or repeating of the daily episode. The duration of the daily episodes is between 40-60 minutes, the live episodes are with duration of hour and a half to two hours, and the late night edition episodes are 25 minutes. The sample was drawn from the official website of the show, and from the official network site of Nova television, the presenter of *Big Brother Bulgaria*.

3.4. Time period of analysis

In the present thesis 42 episodes (entire season) were carefully watched, of which 20 selectively chosen episodes of the same 4th season of *Big Brother Bulgaria* (Vip edition) were analyzed. However, the entire episodes do not represent and communicate political issues during the full duration of the episode, so I have focused on specific time slots. The precise duration of the time slots that were transcribed and analyzed in the present research varies.

However, most of the time slots analyzed are with duration of 20-25 minutes. In the entire 4th season only one episode (10th) communicates political talk during the entire 40 minutes. The time that was devoted for the present research was around a month (20.04 to 24.05.2014).

3.5. Data analysis

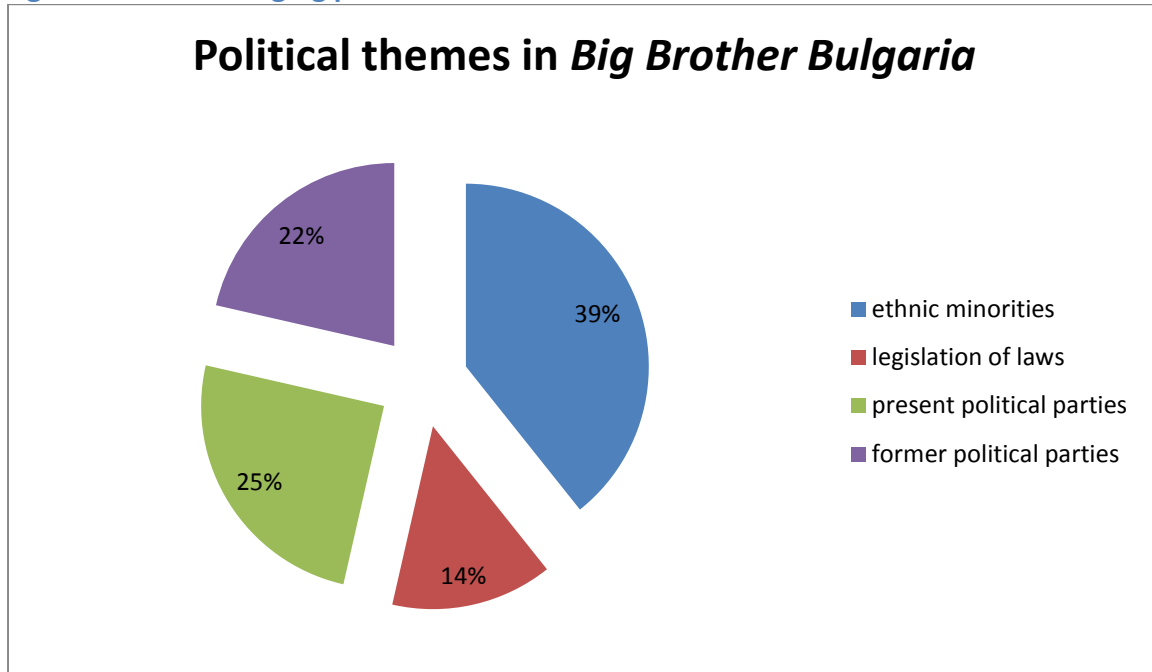
The episodes of the show were collected and transcribed as data, and then analyzed through qualitative content analysis by the model of Fields (1988), Philips & Jorgenson (2002) and Teo (2000). Based on the model of qualitative content analysis of Fields (1988), the present research was following a few steps. First, unitizing the content – all of the episodes from the 4th season of *Big Brother Bulgaria* (Vip edition) were attentively watched. From methodological perspective I have started with the main content presented on the format, and then I focused on the most highlighted issues considering the political talk. Afterwards, the emerging political content in some episodes determined their relevance for the present analysis, and they were collected as data. Second, transcription – the collected episodes were transcribed in verbatim style and transformed into data. The emerging key words and political themes were utilized into themes, and then into categories, that have formed four chapters in the analysis section. In this sense, the main keywords and phrases related to political issues and topics were highlighted and formed into tables that were used in the analysis process. Fourth, a verbal analysis was processed to investigate the main features set in the media text. In this sense, the verbal expressions, such as specific words, voice, debates, and discussions, based on political issues, served as the main focus for the research in the present thesis. Fifth, the message elements that emerged from the data analysis were interpreted and presented in the analysis chapter. In terms of frame investigation, in the process of qualitative analysis, the main communicated frames emerged as patterns of the media text, as keywords, catch phrases, metaphors, and epithets. They were presented and examined in each of the four analysis categories, on the basis of different examples, such as relevant words and metaphors that have emerged as repeated patterns in the text. In addition, the frame models applied in the presentation and communication of political talk in *Big Brother* was investigated. At the end, in the discussion chapter an in depth explanation of the results together with answers of the two research questions is presented.

4. The data analysis. Introduction

To answer the main research question ‘How are political issues communicated in *Big Brother Bulgaria?*’ in the present thesis I have collected and analyzed data from selectively chosen episodes from the show. This data was transcribed and analyzed through a qualitative content analysis. In order to classify the emerging political themes I formed the data into simple and easy categories, based on the utilized sample tables by Peter Teo (2000) in his model of qualitative textual analysis (presented with the transcripts). The same tables present direct examples from the data, of which the main emerging epithets and keywords are highlighted. These tables defined and formed four categories positioning the political content into specific, organized chapters that are presented in the following paragraphs of the thesis. The same keywords, that have emerged as patterns in the data analysis were a significant variable and a preliminary framework for the analysis of the political content and the media frames utilized in the show.

As examined in the method section, the model of analysis in the present thesis is a qualitative textual analysis, based on the studies of Fields (1988), McKee (2003), and Teo (2000). The main focus is on the verbal expressions, such as words and voice, and visual symbols. The following pie chart illustrates the political themes that have emerged in *Big Brother Bulgaria*. This statistic is based on the data sample (42 observed episodes) of which the episodes communicating politics are twenty. As follows, the main communicated theme (39% of the examined episodes) within the show was related to the ethnic minorities, and mainly to the Roma society in Bulgaria. This is followed by 25% with the communication of present political parties and political figures, namely the present (then) government of GERB with Prime Minister Boiko Borisov. The former political parties and political figures, namely the past governments of NDSV and BSP with representatives of these parties, were communicated in 6 episodes (22%). At the end, the legislation of laws, namely the inside smoking ban, passed in Bulgaria in June 2012 by the present government (GERB), was communicated in 4 episodes (14%).

Figure 1. Main emerging political themes



4.1. Minorities. Ethnic tension or a conflict?

As a serious, important, topical, and painful theme, the tension between the ethnic minorities in the Bulgarian nation emerged as the most discussed topic in the episodes of *Big Brother Bulgaria* 2012. The social responsibility and the political relevance transform the ethnic minorities and their position in the society into a question with international importance. In this issue actors are the contestants in *Vip Brother Bulgaria*, political figures, and different national celebrities as supporters and opponents in the studio during the live episodes of the show. To the importance of that social and political issue, a special additional 40 minutes live episode (episode 10, season 4, 2012) is devoted in order to reveal the truth about the ethnic tension, presented as an ethnic conflict based on a racist attitude, and to answer the question about the ethnic tolerance of the Bulgarian nation. In the same episode guests are the first expelled contestant in the house – a famous journalist, the leader of the political party Euro Roma, a famous Roma musician, and the leader of the nationalist political party VMRO. That episode is characterized with a social responsibility and political actions communicated by opponent political figures.

The presence of a female singer (Boni, contestant number 1) in the house of *Big Brother*, with roots from the Roma ethnos, is a tricky method of an entertainment show to position a popular, famous, and rich person from the ethnic minorities in front of a huge

audience in order to show that the society is more than tolerant. On the other hand, the presence of a person from the ethnic minorities might be seen as a way of the television to educate and form a tolerance between the ethnos, or this is just a way of the television medium to question that tolerance? The participation of representatives from the ethnic societies in Bulgaria is not alien for the *Big Brother* format and for the audience. In *Vip Brother 2* (2007) one Roma contestant was present, but no other minorities such as Turkish or Armenian were presented in that season. In *Vip Brother 3* (2009), two contestants from the Roma ethnos were participating, and no other ethnic minorities were presented in the same season.

In the examined *Vip Brother 2012* the presence of the female singer from the Roma ethnos opened a number of difficult, from a social and political point of view questions that were part of numerous discussions among the contestants in the house, the host of the show, and the guests in the live studio. The first topic about the ethnic intolerance and a starting pressure point among the guests in the *Big Brother* house is opened during the second episode, when the name of the dog in the house, whose owner is a *Survivor* winner (Niki) is revealed to be Mango. The owner states that this name means gypsy in Bulgarian language, and it is named after the gypsies in the nation. However, the etymology of the word Mango has a dual meaning. In both ways it could be an exotic fruit, but it could be an insulting for the Roma people word. Nonetheless, the real beginning and the explosion of this huge conflict is presented in episode 7 of season 4, when the show starts with a short video in which the female Roma singer (Boni) refers to the tension as an issue of the different skin color in the society not only for the Roma people, but for all of the minorities in Bulgaria, and the rights of these people (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012). In addition, the host starts the episode with a statement towards the audience that they would witness an ethnic conflict in the house. In this sense, it is interesting to mention Mikos (2004) and his definition about the reality format. He argues that the political figures define *Big Brother* as a part of the social reality, and the interactions of the contestants, and the actions inside the house present a unique miniature of the social world. That small society in the house reflects the social issues outside *Big Brother*, and positions the audience to formulate a specific understanding of the surrounding political situation. In this sense, the ethnic conflict familiar to the society is an easy way for the audience to recognize and to understand it as a representation of the existing reality. Despite that, the following statement of the nationalist

political leader Angel Jambazski from episode 10, season 4, does not affirm the reality and the life in the *Big Brother* house, but it demonstrates that the communicated political talk is extremely similar to the reality in the Bulgarian society:

“Yes in Bulgaria there is a huge ethnic tension, a huge conflict between Bulgarians and gypsies in the nation it exists /.../ in some small villages, but in this house...” (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012)

The same episode refers to a number of issues within the ethnic conflict in the house. The constant repeating of the singer against the *Survivor* winner that he does not play a game, neither is just part of an entertainment show, but an insulting person, trying to offend the entire Roma population, is seen as a mission for the singer. She is stating that she has to prove that she is better than him, that she is above his standards and mostly that she is equal with him. This is a competition, and a mission for both of them, trying to present the other in the worst light. In this debate the two contestants represent two significant groups in the Bulgarian society – the one of the ethnic minorities, and the one of the nationalists that truly supports the pureness of the Bulgarian nation. In this sense, the tension in the *Big Brother* house reveals different dimensions of the ethnic conflict in the nation. To illustrate that, I would refer to the study of Hajdinjak et al. (2012) that examine the tolerance in the Bulgarian society, considering the political and the media discourses on a national level. Thus, they state that the Roma minority is excluded from the national population, due to the perception that the ethnos is tolerated by the political institutions, and not controlled by them. In a similar model to their study the present research demonstrates the ethnic conflict in the reality format as a reflection of the ethnic tension inside the society, in which the Roma representative is partly excluded, due to her ethnic origins.

4.1.1. Education system and inequalities

The conflict inside the house of *Big Brother Bulgaria* shows and represents issues that are directly connected to the social and ethnic conflicts in the reality. These conflicts are based on a tension between the ethnos and caused by a disparity in the educational, institutional, and political systems in the nation. In this sense, Hajdinjak et al. (2012) argue that the main rejection and inequality, forming the disintegration of the Roma ethnos is

visible mainly in the educational system. In a similar way, the audience of *Big Brother Bulgaria* is a witness of one of the main reasons for the ethnic problems not only inside the show, but also inside the society, namely the problem with the disintegration, based on a lack of education among the Roma. Thus, inside the house of *Vip Brother 2012*, the contestant Boni refers to the importance of education, as the most important step in the life and the prosperity of every young person. However, she obviously states that she did not graduate school, because the music career and her child were of main priority. The “delay” in the education is based on the wish to sing, to have a career, to be successful, and to be famous, and this is achieved. The singer is aware of the absence of education and knowledge, and she is keen to achieve that. The education is not just a need, it is a privilege that would bring satisfaction and deserved acknowledgement. In a statement of the singer (Boni) the audience is able to see a wish, a desire in the personal plans of a human from the minorities, a boldness to state it, and the passion to change the mistakes in his life. The necessity for that change is driven by a worthy aim, to be “the best role model” and figure in the choices of her child. In a more symbolic way, this decision of Boni is an open statement to the audience and the young society to follow this model, and to listen to the advice of a person that has already achieved almost everything in his life. Similarly, Boykoff and Goodman (2009) outline the endorsement of famous people on the tribune of entertainment formats as a facilitator of non – direct political talk, and similar to the politicians’ campaign model. Moreover, this type of celebrity endorsement affirms the stable position of famous people to communicate political issues and to moderate public opinions.

The education as a value in a personal and a social aspect is part of the conversation in the house of *Vip Brother Bulgaria* (2012) with two sides. The position of the singer and her desire to study is presented, and sounds honest. However, the main opponent of Boni has a different position. In his conversations with other contestants, Niki obviously states that he knows the singer from the past, namely from another famous reality show – *Survivor*, where the Roma singer had the same statements and desires about her education. That show was three years ago, and Niki is trying to explain to the other contestants, and to the audience that these desires are just lies, and a way for a good advertisement. The demonstrations of Niki and the verbal attacks towards the singer have created suspicions in the other guests in the *Vip Brother* house, who have directly questioned the promise of Boni to finish high school and to study in a university. The same question is one of the main issues,

communicated during the special live episode 10 of season 4, devoted to that ethnic tension (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012). The education as an issue in the personal life of the Roma singer, and the educational inequality inside the Bulgarian nation, and mainly among the ethnos is a focal point in the talk. During the debate, the first expelled contestant from the house states that one of the reasons for that tension are the lies of the singer about her education. To illustrate this, *Big Brother* presents parts of episode 10, season 4 (statement of Niki) that is never shown to the audience before:

“This gipsy, three years ago, even the newspapers said that she is accepted in the university to study pedagogy or philosophy. This night I heard the same thing, that she will start university education. After 5-6 years you would hear the same thing that she is starting to study” (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012)

In that video the main opponent of the singer states that she is lying about that promise, and demonstrates that with a reference to the news media, referring to the words of the singer. In addition, the Survivor (Niki) states that the “ignorance” is an issue in the Bulgarian nation, mostly coming from the bad examples that the famous people impose. However, after the video, the guests in the live studio comment the situation inside the house with interesting references to the outside reality in the Bulgarian nation. The main supporter of Boni, the leader of the only Roma party in Bulgaria – Cvetelin Kuntchev states that the children in the society need models, coming from the authorities, and from the political elites. He refers to an example in order to support and expose the accomplishments of the Roma society, pointing that one of the poorest regions in Bulgaria has one of “the most educated gypsies” (“82% are with high school education, 17.5% are with university education and 0.5% are without education” Cvetelin Kuntchev, *Vip Brother Bulgaria*, 2012). This statistic is questioned by the Host of the show, who is interested how these results are achieved in poor surroundings, where the misery and the fight for food are supposed to prevail over the necessity for education.

However, the achievements of the Bulgarian Roma are compared with the lack of knowledge of another contestant inside the Vip house. It is an open confrontation between Bulgarians and Roma, in which both of the sides are furiously trying to support its own side, emphasizing their best achievements. The Roma representative, and leader of the political party Euro Roma states that some of the gypsies have more knowledge than other celebrity

contestants in the house that are truly stupid. The debate about the education of the Roma ends with the statement from the same political figure, pointing that the children from the Roma minority have to take “as models their friends, other students, Bulgarians” (Cvetelin Kuntchev, episode 7, season 4, 2012). In this sense, the education is examined as the basis of that tolerance between the different ethnos that will bring integration and communication and would lead to the desired suppression of the ethnic tension. Thus, this affirms the examined by Hajdinjak et al. (2012), that the education of the Roma ethnos would be followed by integration that would form tolerance between the main population and the minorities.

In the elimination night of the 31st episode of season 4, the two opponents – Boni and Niki face each other with a special mission ‘School for stars’ in order to survive in the show (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012). The female singer has to go back at school in order to study Bulgarian history, where she shows that her knowledge about the main historical facts is more than limited. However, *Big Brother* gives a second chance to everyone that deserves it. The singer has few days to study with other contestants in the house, and later during the elimination night in the live studio, in front of the audience she answers eight historical questions more than brilliantly. She wins the mission, answers all of the questions, and later, Boni is saved by the votes of the audience. At the end of the mission, she takes a strategic move, while she sings the Bulgarian national anthem, as a Bulgarian citizen, and then the so called Roma anthem, referring to her roots and satisfying two diverse audiences. This even can be examined as a similar to the politician’s strategic decision in which sense the symbolical gestures and promises for the voters could win the elections. Moreover, as Dryer (2011) states, the voting in *Big Brother* demonstrates the political model affirmed in the outside reality.

This is not the end of the ethnic conflict, and the tension inside the *Vip Brother* house, neither the end of the educational issue in the Bulgarian society. The examined above issue in the educational system considering the Roma ethnos, demonstrates a similar academic findings, stating that “the issue of Roma education is considered as one of the most /.../ effective mechanisms for their integration” (Hajdinjak et al., 2012, p. 5). Thus, the present research does not deal exclusively with the inequalities in the educational system in Bulgaria, but examines it as an aspect of the political talk within *Big Brother Bulgaria*. In this sense, it is an open question and a part of an ethnic problem that would be investigated in

its other dimensions in the following sections of the present thesis.

4.1.2. Two types of people – good and bad, and the racism as an issue

The ethnic tension in the *Vip Brother* house and the minority conflict between Bulgarians and Roma has different dimensions. As examined above, one of them is the inequality and the disintegration of the Roma society, based on the issues in the educational system. The following paragraphs investigate the attitude of the two opponent contestants in terms of references and statements with racist characteristics. The actions of the gypsies and the attitude of some Bulgarians would be examined on the basis of the communication between the Roma singer Boni and the *Survivor* winner Niki. The racism as a notion and term would be defined. The tolerance and intolerance of Bulgarians and Roma in terms of political and social relevance is also investigated.

The different color skin and the inequality between the ethnos is a topic opened by the famous Roma singer Boni. From the beginning of the show, she states that the different color of the skin is not a reason to define someone, to offend him, and to think that he is below the standards. The female singer outlines that living in the 21st century is a time when the ethnic and religious inequalities do not have to be part of the today's society, while the qualities and the morals are the most valuable possessions of the human. The main, and most valuable statement bounded with the moral values and the qualities is made by Boni in episode 7, season 4, and the audience will hear it many times:

“I don't think that the color of the skin matters, I think that the types of people are only two, good and bad” (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012)

The only possible and accurate determination and dividing of the people is based on the qualities that they have and what makes them good and bad people. In this sense, Boni states that the discrimination based on color skin, ethnos, and religion is inadmissible, not only in the present case in the house of *Big Brother*, and not just between Roma and Bulgarians, but among all of the ethnos. In a similar way, Hajdinjak et al. (2012) examine the situation in Bulgaria and the ethnic tolerance of the national population, stating that the tolerance is visible mainly towards minorities such as Turks, Armenians, and Jews, while the Roma ethnos is mostly rejected. The most important place in the *Big Brother* house – the confession room, plays the role of a tribune where everyone has its own time to talk with *Big*

Brother, with his fans, and mostly with his supporters. Boni confesses there that in difficult moments (with the Survivor Niki) she does not feel ashamed by her roots and origin, even more, she is proud with that. Thus, despite her personal achievements as a famous singer, she still has the pain of the intolerant attitude towards her and the ethnos that she represents. This negative attitude of the Survivor is part of the debate in the special episode 10 of season 4, in which the ethnic intolerance and the suspicions for ignorance are discussed (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012). The attitude and the behavior of Boni as a person are also questioned. In addition, during the 10th episode of season 4, the host of the show makes an extremely direct and interesting statement referring to the attitude of an entire ethnos, and at the same time questions the abilities, and the power of the democratic political system in Bulgaria after the 1990s:

“Maybe just Boni has a bad influence over Niki, but maybe Boni is using the best weapon of the democracy – to cry that she is part of the pressured minority and at the same time to win new successes” (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012)

The honesty and well-behaved attitude of the singer is seen as double-sided, and is examined as a strategy similar to the political situation in the nation. This statement opens numerous debates about the rights and the responsibilities of all Bulgarian citizens, and at the same time puts on doubt the ability of the political elites to deal with the issues in the society. This illustrates the examined by Hajdinjak et al. (2012) that the disintegration of the ethnos is based on the lack of control of the political institutions towards the actions of the minority. “The best weapon of the democracy” is seen as the ability to be weak, to be poor, to be humiliated, and to cry in order to achieve something. This statement refers to the reality in the Bulgarian nation, in which during the past 25 years the citizens try to survive. This statement is the opposite of the deserved reality, in which the dignity and the freedom in every sense of the word have to dominate. In that sense, the statement of Havens and Imre (2012) that the nature of the television medium, and mostly the reality television is explosive, as a democratic phenomenon and a tribune on which the social and political inequalities have to be exposed, in some aspects is demonstrated by the host of *Big Brother Bulgaria*. In terms of the political changes after the 1990s, examined by Barnes (2007), the freedom of speech is examined as possible on the arena of the reality television, in which the tribune for political communication is open and every verbal weapon is allowed.

The ethnic debate as a part of the race politics of the European nations is communicated by political figures, that represent the two oppositional sides, namely the Roma party and a nationalist party. The presence of ethnic intolerance, tension, and mostly racism are the main issues, in which the positions of different public supporters have to be investigated. In terms of racism the host is interested to reveal and answer the main question “Does Niki hate the gypsies?” and Does this make him racist? The position of the first expelled contestant (Sonya) is that Niki truly does not like Boni and he is insulting her, despite the fact that he is not using direct offensive words. Furthermore, the journalist states that this is not a discrimination based on an ethnic dislike, but it is more likely to be a personal dislike. On the other hand, Boni is the only person in the house that refers to the situation as an ethnic discrimination, ethnic intolerance, ethnic tension, and racism. To that, Sonya states that Boni does not understand the meaning of these words and in that sense the tension is related to prejudices related to the ethnos. Nonetheless, the conversation is following a specific direction and it gets extremely political. In the reality show, during episode 10, season 4, the journalist (Sonya) refers to a real and tragic situation from 2011, when the social and the political tension between the ethnos have escalated to an intense point:

“I reminded her that last year, when the dramatic times came in Katunitsa, and almost the entire population revolted against the gipsy community, in the words of God, if the Bulgarian nation was intolerant against the gypsies, a real fire would start” (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012)

This is an event from the previous year (2011), when the tension between the Bulgarian nation and the Roma ethnos has escalated to a tremendous extent. The small town of Katunitsa has become a witness of the murders of two boys, the inability of the political institutions to deal and solve the issue, and an aggression that was followed with the burning down of a few Roma leaders’ houses. As the journalist points “a real fire would start” in which sense the tolerance of the Bulgarian population was the reason for the end of that “fire”. It is a brilliant metaphor that describes the situation in the house of *Big Brother* and in the Bulgarian society in terms of the fire burning in the tension between the different ethnos. Nonetheless, these processes in the society, communicated in *Big Brother* present the position of the citizens towards the social and political inequalities in every dimension. In

order to prove the Bulgarian ethnic tolerance, Sonya states that less dramatic issues in more liberal countries such as France and The Czech Republic have led to more serious protests, and tension among the different nationalities. On the other hand, this political event is also communicated by two opponent guests – the leader of Euro Roma and the leader of VMRO (nationalist party). In order to demonstrate the tension between the different ethnoses, the VMRO leader states that dramatic moments such as the small village of Katunitsa are the proof for the ethnic tension inside the Bulgarian society. In opposition, the leader of the Roma party examines the situation there as a social conflict, based on a hatred towards a wealthy Roma family and definitely not an ethnic tension. In other words, this protest in the small village is seen as a union of the Roma and the Bulgarian societies against the same social and political enemy.

In terms of discrimination and the way to address a person from the Roma ethnoses, the guests in the live episode 10 of season 4, communicate that as another issue, which is considered as an issue in terms of the policy for ethnic discrimination (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012). The words gypsy and Roma and the proper appeal towards the people from the ethnoses are questioned by the host of *Big Brother Bulgaria*:

“At the end, the word gypsy, is it assaulting, tell us?” (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012)

The most accurate answer is provided by the leader of the political party Euro Roma. He states that the word gypsy definitely is not offensive in any aspect of the word. However, the word Roma is made by his words from the journalists and the politicians in order to divide the ethnoses with a new, different, and more polite word that comes directly as an etymology from the Roma language. In that sense, the usage of the word gypsy does not need to be considered as offensive or to be referred as an ethnic discrimination.

In terms of the accusations of racism and ethnic discrimination, the show offers a few videos presenting the conflict in a more systematized way for the audience and the commentators in the studio. In the first video, the audience is a witness of the conversation between Boni and Niki and his references about the skin color of the singer. Despite that the Survivor does not directly assault her with offensive words, neither refers to the fact that she is a gypsy, he points that she is different and it is obvious to the audience that the gray and blue skin colors, mentioned by him are typical for the Roma. However, almost every

small part of the presented videos end with a conversation of Boni with another contestant, in which the achievements and the success of the singer are highly estimated. In this sense, as Boykoff and Goodman (2009) state, the celebrity endorsement in political debates and political issues is an integral part of the entertainment formats, facilitated by the extraordinary status and image of the famous figure. Another short video (already extremely familiar to the audience) presents the honest discussion between the opponents in which the main question for accusation in racism is presented “Do you hate the gypsies?” The answer is clear, in which Niki states that he does not hate any ethnos, but he hates different people, and maybe she is one of them. This is an honest answer, followed with the statement of Niki that he does not like the singer, because he was accused by her in racism, not in the *Big Brother* house, but in a different reality show (*Survivor*). This statement is completely denied by Boni and something more, it is defined as a lie. Following this model of denial and accusations, the singer decides to finish the conversation and to thank her opponent. In the live studio the content of the videos is communicated and to some extent investigated by the guests. An interesting position has the leader of the nationalist political party VMRO – Angel Jambazski. He states that the racism in the show and in the Bulgarian society is something exaggerated, and despite the fact that the ethnic tension exists, the discrimination and ‘hatred’ as accusations are dramatized by a tension based on a personal conflict. Furthermore, during episode 10, season 4, the political leader Angel Jambazski makes an interesting point:

“The singer is searching for a public expression and support, trying to make from one game in the house politics” (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012)

The desire for self-expression and popularity from one side is an achievement, but from the other, is related to a model similar to the political campaigns (Dryer, 2011). The references of the female singer and her attitude transform the nature of her conversations into a political and social arena, a tribune with references towards the audience and her fans. At the same time, she is trying to find a bigger support with a double sided image – the famous and strong singer, and the weak, oppressed representative from the minority. In this sense, Boni finds a way to win the elections. Similar to the politicians’ model, the singer has a tribune, and a huge audience to which to send her political messages. On the other hand,

the above mentioned quotation of the politician can be examined as a way for manipulation of Boni, and a symbolic transformation of a show that is not naturally intended to be political into a house of politics. This manipulation of the audience in the media sphere is similar to the examined by Barnes (2007) post communist transformation in the new Eastern European nations, in which different representatives of the elite had the ability to manipulate the viewer, positioning the political institutions into a powerless position.

The ethnic tension or the personal conflict in the *Big Brother* house does not finish with the special live edition episode, dedicated to the issue. The conflict proceeds until the moment when the singer is expelled from the Vip house. Nonetheless, the accusations of racist discrimination are one of the main focuses in the conflict. In this sense, the research of Palasinski et al. (2011) about racism in the *Celebrity Big Brother* (2007) in England is a relevant basis in order to investigate the issue. As the authors state, the racist jokes and racist attitude towards people with different ethnos is a complex and a delicate topic. In more detailed findings, Filipescu (2009) examines the portrayal of the Roma ethnos in the mass media as a fluctuating process between the positive and the negative references towards the minority. In this sense, Eastern Europe is presented as “the most diverse and conflict region in Europe”, considering the minorities portrayed in the media mainly as criminals and vandals (Filipescu, 2009, p. 299). Despite that, as Palasinski et al. (2011) and Filipescu (2009) examine, the ethnic racism presented in the media is based on the we – you model, in which the distinction between the minority and the majority of the national population is visible. In a similar way, the ethnic tension in the house draws an amazing attention from the audience and from the politicians. However, the race policy of Bulgaria as a European state is not legally challenged due to the unjustified accusations. Nonetheless, in the 11th episode of season 4 the private and straightforward conversation between the opponents is presented, and the racism is in the focus of the tension (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012). The *Survivor* winner feels ashamed from the racist label on him and tries to explain that the dislike and the tension have nothing in common with a racist discrimination. Despite that, in future episodes (12, 13, 23, 41) the topic is seriously discussed by the contestants in the house and presented by the host of the show as an interesting, and at the same time unexpected moment in the history of the Vip *Big Brother Bulgaria*.

In the ethnic conflict, position takes one of the most famous political journalists in Bulgaria, a contestant in the present season, and a writer of the documentary/

autobiographic book - Kristina Patrashkova. During the 23rd episode of season 4 Boni tries to attach the attention of the journalist and to persuade her to believe that the Survivor winner is racist and hates the Roma ethnos. The position of the journalist is neutral, but to some extent supportive, in terms of the personal achievements of the singer. Following that direction, the journalist states that the success of a person from a different ethnos has to be exposed in the media in order to facilitate a better integration among the youths, illustrating the position of Boykoff and Goodman (2009) that the celebrity appeal may facilitate positive outcomes for political communication.

The same episode 23 of season 4 reveals another aspect of the conflict, in which the journalist and the accused Survivor investigate the nature of the discrimination and the ethnic tension (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012). The position of the journalist is that the ethnic conflict in the house is more than visible, in which Niki has the leading role of the opponent, with a negative attitude towards the Roma singer. However, the Survivor Niki tries to distinguish his image from the racist accusations, and during episode 11, season 4, he states:

“Maybe I am negative towards Boni, but what negative I say against the gypsies? I don’t want an example, but if you give me” (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012)

This statement is another attempt to excuse his attitude and to defend his positions as a fair player in a game, in which all methods of physical attacks are allowed. Furthermore, this type of behavior is intended as boldness and courage of the Survivor to expose the negative aspects in the behavior of Boni and the Roma ethnos that she represents. In this sense, the honesty and the ability to unmask the social inequalities inside the nation do not need to be considered as discrimination and racism. Moreover, as Dryer (2011) states, this type of references can be examined as a direct political address, similar to the politicians’ model that attracts a diverse audience. As a painful and delicate topic, the discussion ends with an agreement, in which both sides assent that the negative attitude towards the Roma ethnos in Bulgaria is based on the disintegration and lack of education among the majority of the ethnos. In this sense, the low level of education of the Roma leads to a competition for survival with corruption and illegal actions such as stealing.

To test the attitude of the Survivor, and to present the lifestyle of the Roma ethnos in the most natural way, the show creates an infeasible environment, in which Niki has to

spend entire day working with Roma inside the Roma neighborhood. Testing his ability to survive, the so called Survivor states that he has lost his dignity, positioned into the lowest level in a profession intended for “people with no education”. In the same time, a numerous faces of Roma women and children are shown, in a poor and dirty environment. The audience is a witness of the lifestyle of these people and their relatively aggressive behavior, searching for expression and tribune to state their needs and to support Boni. This episode symbolically reveals the difficulties of the ethnos, and at the same time questions the inability or unwillingness of the Roma for education. In this sense, the investigated theme, demonstrates that the reality format *Big Brother Bulgaria* is a mirror of the political life, and the inequalities in the social system (Berg & Tobin, 2007).

The disintegration of the minority as an emanation of the political system in Bulgaria in the past 25 years is examined in detail in a following chapter, in which the direct accusations towards the political corruption and inability of the power elites to integrate the Roma would be interpreted as part of different political theme.

4.1.3. Main emerging frames in the “ethnic tension” debate

In the former chapters the debate about the tension in the *Vip Brother* house, based on ethnic discrimination was examined. However, the present chapter investigates the different emerging themes and key framing words related to the ethnic conflict.

The present research investigated that *Big Brother Bulgaria* communicates the minority tension on the basis of two media frames, as follows: the conflict and the human interest frame. These two frames emerged as the most prominent devices for moderating the ethnic tension in the show. In addition, these two frames demonstrate a similar to the examined by de Jebril et al. (2013) findings, that the conflict and the human interest frames are the most popular and active devices for softening political issues in entertainment media. In the examined theme the main emerging frame in communicating the ethnic tension in the show is the conflict frame. As examined above (in the theory chapter) this frame moderates the event through a conflict between different individuals (de Vreese, 2005), in this situation between the contestants Niki and Boni. *Big Brother* presents a topical issue in the Bulgarian society, and frames it through a personal conflict, based on which the main event in the show is formulated as an “ethnic tension”. Similarly, de Vreese (2005) outlines that media frames are the communication device that serves to present the most

important political issue of the day. The second frame that emerged from the data analysis is the human interest frame, in which as De Vreese (2004) states, the emotions of the individual have the most fundamental role in the presentation of an issue. In the present theme, the emotional statements of Boni about the ethnic discrimination in the house and her personal achievements as a person form the issue into a dramatic story about the life of the minorities. On the other hand, the statements of the Survivor Niki, as a main opponent in the debate have defending position against the accusations in discrimination, intolerance, and racism. In this sense, moderating the story through the individual's emotions, the human interest frame offers the audience an easy model to identify the issue (de Vreese, 2004).

In terms of the devices utilized in the examined frames, a number of key words and phrases emerged during the process of transcription and data analysis that directly refer to the main debate in the show. These words determine and illustrate the human interest and conflict frames utilized in *Big Brother Bulgaria* (2012). Nonetheless, they can be divided into positive and negative references towards the discussion. The former ones, as follows: "a proud gypsy" ("I am singer, a proud gypsy", Boni), "good people" ("I think that the types of people are only two, good and bad", Boni), "role model", "same rights" ("We need to know that we are equal, we have the same rights", Boni), "equal", and "integration". The second type, as follows: "different color skin" ("They are not supposed to think that all of the people with different color skin, not only the roma, but all of the minorities, that they are second hand type of people", Boni), "second hand type of people", "minority conflict", "discrimination", "ethnic conflict" ("Is there an ethnic conflict inside the house of *Big Brother?*", The Host) , "racism", "ethnic intolerance", "racist discrimination", "ethnic tension" ("Yes in Bulgaria there is a huge ethnic tension", Angel Jambazski), and "disintegration".

4.2. Legislation of laws. Support or Denial

The first episodes of *Big Brother Bulgaria* (2012) demonstrate the division of the house into small groups, in which the conflicts for superiority and dominance emerge. The host of the show introduces the 9th episode of season 4 as the starting point for conflicts, which divide the house into a battle field of smokers against nonsmokers (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012). During the same episode, the first nominations take place, in which a

number of contestants are nominated due to their personal attitude and opinion against the smoking inside the house. While the nominations take place, one of the most famous showmen in Bulgaria, a follower of an extreme healthy lifestyle and opponent of the smokers, is shown in a small picture, followed by an anti smoking sign in the house. This illustrates that the politics of *Big Brother* as a format are interrelated and extremely similar to the political agenda established by the political institutions. In this sense, Dryer (2011) outlines that elections and nominations in the *Big Brother* house refer to the political rules established in the outside reality and are extremely familiar to the viewer. However, despite the fact that the inside smoking in Bulgaria and inside the house of *Big Brother* is forbidden, some of the guests decide to defy these laws.

During the 9th episode of season 4 the showmen, the political journalist Kristina, and a famous model, discuss in a conversation the significance of observing the laws, and at the same time the way to be an exemplifier for the society. Therefore, Kutzi states:

“There, outside is fine, but if it is everywhere, just think about it. From this point it’s a show and you walk and smoke, you are seen by other people and what they see on the television in the main area of the house, it is possible to create bad habits for the people” (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012)

The position of the showmen is clear and demonstrates that he has respect from the political laws set by the state. Following the political laws is considered as the right attitude, while the opposite of that would lead to bad habits in the viewers that are under the influence of the Vip guests. In a similar way, Boykoff and Goodman (2009) state, that the celebrity endorsement in different political topics, such as legislation of laws, is a visible and familiar to the audience phenomenon in the media. In addition, as a main politically educational medium (Winslow, 2010), the entertainment format has the role to be an exemplifier of moral values for the audience. However, the desire of the showmen to change the opinion of his opponents is faced with unwillingness and irony. The position of the political journalist (that is a smoker) is that the manners of the showmen and his statements have almost made him an American. This can be examined as a compliment, but also as a joke with some notes of sarcastic humor, in terms of his inadequate attitude that is not innate for the Bulgarian society. Furthermore, the American lifestyle and the American dream are presented by another contestant Vladi as a lie. The young man who has spent

most of his life in the States points out that the American system is simple – the citizens sell their lives to the institutions in order to survive. In a similar manner, the attitude of the showmen can be examined as a blind support and confidence in the political institutions. As a censor in the house, the showmen that is accused (in the first episodes) in a communist behavior with a desire to vote for everything and to observe all of the laws, proposes an open discussion and voting in order to solve the issue. Despite that, the majority of contestants does not consider his attitude seriously and demonstrate unwillingness to solve this issue.

The other supporter of the law and opponent of the smokers inside the *Vip Brother* house is the singer Boni. Despite her conflict with the Survivor Niki, she decides to take actions in another conflict, considering a serious political law. In the 11th episode Boni accuses another singer in the house Mariana, who is a smoker and devoted opponent of the smoking veto that she is a bad model for the audience (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012). The main arguments in the debate are that the entire house smells like cigarettes, and the health and the comfort of the contestants is threatened. However, Mariana states that some of the contestants are not tolerant towards the preferences of the others, and most of them have their own temptations. Furthermore, the absence of decision is stressed by the singer (Mariana) as the main issue which creates the confusion in the house:

“If we smoke inside we would smoke inside, if we have an agreement I would smoke outside” (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012)

In a similar model to the reality, the contestants in *Big Brother Bulgaria* communicate that issue with the deserved responsibility, but with a specific insecurity in terms of the final decision. To illustrate that, Berg and Tobin (2007) state that the political life in the reality is mirrored by the communications in a reality shows such as *Big Brother*, in which the political decisions and laws are questioned and discussed.

The 12th episode starts with an image of an ash tray full with cigarette ends, and the voice of *Big Brother* who announces that the disagreement between smokers and non smokers have led to an extreme tension and debates in the house (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012). In the present episode, the position of both smokers and non smokers is presented in a peaceful debate about the issue. The internationally famous opera singer (Yulian) as a non

smoker takes an interesting position to support the inside smoking and to oppose the house rules. On the other hand, the rebel in the house – a rock, funk singer demonstrates his unwillingness to accept conditions. Being one of the funniest persons in the house and a finalist in the show with a proven popularity among the audience, his disagreement with the laws demonstrates to some extent the disagreement of his supporters to observe the specific political law. However, the former smoking opponents have agreed that the smoking inside is not the main issue, but the necessity for fresh air in the small area of the house is huge. Despite that, the end of the discussion demonstrates the desired tolerance in the house, in which the decisions have to be common for everyone without exceptions. Moreover, this side of the show reveals an interesting position, illustrating the educational effect of entertainment programs over the audience in terms of political laws and social issues (Murray & Oullette, 2008; Rhodes, 2001).

4.2.1. Main emerging frames

The following chapter examines the emerging frames in the presented smoking debate in the house of *Big Brother* (2012), based on the new law (passed in June 2012) in Bulgaria that bans the inside smoking. The investigation of the present theme demonstrates that in *Big Brother Bulgaria* the legislation of laws and the acceptance or denial of these laws is communicated on the basis of two media frames, namely the conflict and the attribution of responsibility frames. The main emerging and most prominent frame is the conflict frame, based on the repeating debates in the house between the groups of smokers and non smokers. The conflict considering the inside smoking is mainly formed as a disagreement between different individuals in the house, emphasized by the division of two groups of opponents and supporters to the new ban. Nonetheless, the conflict is presented in a soft and humoristic style, appropriate for the entertainment format. This demonstrates the findings of Jebril et al. (2013) that the conflict frame formed as an individual disagreement, used in softening the political issues, serves as a facilitator of political talk on entertainment oriented programs. The second frame used in presenting the issue is the attribution of responsibility, in which the reason for the tension is based on the lack of discussion and agreement between the groups. As Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) outline, the attribution of responsibility frame, moderates the issue through direct accusations against individuals and institutions. In the present theme considering the smoking ban the accusation is

directed towards a few contestants in the house that support the inside smoking and deny to follow the set political rules.

The main key words and phrases that illustrate the above mentioned frames used in the presentation of the smoking debate have emerged during the data analysis, as follows: “divided”, “need to discuss” (“all of us need to discuss and say who is pro and who is against that”, Kutzi), “bad habits” (“what they see on the television in the main area of the house, it is possible to create bad habits in the people”, Kutzi), “tolerant”, “inside”, “smoke inside”, “smokers and nonsmokers”, “tension”, “need agreement”. The host announces the issue in the *Big Brother* house as a tension, based on which the contestants are divided into smokers and non smokers. The “need for agreement” and “need to discuss” set a feeling for legal interrelations inside *Big Brother* (Dryer, 2011). In addition the “smoking inside” is the main repeated phrase in the debate, which is used both in terms of permission and denial.

4.3. Present political parties and political figures

The following chapter investigates the way in which present (active politicians from the government during 2012) political figures and political parties are presented in the show and communicated in conversations by contestants in the *Vip Brother* house, the host of the show, and guests in the live nights. The following table is an illustration of the discussion related to different political figures in *Big Brother Bulgaria*. The main emerging political party is GERB, which is the leading political force in Bulgaria, and a head of the government during 2012. In terms of main political figures discussed in the house, the name of the present (then) Prime Minister Boiko Borisov is the most frequent. In addition, the name of the Prime Minister often is used directly without mentioning his political status. Thus, both the position Prime Minister and the name Boiko Borisov were considered as direct references in terms of communication of a present political figure. The following table includes two other political representatives of the relatively small parties Euro Roma, the main and only Roma party in Bulgaria, and VMRO, the biggest, and the most famous nationalist party, which however, on the national political spectrum has limited power.

Table 2. Present political parties and figures communicated in *Big Brother Bulgaria*

Political figures	Party	Present/Former/Active*	N mentioned
The minister of culture	Gerb	Present	1
The prime minister	Gerb	Present	8
Boiko Borisov	Gerb	Present	4
Minister of Internal affairs	Gerb	Present	1
Aleksei Petrov	independent	Active	1
Angel Jambazski**	VMRO	Active	1
Cvetelin Kuntchev**	Euro Roma	Active	1
The Mayor of Varna**	GERB	Active	1

*active politicians and political parties that are not part of the present (2012) parliament

**these political figures are guests in the live studio, they are not part of the political talk inside the *Big Brother* house

In the first episode of season 4 all of the contestants are presented with small videos to the audience, which reveal their personal and professional life (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012). One of the first contestants in the house, and an extreme conflict figure Boni has the first private mission (to do everything that she will hear through the microphone in her ear) set by *Big Brother*. In that task she has to mention the Minister of culture, emphasizing that it is the minister of the present government. In this mission the son of the most famous actor in Bulgaria, and biggest supporter of the communist party (BSP that is in opposition to the present government) is told that he looks like the Minister of culture of the present government (GERB). To that statement he answers that he knows only one minister, the one from the communist party (his father Stefan Danailov). In this sense, this task does not reveals a specific attitude, neither some positive or negative behavior towards this political figures, but a neutral references towards political figures of two opponent political parties.

The next contestant in the house is the famous political journalist Kristina Patrashkova, presented in episode 1, season 4, by *Big Brother* with a scandalous and intrigues video that reveals accusations in corruption towards the present power elites. She makes the statement that:

“The biggest enemy of the banality and the power elites” (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012)

This statement can be considered as the best way to present the independent, oppositional

journalist and her rebel attitude against the power elites. During the video Kristina reveals that the biggest blow counter in her professional career was the moment when the newspaper, in which she is an editor-in-chief, have presented secret audio conversations between political figures from the present state and a businessman, considering corrupted deals. Kristina, states that:

“It is clear in this conversation that the prime minister frustrated a customs action in the factory of that business man” (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012)

In this sense, the audience is a witness of something familiar from the news media. To illustrate these statements, pictures of the Prime Minister (Boiko Borisov) from different serious Bulgarian newspapers are shown, demonstrating that he is protecting the positions of a businessman in a two million dollars deal. In addition, audio records of the conversations of the Prime Minister, as a proof for the validity of these statements are presented.

“I took the commitment not to bother this businessman” states the voice of Boiko Borisov, in the audio records presented on the show (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012)

Together with audio conversations, pictures of the prime minister, the businessman, and videos from the news media channels, a short video of official news reveals that the conversation is manipulated, and the Prime Minister denies its authenticity. Throughout these news reports no direct accusations are made. Furthermore, all of the conclusions are committed to the viewer. In this sense, the examined situation demonstrates the findings of Berg and Tobin (2007) and Jones (2005) that the politics are a significant aspect of the communication in entertainment formats, demonstrating the inequalities from the outside reality. Moreover, as West (2005) states, the neutrality and the objectivism in presenting political issues have to be an inevitable part in the political talk on shows such as *Big Brother*. The video presentation of the scandalous journalist continues with her statements around past events, in which the same businessman was found dead (after the secret conversations), while in front of the newspaper’s office a bomb exploded. The entire video is backed up with additional news media materials (short video of news report showing the official sequences after the explosion) which demonstrate and prove the validity of these

political references. Kristina Patrshkova, in a news media video, stated:

“I said that this is an attempt for frightening and the biggest interests have the people from the power elites” (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012)

This is a personal statement of the journalist given during a press conference after the explosion, in which for a first time a direct accusation is made towards the power elites, and the face of the present government is the most visible. This accusation in corruption within the political institutions, demonstrates the examined by Barnes (2007) situation in post communist Bulgaria, stating that the power elites were extremely tied up with the criminal business. Nonetheless, this statement of the journalist and mainly its authenticity in terms of the deals in the political institutions are not a subject of the present research, but a layer of the communicated political talk.

During the presentation of the journalist, the political theme is an invariable part in different dimensions. The sense of style of Kristina is a reason for another reference towards the political elites in a sense that the adorn is an inevitable part of the performance of the Bulgarian politicians in the media. In this sense, the celebritization of politicians, as examined by Mazzoni and Caglia (2013), and Bennett (2012) is a trend in the political system and in the media world, followed by personalization of the political figures, is illustrated by the journalist. In addition, the journalist states that it is inadmissible for the Minister of internal affairs and the ex US council to teach belly dancing and to bake on television in order to facilitate their media image. However, the political journalist explains that she might do the same things in the house of *Big Brother*, but she is not the Prime Minister. The image of the present politicians is criticized and to some extent this is made in a fair way due to the existing, sometimes absurd performance of the power elites on different media, illustrated by Dahlgren (1995).

In the 2nd episode of season 4 another seven stars enter the house, including another famous journalist (Sonya) that addresses a statement towards the political preferences of a guest in the house (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012). This time it is about the political objectivity of the enemy of the politicians Kristina Patrashkova. In this statement, Sonya mentions the close connection of Kristina with a political figure (Aleksi Petrov) that is more famous with its criminal past and corrupted deals, than with his political activity. As a serious joke with

some notes of humor Sonya points that the inevitable connection between the media representative and the corrupted businessman may lead to a take-over of the political power and a sabotage of the future political elections. This style of political conversation is an example of the examined by Milev (1998) and Barnes (2007) situation in the post communist Bulgaria, in which the media systems and the suspicious business have established an interrelated tie.

The presence of the internationally famous model and actress Pamela Anderson in the house is followed by an extreme interest and excitement from the audience and from the contestants in the *Big Brother* house. The first questions that the model faces in the house during episode 3, season 4, are related to the political situation in Bulgaria (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012). Despite that, she has no idea who is a Prime Minister and what the position of a Prime Minister is. The interest that she shows is followed by a negative reaction of the rebel in the house (the rock singer Funky) who states that this type of political information is useless. However, the figure of the Prime Minister is examined as the most important political position in the Bulgarian parliament, and his image is a common topic in the conversations of the Vip contestants. Furthermore, during a mission, the contestants have to stand under signs with quotations from their personal and professional life. The most interesting one, in terms of politics is:

“Boiko Borisov lies very convincingly” (sign)

In episode 7, season 4, the journalist Sonya reveals that this is something that she has said in the past, and adds that the present Prime Minister Boiko Borisov:

“...is not a liar, but when he is doing it, he is just brilliant” (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012).

The statement is more than direct and has an amazing double sense, in which the journalist states something while denying the same thing. The point is that the Prime Minister is not a liar, but his excellence in that reveals a great experience. It is a masked message with indirect accusations towards a political figure that the viewer may interpret in different ways.

The figure of the Bulgarian Prime Minister is involved in another mission during episode 8, season 4, in which the famous model Pamela Anderson has to use her “greatest

asset” and to place the pictures of seven famous Bulgarians with their professions from top to bottom, based on who is the most handsome (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012). In the mission Pamela directly states that it is easy and puts the image of the Prime Minister on the top position as the most handsome. She wonders a bit where to put the sign ‘Prime Minister’, but then she matches it with the right picture. This confusion later is discussed by the contestants and the opera singer Yulian states that she has matched the profession due to presence of a costume, while the sports hat that the Prime Minister wears on the picture is seen a sign that he is a democratic person. However, the word handsome is the definition of Pamela Anderson for the Bulgarian Prime Minister that leads to an excitement in the contestants (who watch that mission), and to a specific feeling that she finds something extraordinary in his image. This superiority of the Prime minister is affirmed by *Big Brother*, who announces that Pamela wins the mission and she has made the placement in the right order. However, the right order has to be based on her personal choice and not a specific one, which leads to the interpretation that the scenario of the show has a specific aim. To illustrate this, Patrashkova (2012) states that Pamela Anderson is honest and kind, but follows the directors’ scenario with huge professionalism. In this sense, the audience is a viewer of well formed and to some extent manipulated through frames media message. The image of a political figure is presented and at the same time framed in a preferred position. However, no direct answers could be drawn from that video that could accuse *Big Brother* in political preferences and favoring the political elites. Thus, the examined discussion outlines similar to West (2005) findings, that entertainment programs have the influence to moderate the political issue, and to change the discourse interpretation, providing numerous possibilities.

Another interesting conversation with references towards the political system and the decisions that the present government takes, is a focus of an intellectual conversation between a famous Bulgarian actor (Ivan), the internationally famous opera singer (Yulian) and the rock, funk singer (Funky). In this conversation the politics of the Bulgarian parliament are questioned, and as *Big Brother* announces, it is a debate about the present issues in the Bulgarian nation. In episode 40, season 4, Yulian states that in the past years the Bulgarian nation faces a freedom of media and freedom of speech, symbolically supporting the entire political system in the democratic period after 1989.

“We have a freedom of speech, this is something more than we had, man” (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012)

This dreamy attitude about the possibilities of the democracy faces an opposition that justifies the present political system as slavery for the nation, in which the freedom of speech is just an inadequate delusion. The democracy and the present political situation in Bulgaria are seen as a misery, a financial catastrophe, in which the population is trying to survive without the ability to establish stability for its family. Despite that, the almost utopist idea of Yulian for the Bulgarian nation is based on its vision for the opportunities that every person these days have to build his life and future. It is seen as a life full of incredible opportunities and desires, opposite to the limited communist system with the idea for equality in terms of possibilities. However, during episode 40, season 4, the utopist statements of Yulian are faced with the oppositional opinion of the actor Ivan:

“Do you know what is the politics in Bulgaria, left-central-right, this is my brother. Where are the fighters, where are the people that need the word aspiration /.../ and some others as me, that no one would hear their words, I am a dog that is barking on a chain. Making highways, ‘see this is a highway’, ok this is splendid. But what our children will pay for this highways, it is better to walk on foot and to be a power....” (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012).

The politics are extremely generalized in the above mentioned statement, but at the same time painfully true, revealing the inevitable mixture of political colors and masked political affairs in the democratic period. The political system is seen as a mixture, a union of politicians, in which union the personal interest is taking advantage. Furthermore, the unclear boundaries between the political parties and their representatives show the instability in the economic and the political sectors, followed by the inability of the political institutions to solve the issues in the nation. This illustrates the examined by Barnes (2007) and Gross (2003) that the new political parties and institutions in the post communist nations are formed by the old political elites, mixed with the existing opponent movements, while in Bulgaria after 1989 the new socialist (BSP) party would be the main impediment of the new political system.

In the above mentioned quotation, the actor sees himself as a fighter for the nation, while the present political system is absent from revolutionist and inspirational ideas as instruments for advantage. His voice would not be heard, neither the voice of the others with similar ideas, because they might have the freedom of speech, but they do not have the

tribune for that. However, this address is a bit dramatic and has some contradictory inside of it. The tribune is *Big Brother*, and the audience is his potential supporter. In addition, the conversation leads to a direct reference about the politics of the present government. It is a serious topic related to the main policy of the present parliament – to build a better infrastructure in Bulgaria, and to create more highways. This is a direct accusation against the politics and the decisions that can undermine the stability of the future generations, in terms of the recourses spent on building this project. Furthermore, this statement refers to the projects of the present political institutions as unserious decisions that would not bring advantage in the economic and political systems, but the opposite. In addition, the conversation in episode 40, season 4 leads to another symbolic reference, related to the political past of Bulgaria, made by the actor Ivan:

“/.../the one who forgets his past doesn’t have a future” (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012)

This quotation, following the former political ideas, leads to a specific interpretation. The opponent of the present government sees the past as the foundation of a bright future. In essence, the past might be symbolically examined as the political institutions before the democratic period and namely the communist party, which is the opposition of the present government. This statement is a symbolic reference about the abilities that the oldest political party in Bulgaria has, and the advantages that it could provide for the nation that need to be considered.

The examined political theme reveals different aspects in the communication of present political parties and figures, and outlines similar to Winslow (2010) findings, that the entertainment format is an educational medium, reflecting the institutional life (in Bulgaria), and pointing the different sides of the inequalities in the nation.

4.3.1. Main emerging frames

In the communication of present political parties and political figures the usage of frames is relatively limited. The key words and phrases used to address the present (then) political powers are also limited. However, the present research investigated the communication of two media frames in the text, as follows, the conflict and the attribution of responsibility frames. The conflict frame emerged as a main device communicated in *Big*

Brother to present the political elites in specific light, and this is most visible in the 40th episode, in which the democratic period and the present government's decisions are examined. The discussion referring to present political parties and political figures in *Big Brother Bulgaria* is framed as a disagreement between two contestants in the show. In a similar way to de Vreese (2005) and Jebril et al. (2013), the personal conflict of two individuals is utilized in the entertainment format to soften topical and serious political issues, communicated in *Big Brother Bulgaria*. In addition, the examined political talk, based on the communication of the decisions of the present government is an important theme in the society at the same moment. In this sense, this illustrates the findings of Gamson and Modigliani (1989) that the conflict frame is the main device that moderates topical political issues in the media. A number of phrases and key words that illustrate the conflict frame in the present theme are: "freedom of speech", "freedom of press", "fake words", and "slavery". In a single debate these words emerged as main keys of the conflict frame in which the decisions of the present government are examined from both the negative and the positive sides. During the data analysis of the present political issue, the attribution of responsibility frame emerged in the first episode of the show. The accusations in corruption and personal interest in business monopoly, towards the present (then) Prime Minister are presented in the video presentation of the political journalist Kristina.

In addition, some key words and phrases considering mainly the image of the Prime Minister emerged in the analysis of the present theme, as follows: "the most famous", "famous" ("*Big Brother* would like to introduce you to some other famous Bulgarians", *Big Brother* to Pamela Anderson), "handsome" ("this is a very handsome prime minister", Pamela Anderson). The political position Prime Minister is a focus on numerous debates, while "famous" and "handsome" are epithets used in order to facilitate a specific image of the same political figure. In this sense, these key devices are not part of a communicated media frame, but positive references related to a political figure.

4.4. Former political parties and political figures

The following chapter analyzes the data from *Big Brother Bulgaria* (2012) with main focus on the former political parties and political figures. All of the mentioned former political figures from past governments and political parties that do not have active participation in the present parliament are taken into account. The following table is a

demonstration of the former political figures communicated in *Big Brother Bulgaria* (2012). The parties present in the table are BSP (Bulgarian Socialist Party), the biggest political party in Bulgaria and main opposition during 2012, SDS – the first Democratic Party after the fall of the communism, which at the present moment has limited influence, NDSV – a party led by the last monarch of Bulgaria (and then Prime Minister), and a main leading power in a previous government. The other parties communicated in *Big Brother Bulgaria* (the Communist party, and Ataka) have limited influence in terms of political talk in the format.

Table 3. Communication of former political parties and political figures

Political figures	Party	Present/Former/Active*	N mentioned
Stefan Danailov	BSP	Active	4
The US council	US	Former	1
Aleksei Petrov	independent	Active	1
Angel Jambazski**	VMRO	Active	1
Cvetelin Kuntchev**	Euro Roma	Active	1
Ivan Kostov	SDS	Former	1
The government	NDSV	Former	1
Todor Zhivkov	Communist party	Former	1
G. Dimitrov	Communist party	Former	1
Kapka Todorova**	Ataka	Former	1

*active politicians and political parties that are not part of the present (2012) parliament

**these political figures are guests in the live studio, they are not part of the political talk inside the *Big Brother* house

In the 1st episode of season 4, the second contestant presented in the house is a non famous young man that is revealed to be the son of the most famous Bulgarian actor Stefan Danailov, who is the face of the Bulgarian socialist party BSP (Tuprev & Nikolov, 2012). During the presentation, the song used as a theme of the video is actually the symbol of the Bulgarian communism. The references here are non direct and non verbal, and direct a neutral symbolic address towards the communist regime. However, a picture of the actor Stefan Danailov is positioned inside the house of *Big Brother*, and it is an occasion for a small future conflict. The son of the famous communist actor a number of times refers to the

image of his father with extreme respect and to some extent worship. However, the conflict led by the presence of the portrait of the actor has its peak in the 24th episode, in which the host of the show in a live night edition announces that the personal request of Stefan Danailov is to take off his portrait from the *Big Brother* house (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012). While his son takes off the portrait, the singer Orlin, who is a witness, makes an interesting statement:

“What is happening? I think that they are changing the portraits, maybe they will put the portrait of Todor Zhivkov or Georgi Dimitrov” (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012)

The existing portrait is directly associated with the communist past, and the followed presumption that the images of the two communist leaders (Todor Zhivkov and Georgi Dimitrov) might be exhibited in the *Big Brother* house is a humoristic reference towards the communism that has no effect on the debates of the Vip guests about the political regime.

The last episode that communicates the presence of the son of the communist politician is the 41st (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012). It is a live edition episode, in which guests are political figures: the ex-wife of the leader of the most controversial, nationalist political party in Bulgaria (Ataka), and the present Mayor of Varna (the second biggest city in Bulgaria). Despite the presence of two political figures in the studio of *Big Brother*, the political reference is made by a non-famous guest:

“Do not vote for Vladi, he has to leave the house, I don’t like Stefan Danailov, because he is a communist” (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012)

This statement sounds extremely simple, but at the same time it is not neutral in terms of intention. In an elimination night the most important strategy is the public support. In this situation the son of the communist has no support, due to the specific political past of his father. In addition, the following quotations from episode 25, season 4, of the model Nikol and the journalist Kristina, reveal an interesting aspect of the eliminations in the *Big Brother* house:

“I think that this elimination is manipulated, why Vladi is still in the house?”

“No this elimination is not manipulated, see the political elections, the people like the ignorance, because it’s interesting for them, the elections are that proof” (Tuparev &

Nikolov, 2012)

The position and the presence of Vladi (son of Stefan Danailov) are questioned due to his rude attitude together with the inadequate support that he receives from the audience. Something more, the political journalist and author of the documentary book about *Vip Brother 2012* Kristina, states that the elections in the house are a representation of the political elections in Bulgaria. This illustrates that as integral part of the reality format, the elections inside the *Big Brother* house have similar model to the political elections in the real life (Dryer, 2011). In addition, the decisions that the Bulgarian nation makes in terms of voting, are seen as influenced by an ignorant, nonsense political behavior. Furthermore, the importance of the *Big Brother* elections and their similarity with the political elections is affirmed in episode 42 of season 4 of the show (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012), in which the host states:

“We would see how the contestants will fight on the political arena and what type of political campaigns they will make in order to win this year elections of *Vip Brother 2012*” (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012)

This statement affirms the examined by Mikos (2004) and Dryer (2011), that entertainment programs, such as *Big Brother*, represent the reality, comparing the style of nominations and voting inside the show directly to the established political models in the society. Moreover, the confession room in the house of *Big Brother* is compared with the political tribune of the parliament, and the statements that the participants address are directed to their supporters. The show is seen as an arena, on which the social and political issues are communicated as an integral part of the discussions between the *Vip* guests.

In another episode (10th), devoted to the minority conflict (examined above), two political figures communicate the integration process of the Roma society, and during the debate a former Bulgarian government is accused in corrupted affairs and manipulative deals (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012). The representative of the Euro Roma party (Cvetelin Kuntchev) and the nationalist party leader (Angel Jambazski) as active politicians communicate the disintegration of the Roma as a mistake of the former Bulgarian government (NDSV). The next quotation from a statement of the Host of *Big Brother* illustrates the political debate:

“There is something that both of the opponents agreed on and that is another political topic related to the census” (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012)

The population of the Roma ethnos in Bulgaria is the focus of the debate. The absence of high school education among the majority of the youths from the Roma society, followed by their disintegration, are presented as part of the wrong policy of the former government and its inability to solve the issue. However, the legal authenticity of the Roma ethnos as a minority, established by the European commission in Bulgaria is questioned by the nationalist leader, due to the gypsy roots of the founder of the same commission who is a former Bulgarian Prime Minister (Ivan Kostov). This reference towards the former politician has some notes of accusations in personal interest as a representative of the ethnos. In addition, the debate is followed by a statement of the journalist Sonya who directly investigates the disintegration as a consequence based on the wrong political decisions of the former political institutions:

“Some gipsy organizations and NGOS, what amount of money they received, from the nation and from the European parliament? During the government of NDSV it was announced the joining of the gypsies, but where this money went for?” (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012)

The integration of the Roma society is sabotaged by the incorrect policy of the former government, in which the distribution of financial support to the ethnos is interrupted by corrupted deals in the political institutions. In addition, the nationalist party leader (Angel Jambazski) announces that more than 700 million euro were supposed to be distributed in order to facilitate better education and integration of the ethnos, which by ministerial documents are invested. In essence, the commentators accuse the institutions and the political system in speculations and misuse of funds, followed by an extreme ethnic tension in the society, based on the unemployment and corruption among the Roma ethnos. Thus, this model of representation of the ethnos outlines similar findings to Filipescu (2009), that the portrayal of the Roma in the media is mainly seen as negative. However, the same political topic is presented in the 40th episode, in which the journalist Kristina and the accused in ethnic discrimination Niki discuss the disintegration of the ethnos and the missing funds (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012). The inability of the majority of the Roma ethnos to find a

permanent job is considered as the main motive in the tension between the national population and the ethnos. Thus, the political system (namely the former government of NDSV) was manipulating the ethnos for personal interests, while at the same time was incapable to integrate the entire population. The following statements of the political journalist Kristina illustrate the examined:

“Here in Bulgaria for us we need them only for the political elections”

“Those are huge amounts of money and amazing frauds are done with it” (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012)

These statements exemplify a serious for the Bulgarian society question, related to the authenticity of the political elections and affirm the frauds that are happening in the national political institutions. The validity of these references is not ensured, but they are a mirror of the distrust of the Bulgarian society in the political institutions, demonstrating the inequalities in the political sphere, outlined by Rhodes (2001).

4.4.1. Main emerging frames

During the investigation of the present theme, the main frame that emerged in the data analysis, related to the communication of former political parties and political figures is the attribution of responsibility. As Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) argue, the accusations towards different individuals or institutions utilized in this frame form the political issue presented in the media. In the live edition episode devoted to the ethnic tension, the decisions of the former Bulgarian government (NDSV) in terms of the integration of the Roma ethnos are discussed. The former political institutions are accused in frauds and business deals that have led to the ethnic tension in the Bulgarian nation. The cause for the ethnic tension in the society and the disintegration of the ethnos are seen as an issue of wrong political decisions of the former government. In addition, the European funds for education and integration are presented as “missing money” and part of corrupted deals of the political institutions, based on which the disintegration of the ethnos is visible. The main key words and phrases that illustrate the emerging frame are, as follows: “amazing frauds” and “missing money” are used to exemplify, and to emphasize the importance of the issue, while “700 million euro” illustrate the exact amount of the fraud that have led to the disintegration of the ethnos, followed by a tension in the society.

5. Discussion and conclusion

5.1. Discussion and main findings

The present data analysis investigated the communication of political issues within the reality format *Big Brother Bulgaria* (VIP Edition, 2012). During the data analysis a number of key themes emerged, which were utilized into categories and then presented in the analysis chapter. The present research examines that *Big Brother Bulgaria* communicates different topical political themes and issues from the society. Main actors and communicators in the political talk are the VIP contestants, the host of the show, and national celebrities and politicians, appearing as guests at the studio during the live edition nights. These findings illustrate what Dahlgren (1995) found, that the presence of political figures on entertainment formats as media celebrities, communicating different topical political issues, is an inevitable variable of the debates in the format. During the data analysis it was discovered that different (active, present, and former) political figures participate in the show as guests with the role to be supporters or opponents in different debates. Similarly to Bennett (2012), the investigated political talk in *Big Brother Bulgaria* demonstrates the endorsement of political figures as celebrities, communicating different social and political themes. In this sense, at most of the time the presence of political figures in the studio of *Big Brother Bulgaria* is related to a political theme that is communicated throughout the episode. Moreover, the present research, similarly to Boykoff and Goodman (2009), shows that the celebrities and national stars endorse different political causes during discussions in the entertainment format *Big Brother Bulgaria*.

The main communicated political theme related to a minority conflict is examined as an ethnic tension and racist discrimination in the house. The issue is a reason for a number of debates related to the integration process of the Roma ethnos, the educational system in Bulgaria, the inequalities in the educational system, the rights of the minorities, and the tolerance inside the nation. As examined by Hajdinjak et al. (2012), the ethnic tension and the disintegration of the Roma ethnos are a topical political issue in the Bulgarian media, while the tolerance of the Bulgarian nation is promoted by the media and the political elites' stereotype. In this sense, the present research of *Big Brother Bulgaria* outlines similar findings, in terms of the portrayed tolerance of the Bulgarian nation. In addition, the present study outlines that the portrayal of the Roma in the media, and

especially in *Big Brother Bulgaria* is similar to the examined by Filipescu (2009) fluctuating between positive and negative references model. The disintegration of the ethnos as a consequence from the corrupted political system of the former government (NDSV) and the missing European funds (“700 million euro”) for education and integration of the ethnos are part of the political talk. These findings demonstrate that “the significant funding /.../ for financing various programs has not been spent properly” and has become part of a corrupted deal, as examined by Hajdinjak et al. (2012, p. 5).

The communicated issue related to the ethnos and the ethnic minorities in general, is presented in a neutral manner, similar to the examined by Filipescu (2009) style, in which two diverse sides of the problem are presented and examined. Despite that, the issue in the house is presented as a representation of a tension in the reality in the Bulgarian nation. Due to this, different political figures representing two oppositional parties, namely a nationalist party and a Roma party, communicate the reasons for the ethnic tension, forming two positions as a basis. The former examines the tension as based on a personal conflict and dislike between two guests in *Big Brother Bulgaria*. The latter presents the tension as based on an ethnic discrimination and dislike towards the entire ethnos. However, a consensus is not found by the political representatives and the interpretation is opened for the audience. In this sense, the research of *Big Brother Bulgaria* illustrates the same findings as West (2005), that the entertainment formats have the opportunity to influence the social opinion and to change the understandings of different political themes.

The second political theme communicated on the tribune of *Big Brother Bulgaria* is related to the legislation of laws. This theme is a debate, discussed between the contestants, and presented by the host of the show in the daily episodes. The debate is related to the newly accepted by the present government (GERB) law related to the inside smoking ban, passed on June 1, 2012, three month before the start of the show. The tension between the contestants is formed on the basis of intolerance and disagreement within the *Big Brother* house. The issue is presented in a similar to the political decisions model, in which the voting determines the best choice. In this sense, this illustrates the findings of Dryer (2011) that the politics of *Big Brother*, such as nominations, voting, and elections represent the existing in the reality political model. Despite that, no agreement is made, followed by the unwillingness of some contestants to observe the law. The misleading and confusion, in terms of undesignated conditions in the *Big Brother* house, refers to a similar confusion in

the society during the same moment, in which the new smoking ban is faced with huge resistance in the face of smokers and business. The positions of the celebrity contestants in the *Big Brother* house, demonstrate the endorsement of famous figures in different political topics, mainly in legislation of laws and political elections (Boykoff & Goodman, 2009). In terms of policy, this is a law passed by the present (then) government (GERB) and it is followed by an extreme media interest, transforming the communicated political talk in the show into a familiar and topical for the society political theme. This politically oriented conflict has a short history in *Big Brother Bulgaria*, and it can be seen by the audience as a drama of the everyday life. However, the references towards the extremely new and popular in the media smoking ban demonstrate a prepared television scenario based on a social responsibility theme (Jones, 2005).

The third theme investigated in the data analysis of the present thesis is related to the communication of the actions of present political parties and political figures. In the show, the political figures from the present government are a common topic in most of the conversations. Sometimes, the references are made in serious debates about the politics of the present state, but sometimes the irony and the humor are used as methods to present different issue related to the political system. The figure of the Prime Minister of Bulgaria is examined as the “most important” in the national political system. In addition, his image is presented in two different aspects. In the first one, he is accused in corruption and deals with different criminal businessmen, and is ironically presented as a “brilliant” performer in lies. However, the image of the Prime Minister of Bulgaria is presented in a different light during the show, in which a number of times the superiority and the achievements of the politician are affirmed. In this sense, as Milev (1997) states, the private channel Nova TV (the presenter of *Big Brother*) has direct interrelations with the power elites and facilitates the values and ideologies of the present political systems. Despite that, no findings in the present research investigate the political preferences of the show, due to the presence of different and oppositional political parties, and the diversity of positive and negative references towards them.

The final, fourth theme in the present thesis is the communication and presentation of former political parties and political figures. The main focus is on the representation of different communist political figures from the new socialist party BSP that is in opposition at the same time. Most of the references made towards communist figures are positive.

However, during the live elimination night a guest addresses an appeal to the audience and the voters not to support a nominated contestant, due to his communist past. During the same night this contestant receives the biggest negative audience vote and is expelled from *Big Brother*. This episode reveals another debate in which the elections in the house are questioned to be manipulated. Thus, the most adequate answer explains that the elections in *Big Brother* are not manipulated, but they are a miniature of the political elections in the nation. In this sense, these findings illustrate that the inside interactions in the *Big Brother* house serve as a representation of the political agenda set in the outside reality (Mikos, 2004).

In the examined political communication the decisions of the former Bulgarian government (NDSV) are examined as irregular. The policy of the former political institutions is presented as the reason for the disintegration of the Roma ethnos. In the same debate, the political relevance of the topic is affirmed by the presence of active politicians, in order to authenticate the present debate (Mazzoni & Ciaglia, 2013).

In terms of media frames, communicated in the show, the present research investigates the presence of three generic frames, examined by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), as follows - the conflict, the human interest, and attribution of responsibility frames. The main emerging frame in the analysis of *Big Brother Bulgaria* is the conflict frame, present in three of the four examined political themes. Thus, this illustrates that the main frame utilized in the entertainment media to present and soften topical political issues from the national political spectrum is the conflict frame (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Jebril et al., 2013). In the same way, the present research outlines similar findings to Patrashkova (2012) and de Vreese (2004), examining that the main subject line in entertainment reality formats, such as *Big Brother Bulgaria* in communicating political issues, are focused mainly around disagreement and personal conflicts. In the process of investigation the human interest frame emerged as a frequent media device in forming the political talk in *Big Brother Bulgaria*. Most of the examined themes in the present analysis discovered that the debates considering political communication are presented through the emotions and the personal perspectives of the main actors in the political discussions. Thus, these findings illustrate the examined by Jebril et al. (2013) that the human interest and the conflict frames are devices utilized mainly by entertainment formats to communicate and soften different topical political issues. In addition to the examined above media frames, the attribution of

responsibility frame emerged as a tool to moderate a number of political debates in *Big Brother Bulgaria* into politically oriented discussions, estimating different political actions and relevant consequences for the society. In a similar way, as outlined by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), the attribution of responsibility frame communicated in *Big Brother Bulgaria*, emerged as an accusation towards different political figures and institutions.

In summary, the utilized media frames communicated in *Big Brother Bulgaria*, as de Vreese (2005) states, moderate and present the most important and topical issues in the society, suggesting an emphasis of that issues (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987). Most of all, the present research outlines that the examined political communication affirms the superiority of the reality format, and illustrates that entertainment programs have the power to motivate political talk (Jebril et al., 2013).

5.2. The answers of RQ 1 and RQ 2

The data analysis and the present discussion have formed an answer to the main research question ‘How are political issues communicated in *Big Brother Bulgaria*?’ and to the second research question ‘What types of media frames are communicated in different political debates and discussions in *Big Brother Bulgaria*?’

In *Big Brother Bulgaria* political issues are communicated and presented in a fair and objective style, exemplifying different aspects of some of the most topical political themes in the society. At most of the time the political talk is examined by two sides, and two positions related to the topic are presented. In this sense, the present research illustrates similar to West (2005) findings that the television and its diversity of entertainment programs have the responsibility to communicate political issues in a fair style. In *Big Brother* the neutrality in terms of partiality towards a political party is visible, but at the same time the show demonstrates that it is not neutral towards the social inequalities and the political issues in Bulgaria. Moreover, the social responsibility of *Big Brother Bulgaria* affirms the ability of the show to be an entertainment and political educational medium (Winslow, 2010). The following statement from the host of the show is an illustration of the above mentioned:

“We are not a political show, don’t forget that, but we are searching for the social dimensions” (Tuparev & Nikolov, 2012)

In addition, the present study outlines that *Big Brother Bulgaria* is not a political show, but it is a politically interested show, demonstrating social responsibility through exposing the topical issues in the Bulgarian nation. In this sense, these findings illustrate the examined by Landerville and LaMarre (2011), that entertainment television and the reality format these days have the influence to stimulate political talk, and the influence to change the political discourse (West, 2005). Moreover, as outlined by Berg and Tobin (2007) and Mikos (2004), shows such as *Big Brother* are a social mirror of the political life, monitoring the disparities in the nation and exposing them in the media. Thus, the politics are present in *Big Brother Bulgaria*, communicated as part of the everyday life and the interactions in the house, and an inevitable part of the debates between the contestants, illustrating the social influence of the celebrity endorsement in different political debates (Boykoff & Goodman, 2009). In addition, the presence of political figures in the live studio and the communication of political issues on the tribune of *Big Brother Bulgaria* is a main fundament in the political talk of the reality format. In this sense, as Milev (1997) states, the television channels in Bulgaria and mainly Nova TV (the presenter of *Big Brother*) are politically oriented, while the present political institutions have stable positions and influence over the television channel. Nonetheless, the present research does not demonstrate a specific political orientation of the television channel Nova TV, but definitely states that the reality television format *Big Brother Bulgaria* is politically oriented. Moreover, the present research outlines similar findings as Berg and Tobin (2007) and Rhodes (2001) that entertainment programs are the mirror of the political life, reflecting the social and power inequalities, transforming *Big Brother* into a powerful educational medium for the audience. In this sense, the political communication in *Big Brother Bulgaria* and its popularity among the audience, confirm that the show is one of the central sources for political education and formation of the political identity of the Eastern European viewer (Imre, 2012).

5.3. Discussion about the existing theory

The presented scientific literature considering the examined phenomenon was used as a basis in the present data analysis. In this sense, the theoretical background incorporated in the thesis served as a framework in the investigation of political communication in the reality format *Big Brother Bulgaria*. However, as mentioned in the introduction, the academic research examining the influence of the political institutions over the television

channels and television programs in East Europe is relatively insufficient. In essence, the politicization of different media channels and in turns the objectivity and partiality of the media industry in East Europe is a phenomenon that needs further investigation. Thus, the present research shows that entertainment reality formats have the role to be politically oriented informational mediums. Moreover, the present thesis illustrates that the media systems and the entertainment industry in Eastern Europe, examined in the light of *Big Brother Bulgaria*, communicate and refer to socio-political issues that are topical and relevant for the national audience. In this sense, the present research fills an academic gap in the Media studies that was not examined until the present moment. Most scholarship on the bond between political discourse and entertainment television focuses on America and Western Europe. However, the political nature of *Big Brother* and especially its franchise in a young democratic nation, with a controversial and complex political system, such as Bulgaria, is a phenomenon that is not examined in any other academic research on the Media sphere. Research based on the political representations in different reality formats is considered necessary in order to formulate a critical overview of the modern television environment in the Eastern European nations. In terms of the political communication within *Big Brother Bulgaria*, and within entertainment television shows in general, the usage of media frames as textual devices is a trend that has to be investigated in depth in future studies. The present research outlines three media frames utilized in the political discussions within the show that are based on media frames communicated in different serious journalist news and talk shows (de Vreese, 2005). However, the studies investigating the usage of media frames considering the processes of frame building and frame setting and their influence over the audience in entertainment reality formats is extremely limited. Thus, the present research shows that media frames are an important and inevitable variable in the communication of political talk on entertainment reality formats, forming the presented issues through the prism of individual's emotions. As outlined by Jebiril et al. (2013), soft media and entertainment formats communicate political themes on the basis of the conflict and the human interest frames. Similarly, the present thesis shows and affirms the theory that these two media frames are the most common device in the political communication within entertainment reality formats. In this sense, this study illustrates that media frames communicated in entertainment formats also have the influence to emphasize the specific aspects of serious political issues and to moderate the public opinion.

5.4. Limitations of the utilized method and suggestions for future research

The qualitative content analysis utilized in the present thesis as a main device in investigating the political communication in *Big Brother Bulgaria* has faced a number of limitations that form ideas for future theoretical and methodological research. The main methodological restriction in the present thesis is related to the number of units, transcribed and analyzed in the research. The mentioned point is based on time limitations that have reflected the amount of episodes examined in the present study that are twenty selectively chosen episodes, collected from a single season of *Big Brother Bulgaria*. Future research may expand the amount of the examined units of analysis, and to investigate two different seasons of *Big Brother* (or another reality format), formulating a greater statistical information with representational validity for the entire entertainment industry. In essence, a similar study would have the ability to outline and examine more relevant political themes that would present a better overview of the social issues and the political institutions presented on entertainment media channels. In addition, a future research, investigating the same reality format, but from two different Eastern European nations, based on a comparative analysis could formulate interesting findings about the influence of the political systems over the television channels in two different and at the same time politically similar European nations. In this context, the media frames communicated in the political talk of entertainment programs, with a focus on Eastern Europe, and the effects they have on the audience is another aspect that could be examined in order to reveal the construction and representation of socio-political themes in reality shows. Furthermore, interviews with the production team of entertainment shows, such as *Big Brother*, and audience members could tell us more about frame building, frame setting, and the effects over the audience's perceptions in terms of political discourse.

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