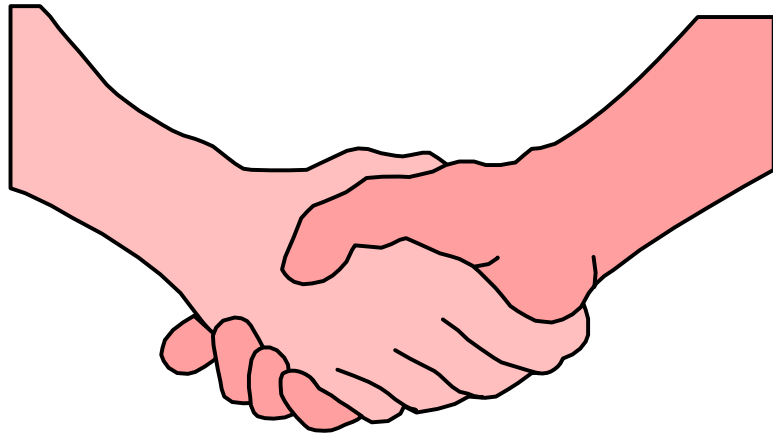


Delivering the Message: An Analysis of the Media used by the Church in Malta





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Introduction

In its ministry of transmitting Catholic values, the Church makes use of a number of organisations. An important means to help the Maltese Church transmit its message and remain "in touch" with the local population is the publication of a regular weekly newspaper "*il-Gensillum*". As part of the series of Omnibus Surveys carried out by DISCERN during 2003, a comparative test of the effectiveness of this medium was carried out. Effectiveness was measured by overall readership of the newspaper and by assessing the overall awareness of the important current Diocesan Synod. The Diocesan Synod was set up to assess the spiritual needs of the Maltese community and was set to involve an active process of involvement by the laity to ensure an interplay of ideas.

Methodology

The surveys were carried out during the months of February-April 2003, and October-December 2003. They were conducted as a computer-aided telephone survey using volunteer interviewers. The data was collected on a specifically designed database and analysed using SPSS. A statistical value of $p < 0.05$ was taken as statistically significant. The samples were selected randomly from the April 2001 Electoral Register. When the respondents were unavailable or unwilling to participate they were systemically substituted by other respondents from the same town/village, same sex, and same age.

The respondents were specifically asked to indicate whether they read the newspaper "*il-Gensillum*". In addition they were asked whether they were aware of the current Diocesan Synod. The distribution of individuals in the three surveys who responded to these questions amounted to 599 [Table 1]. This population sample gives a confidence limit of ***%.

Table 1: Survey Series

Survey Series	Frequency	Percent
❖ February-April 2003	275	45.9
❖ October-December 2003	324	54.1
Total	599	100.0

Acknowledgements are due to all those volunteers who have so generously dedicated the necessary time to administer the telephone interviews.

Demography of study populations

The study series had a greater preponderance of female respondents than male with a Female-to-Male ratio of 269:214. The majority of respondents [57.4% belonged to the second generation age groups [30-59 years]; while 23.9% and 19.9% belonged to the third [<30 years] and first [>60 years] generation respectively [Table 2]. The age distribution by gender was statistically significantly different.

Table 2: Age by Gender distribution

Age group	female	Male	Total	Percent
❖ <20	9	10	19	3.2
❖ 20-29	55	42	100	16.7
❖ 30-39	64	38	102	17.0
❖ 40-49	70	35	106	17.7
❖ 50-59	75	42	118	19.7
❖ 60-69	53	27	82	13.7
❖ 70+	42	15	61	10.2
❖ unknown	1	5	11	1.8
Total	369	214	599	100.0

Age by gender distribution P<0.0001 sig.; Differences in totals due to missing data

The majority [68.6%] of the respondents were married according to civil or canonical law; 19.4% were single while 5.2% had lost their marital partner through death. Only 4.6% reported their state as being divorced, separated or co-habiting [Table 3]. The marital distribution by gender was statistically significantly different.

Table 3: Marital Status by Gender distribution

Age group	Female	Male	Total	Percent
❖ Single	61	52	116	19.4
❖ Divorced - Separated	12	14	26	4.3
❖ Co-habiting	0	2	2	0.3
❖ Married	269	135	411	68.6
❖ Widowed	27	4	31	5.2
❖ No answer	0	7	13	2.2
Total	369	214	599	100.0

Age by gender distribution $P < 0.0001$ sig.; Differences in totals due to missing data

It would appear that the study population may have had a slight bias towards the Inner Harbour Region to the detriment of the Gozo & Comino Region [Table 4].

Table 4: Residence Locality

Locality	Number	Percent	Maltese population [2000]	Study: Total pop. Percent
❖ Inner Harbour Region	151	25.2	83405	0.18
❖ Outer Harbour Region	171	28.5	118059	0.15
❖ Southeastern Region	81	13.5	52407	0.15
❖ Western Region	75	12.5	52930	0.14
❖ Northern Region	75	12.5	46034	0.16
❖ Gozo & Comino	21	3.5	29690	0.07
❖ Unknown	25	4.2		
Total	599	100.0		

Respondents reporting a professional and managerial or administrative occupation accounted for 16.2%; while 11.5% reported being labourers [manual or skilled]. Pensioners accounted for 15.2% of the study population; with students and unemployed respondents accounting for 4.0% and 15.2% respectively. Unemployment accounted for 2.7%. As expected, employment patterns showed statistically significant differences between the genders since

most women reported that they were homemakers and not gainfully employed [Table 5].

Table 5: Occupation by gender

Locality	Female	Male	Total	Percent
❖ Manual labourer	12	21	33	5.5
❖ Skilled labourer - craftsman	4	32	36	6.0
❖ Clerk	15	13	28	4.7
❖ Managerial - Administrative	8	18	27	4.5
❖ Professional	36	33	70	11.7
❖ Other work	13	28	41	6.8
❖ Homemaker	216	4	223	37.2
❖ Pensioner	45	42	91	15.2
❖ Student	16	8	24	4.0
❖ Unemployed	4	11	16	2.7
❖ Unknown	0	4	10	1.7
Total	369	214	599	100.0

The study population reported a 96.2% belief in the Catholic faith; while 76.3% attended Mass on Sunday or Christmas [Table 6].

Table 6: Religious Practice & beliefs

Sunday or Christmas Mass attendance	Number	Percent
❖ Attended	457	76.3%
❖ Excused due to illness	12	2.0
❖ Did not attend	122	20.4
❖ No answer	8	1.3
Religious beliefs	Number	Percent
❖ Catholic belief	576	96.2
❖ Not Catholic	16	2.7
❖ No answer	7	1.2

"Gensillum" Readership

The overall readership of the weekly newspaper "Gensillum" amounted to only 6.5% of the study population totalling only 39 individuals [Table 7]. Statistical analysis of the social characters of these individuals are not necessarily accurate because of the small numbers involved. However some pertinent observations about "Gensillum" readers can be made.

Table 7: *Gensillum* Readership

<i>Gensillum</i> Readership	Number	Percent
❖ Read	39	6.5
❖ Not read	555	92.7
❖ No answer	5	0.8
Total	599	100.0

Gensillum readers were more likely to be male, aged >30 years, have a marital status as single or separated/divorced, hold an occupation of a clerk or other work, and reside in the Harbour Regions or Gozo & Comino. They were also more likely to attend Sunday/Christmas Mass and had greater awareness of the Diocesan Synod. Readers were not likely to include individuals who did not profess the Catholic faith [Table 8]. Statistical significance was noted only for occupation and Synod awareness.

Table 8: Social Characters of *Gensillum* readership

	<i>GENSILLUM</i> Readership		<i>GENSILLUM</i> not-read		Significance
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	<i>p</i> value
Sex					
# Female	19	48.7	350	62.5	<i>P</i> = 0.079
# Male	20	51.3	194	34.6	
Occupation					
# Manual work	2	5.1	31	5.5	<i>P</i> = 0.016
# Skilled labourer/craftsman	2	5.1	34	6.1	
# Clerk	6	15.4	22	3.9	
# Managerial post	2	5.1	25	4.5	
# Professions	4	10.3	66	11.8	
# Other work	6	15.4	35	6.3	
# Unemployed	0	0	16	2.9	
# Student	0	0	24	4.3	
# Pensioner	5	12.8	86	15.4	
# Housewife	11	28.2	212	37.9	
Marital status					
# Single	8	20.5	108	19.3	<i>P</i> = 0.899
# Married/widowed	26	66.7	416	74.3	
# Divorced/separated/co-habiting	2	5.1	26	4.6	
Residence					
# Inner Harbour	12	30.8	139	24.8	<i>P</i> = 0.097
# Outer Harbour	14	35.9	157	28.0	
# South Eastern	3	7.7	78	13.9	
# Western	2	5.1	73	13.0	
# Northern	4	10.3	71	12.7	
# Gozo & Comino	4	10.3	17	3.0	
Age					
# <30 years	4	10.3	114	20.4	<i>P</i> =0.292
# 30-59 years	23	59.0	300	53.6	
# >60 years	12	30.8	141	25.2	
Christmas/Sunday Mass attendance					
# Yes	32	82.1	421	75.2	<i>P</i> =0.495
# No / illness / no answer	7	17.9	134	23.9	
Catholic beliefs					
# Yes	37	94.9	534	95.4	<i>P</i> =0.994
# No / no answer	2	5.1	21	3.8	
Awareness re. Church Synod					
# Yes	18	46.2	153	27.3	<i>P</i> =0.023
# No / no answer	21	53.8	402	71.8	

N.B. The differences in totals are due to missing values

The greater awareness that *Gensillum* readers had of the current Diocesan Synod is reassuring in spite of the poor readership which the newspaper has. The Diocesan Synod is probably the most important current event of the Maltese Church and the ecclesiastical authorities have striven to create a public awareness and involvement in the process through its media. Overall awareness of the Diocesan Synod amounted to 29.0% of respondents.

Table 9: Diocesan Synod awareness

Diocesan Synod awareness	Number	Percent
❖ Aware of Synod	174	29.0
❖ Not aware of Synod	414	69.1
❖ No answer	11	1.8
Total	599	100.0

There did not appear to be any gender differences in Synod awareness. Those who reported being aware of the Diocesan Synod were more likely to be aged >30 years, be married or widowed, have a professional occupation or be a homemaker, and reside in the Outer Harbour, Western and Northern regions. They were more likely to have attended Sunday or Christmas Mass and professed a Catholic belief. Only Mass attendance and occupation showed statistically significant differences [Table 10].

Table 10: Social Characters of those aware of the Diocesan Synod

	Diocesan Synod Aware		Diocesan Synod Not aware		Significance
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	<i>p value</i>
Sex					
# Female	109	62.6	260	61.2	<i>P = 0.947</i>
# Male	63	36.2	151	35.5	
Occupation					
# Manual work	3	1.7	30	7.1	<i>P = 0.036</i>
# Skilled labourer/craftsman	9	5.2	27	6.4	
# Clerk	7	4.0	21	4.9	
# Managerial post	5	2.9	22	5.2	
# Professions	30	17.2	40	9.4	
# Other work	12	6.9	29	6.8	
# Unemployed	3	1.7	13	3.1	
# Student	8	4.6	16	3.8	
# Pensioner	27	15.5	64	15.1	
# Housewife	70	40.2	153	36.0	
Marital status					
# Single	29	16.7	67	20.9	<i>P = 0.986</i>
# Married/widowed	133	76.4	304	71.5	
# Divorced/separated/co-habiting	9	5.2	22	5.2	
Residence					
# Inner Harbour	42	24.1	109	25.6	<i>P = 0.580</i>
# Outer Harbour	55	31.6	116	27.3	
# South Eastern	20	11.5	61	14.4	
# Western	26	14.9	49	11.5	
# Northern	23	13.2	52	12.2	
# Gozo & Comino	4	2.3	17	4.0	
Age					
# <30 years	25	14.4	94	22.1	<i>P = 0.83</i>
# 30-59 years	101	58.0	225	52.9	
# >60 years	48	27.6	97	22.8	
Christmas/Sunday Mass attendance					
# Yes	153	87.9	304	71.5	<i>P<0.0001</i>
# No / illness / no answer	21	12.1	121	28.5	
Catholic beliefs					
# Yes	169	97.1	397	95.8	<i>P = 0.550</i>
# No / no answer	5	2.9	18	4.2	

N.B. The differences in totals are due to missing values

Conclusions

The Newspaper weekly of the Maltese Catholic Church "*Gensillum*" has an overall readership of only 6.5%. This low rate of readership of the written medium needs to be addressed by the ecclesiastical authorities so that the message of the Church can be more easily available to its members who amount to about 96% of respondents. Since Mass attendance appears to remain relatively high [circa 76%], it may be opportune to consider a free distribution of a magazine outlining the main news messages which the local Church preferred to emphasise. With such a high potential distribution, the costs for preparing such a magazine can easily be covered by advertisements alone.

In spite of the low readership rate of the Church's newspaper medium, awareness of the ongoing Diocesan Synod was much higher at 29% of respondents. This suggests that a significant proportion of the population may be recipient to news pertaining to the local Church from other sources - notably the Church radio station, non-Church news media, and finally through news items circulated by "word of mouth" during Church religious activities such as the Mass.