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Political Communication in the Digital Era

**N.S.P.A.S.
College of Communication
and Public Relations**

The presidential candidates on Twitter during the
2009 Romanian elections

Journalism in the Age of Digital Technology

Pics or It Didn't Happen: Analyzing Facebook
Photographs of Romanian Women Politicians

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Political communication in the Digital Era

Rodica SĂVULESCU*
Alexandra VIȚELAR**

Pics or It Didn't Happen*: Analyzing Facebook Photographs of Romanian Women Politicians**

Abstract: In today's communication reality, social media gain greater importance in all types of marketing purposes. Following this line of thought, political branding could benefit from the rise of social networks that promote more authenticity in relationships, due to their unmediated quality. Therefore, we explore the possibility of a more personable display of information through photographs on the Facebook pages of three Romanian women politicians – Elena Udrea, Alina Gorghiu and Oana Niculescu-Mizil. Preliminary findings indicate that politicians mostly use Facebook photographs to focus mainly on their official position and professional activities, not on personal angles of their lives, thus not making a clear distinction between the opportunities offered by traditional media versus social media, particularly Facebook.

Keywords: social media; Facebook political branding; Facebook photographs; Romanian women politicians.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, Facebook enabled communication gains greater importance in image building efforts of private and public persons alike. However, it is interesting to see if these distinct categories use social networking in the same way to reach their objectives or if they employ different communication strategies.

This paper analyzes the way in which Facebook is used by three Romanian women politicians, namely Elena Udrea, Alina Gorghiu and Oana Niculescu-Mizil, belonging to PDL (Democratic Liberal Party), PNL (National Liberal Party) and PSD (Social Democratic Party), the three main Romanian political parties. We intend to focus on their use of Facebook photographs, as the visual elements of online identity-building are less researched, although crucial in establishing a certain identity.

Firstly, we discuss the changes that new media brought in the field of communication and how they influence the process of political brand building. In addition, we also focus on the use of Facebook photographs as image vectors in supporting online personal branding efforts. Our aim is to establish the level of development reached in this field up to this moment and to select best practices in building a political brand online.

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*** Popular phrase used in response to a person who has made an unbelievable or outlandish claim, common on many forums around the Internet.

We then examine the collected data regarding Facebook photographs of the three Romanian party members. For this purpose, we illustrate the way these politicians use visual cues as part of their online political branding strategy and show the similarities and differences between them as they surface from our analysis. Specifically, we are interested in investigating if they use Facebook photographs in order to support their offline professional activities or rather to uncover more of their private life.

2. The rise of social networks: gaining access to private information

The World Wide Web has suffered many transformations since its inception, and nowadays we are experiencing a new reality that holds the promise of radical change in communication – the emergence of the Web 2.0. The new reality also triggered the introduction of new syntagms like “web as platform”, “digital democracy”, “knowledge economy”, “open source”, “collaborative web”, “the cult of the amateur” etc. (Shih, 2009; Tapscott, 2009; Wittkower, 2010), describing various aspects of the new type of communication on the Internet: participation, affiliation, content creation, dialogue, sharing, accessibility, adaptability.

The new “digital democracy” is centered around sharing and being connected with the whole world in online social experiences. Hence, it is commonplace to assert that the Web 2.0 has changed the way people communicate by facilitating information sharing and co-producing, encouraging communication and eliminating spatial and temporal boundaries. In addition, Web 2.0 grants access to a new way of communicating that is more direct and more accessible for any type of audience.

Another important aspect of the Web 2.0 is the fact that users are not passive consumers of information – not anymore. The rise of the “participatory culture” (Tapscott, 2009, p. 114) on the Web has offered everyone the chance to be content creators themselves, in the sense that there is a vast array of knowledge that Internet users can share with others in the shape of textual, photographic or video material. It has also introduced a new type of communication, that does not include the “one-to-many” model anymore – just the opposite: “In the PC Era, anyone could become a producer. In the Internet era, anyone could become a publisher. In the early days, publishers used the Internet solely as a one-to-many channel to broadcast media” (Shih, 2009, p. 26).

Social networks are probably the most visible aspect of the Web 2.0 in the sense that their expansion has greatly exceeded initial predictions. The main reason for this rapid development, as research points out, is determined by the specific differences of social media, as compared to traditional ones: “digitalization, interactivity, hypertextuality, dispersion and virtuality” (Rotariu, 2010, p. 114). Another study reveals that “on Facebook, Twitter or even YouTube, people do not solely listen to or watch what they are offered, but they participate in the communicational process – they ask questions, give answers, have opinions, take a stand, forward information, state their preferences” (Ulmanu, 2011, p. 211). Furthermore, Ileana Rotariu (2010, p. 130) shows that on social media, consumers gain control over information, which enhances the appeal of social networks: “Consumers and users are able to adapt their own media consumption in order to create highly individualized menus that correspond and serve their own specific needs”.

Among the most popular social networking sites we find Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, MySpace and GooglePlus. While all of them have their fair share of users, eResearch (2012)

statistics confirm that Facebook stands out with a total of 850.723.940 users worldwide, out of which 4.552.374 are Romanian.

Internet specialists (Shih, 2009; Wittkower, 2010) presents the story of Facebook and its inception, the starting point being that this social network that became extremely popular over a short period of time – it was only launched on February 4, 2004. Initially, Facebook was conceived as a network for Harvard students only, but in 2006 its notoriety took it outside the college communication area, making it available to people all over the world, students and non-students alike. In this respect, Internet specialist Clara Shih points out that millions of people around the world are displaying their lives on Facebook: “logged in, updating their status, interacting with friends, interacting with brands, providing valuable information for you to be able to understand them better, and learning about you in return” (Shih, 2009, p. 4).

With the introduction of new media – and particularly social networks, information consumption has changed its patterns in the sense that nowadays people require more than traditional media were able to offer: accessible information, instantaneous news delivery, discourse authenticity and personalisation, interaction and feedback possibilities. In support of this idea, an article entitled “Wall to Wall or Face to Face” shows that “Facebook has radically reconstituted the ability for expression and access to information and other people” (Wittkower, 2010, p. 235).

3. Building a political brand online. Facebook and its implications for political communication

Online branding is an essential element of the 21st century. Initially used for business purposes, as a facilitator of purchase decision, nowadays branding cannot be eluded by any sector of activity that relies on its audience to function properly. That is applicable in politics as well. Moreover, studies (Omojola, 2008; Wittkower, 2010) show that branding in connection to the Internet (and to social networks) becomes more and more important, as people turn to the web in order to obtain direct information about politicians.

Why are social media – and Facebook in particular – essential when it comes to political communication? One factor that should be taken into consideration is that, compared to traditional media, online social networks are not mediated by journalists, who decide what is newsworthy or not (Shih, 2009; Scott, 2010; Zandt, 2010). Specialists (Shih, 2009; Zandt, 2010) argue the fact that classic mass media function as gatekeepers, deciding what kind of information should be accepted and which excluded, as opposed to social networks that are managed by the user itself. Facebook enables people to make themselves heard, whereas traditional media are seen as “marginalizing or otherwise ignoring voices that can share ideas for systemic change” (Zandt, 2010, p. 19). Customarily, publishers functioned as gatekeepers – deciding the public agenda; nowadays, their position is threatened: “an entire shift is happening, both in how we obtain information and in what we do with that information once we’ve processed it” (Zandt, 2010, p. 7). We can remark that, with this shift, publishers have a diminished influence, as on Facebook everyone can set their own agenda and decide what is worthy of communicating. To support this theory we have Mark Zuckerberg, the creator of Facebook, saying that “(...) we turn into a massive publisher. Twenty to 30 snippets of information or stories a day, that’s like 300 million stories a day. It gets to a point where we are

publishing more in a day than most other publications have in the history of their whole existence” (Kessler, 2007). On Facebook, activities linked to personal branding can take up as much space and time as their creator prefers, and their public impact is immediately noticeable, without any other exterior interference.

We can consider the politician as a storyteller with an audience that needs to remain enthusiastic in their direction. Therefore, he/she should be extremely interested in offering more (and less mediated) information than regular broadcasters render to the public. That is where Facebook should step in, by creating personal stories, managed by the politician himself/herself. On Facebook, people are given the chance to redefine themselves. Their profile is their creation, and it represents them. In the new reality of social networks, the idiomatic expression “seeing is believing” regains power – in the sense that concrete, factual information can be interwoven as to create a desired image. After all, social media facilitates “sharing, connecting and story-telling” (Zandt, 2010, p. 30). Roberto Álvarez del Blanco (2010, p. 202) outlines the fact that “storytelling makes sense of the world and gives meaning to a personal brand. Society needs stories and personal meaning (passionate, intelligent, secure, friendly, extravagant...) and they are only valued if they have genuine meaning”. Therefore, as political researchers (Sălcudeanu, Aparaschivei, Toader, 2009, p. 187) show, the Internet offers candidates the possibility of humanizing their image, thus bringing them closer to their voters, as opposed to traditional media, which isolate the two.

But how does the Internet – and social networks – influence political branding? Several studies (Guțu-Tudor, 2008; Tudor, 2008; Toader, Grigorași, Frunză, 2011) have shown the importance of new media in the creation of political discourse, by emphasizing new aspects that online communication reveals to politicians. First of all, “the limited volume of broadcast space has been replaced by almost limitless availability, through the digital encoding of sound, text and images, the use of fiber optic lines, breakthroughs in switching technologies and a massive expansion in the availability of frequencies for transmission” (Axford & Huggins, 2001, p. 14). Now, on account of the proliferation of digital media, politicians have the possibility to communicate with their audience without the previous restrictions of time or space – which greatly enhances their chances to create their image as desired. In addition, social networks like Facebook provide unmediated communication between a politician and his/her public: “communication through Facebook resembles more and more face-to-face communication by interpersonal messages that are sent in real time and interactivity. (...) through Facebook and social networks they get closer to the citizens” (Toader *et al.*, 2011, p. 143).

Broadly defined, political marketing “is that part of marketing that is destined to influence voters about political issues, candidates for public offices or public agenda themes” (Tudor, 2008, p. 17). Generally, a brand is considered to be “the sum total of proprietary visual, emotional, natural and cultural image or attributes associated with a person, company, product or service” (Omojola, 2008, pp. 127-128). Therefore, branding should not be limited to companies, products and services, as personal branding is a promise of value as well. Omojola (2008) argues that political personal branding separates politicians from their peers, colleagues and competitors.

“Brand identity should help to establish the relationship between your personal brand and the target group by generating a value proposition involving functional and emotional benefits as well as elements of self-expression” (del Blanco, 2010, p. 7). Political branding is therefore a challenging activity that requires positive reinforcement of the politician-audience connection with every occasion, whether in tangible or emotional ways. Political affil-

iation, official and unofficial activities, personal style or manner of speaking – all these features (and many others) are combined in order to create a politician's identity. As in the case of any other type of branding, in politics the elements of identity should be "grouped together for reasons of coherence. Such groupings provide texture and wholeness to the personal brand" (del Blanco, 2010, p. 7). Hence, online brand management appears to be as important as any offline activities in this area; it should complement them and at the same time function as a tool that brings the politician closer to his/her public, due to its informal character.

Politicians should understand that their online presence is meaningful and needs to be coherent and supportive in connection to their general image, but not double it. They should not be redundant, as social networks offer them the chance to show their public a different facet of their personality. With the help of social networks like Facebook, "the dull character that appeared on the TV screen in every Romanian's living-room was brought to life. The politician on Facebook listens to certain music, quotes his/her favourite books, uploads pictures with his/her children and family puppies or remembers his/her childhood. (...) This type of communication can help the politician to convey information about himself/herself on a different level, focusing on his/her human quality, and thus, getting closer to the electorate" (Toader *et al.*, 2011, p. 214).

"Information, communication, and tools on the Web have given individuals not only a voice, but also the power to act and to own their own online identities" (Shih, 2009, p. 23). For instance, building a political brand on Facebook is not regulated by the traditional media system, therefore it only depends on the individual that creates it. On a social network, politicians can choose to display a more personal, "colloquial" image, as shown by some authors, who state that new media "can be an extremely important informal medium of influence" (Zbucea, Pinzaru, Gălălae, 2009, p. 169). In the same manner, C. Shih points out that "online social networks have defined a new kind of relationship (...) that is more casual" (Shih, 2009, p. 45). But even though the relationship is more informal, it still serves a business purpose in the end – measured on Facebook by indicators as "fans", "likes", "shares". Therefore, personal branding "is build to help one gather more fans, more success and, indirectly, more personal benefits" (Bogdan, 2010, p. 149). For politicians, building a closer relationship with their audience should be a vital part of their communication strategy and brand building. Bogdan (2010) shows that in this case, personal branding is based on two main elements: charisma and fans. But why are Facebook fans such an asset for a politician? "Depending on your communication style, fans can be your readers, your clients, your influencers, respectively the communication vectors that will promote your message" (Bădău, 2011, p. 143).

Since Facebook communication has the possibility of being more unconstrained by formal rules than its traditional counterparts, "users can present themselves online in diverse forms, including photos, videos, and more" (Wittkower, 2010, p. 235). Politicians can use such an opportunity to create interesting content on their Facebook profiles – content that will complete their online identity and help them gain more fans – which can translate into voters, when needed. After all, the importance of personal political branding resides in its objective: "building a solid relationship between a politician and his publics" (Omojola, 2008, p. 130). As a consequence, building relationships online should focus on a less fabricated, more natural attitude towards communication with the public, as studies show: "Adopting transparency as a core value and actively encouraging and fostering its application by making information readily available, will be critical in establishing trusting, long-term relationships

with the generation that will dominate politics in the twenty-first century” (Tapscott, 2009, p. 267).

4. What Do Facebook Photographs Convey About Politicians?

“If pictures are worth a thousand words, then the ability to post, share, and tag photos on social networking sites represents an important advancement in our ability to communicate.”
(Shih, 2009, p. 46)

Photographs are an important element of identity-building on Facebook: they support the overall message one desires to communicate to their audience. This is especially true in the case of public persons, such as politicians. “The profile picture gives meaning to the text-heavy page. (...) photographs are viewed as a representation of the world. But without the image, all the text in the world, from status lines to group membership to quiz results, would be information overload.” (Wittkower, 2010, p. 51). Consequently, photographs can support or even replace textual information – they send the politician’s message in a less obvious manner; hence politicians should concentrate on choosing “the right images, the ones that will tell at least as much, if not more, than the discourses they replace” (Joannés, 2009, p. 184).

Regarding Facebook photographs, Shih (2009) argues their importance by saying: “the visual aspect of social networking sites is especially important. Most people in the world aren’t very good at remembering names, especially when we have just met a large number of people over a short amount of time. After a party, conference, wedding, or the first day on a new job, profile pictures act like flash cards to help us put the face to the name and better remember people we meet. Seeing people’s photos and videos from different aspects of their lives that they choose to share, such as pictures of their dog, also helps us get to know and understand them better” (Shih, 2009, p. 45).

Up to now, research on Facebook photographs has been mainly focused on profile pictures, but not much attention was pointed in the direction of analyzing other albums that help create a complete image of the person uploading them. One noteworthy fact is that photographs function as personality signals on Facebook. In a sense, they are creative ways of establishing an online identity, accompanying textual messages. As existing literature demonstrates, Facebook users often upload photographs “that reveal aspects of their personality” (Wittkower, 2010, p. 53). It is also essential to outline the fact that “text alone does not make the person. Images make us real” (Wittkower, 2010, p. 51). Photographs are actually the ones that bring the Facebook page to life.

As Facebook functions as an informal medium of communication, photographs posted here offer others a view into a person’s personal space – and the chance to form opinions about that person, based on this information. In the case of politicians trying to build their online identity, Facebook photographs allow a certain degree of freedom in creating a closer, unmediated relationship with their audience: “presenting real pictures of real lives indisputably frees us from our pigeonholes” (Zandt, 2010, p. 43). “Real pictures of real lives” – meaning that politicians try to generate empathy and minimise negative reactions among the public. To support this idea, Zandt (2010, p. 96) reveals another aspect of Facebook pictures: “With more of us showing ourselves (or our children or pets) online, readers are more like-

ly to pause and remember that they're talking to someone «real» before they respond or leave a comment”.

But posting a multitude of photographs on Facebook has also attracted negative comments from certain researchers (Tapscott, 2009; Zandt, 2010) that signal an increase of narcissism encouraged by the new type of communication in social media. Other studies (Wittkower, 2010, p. 229) insist on this aspect as well, saying that Facebook users are involved in a compulsive “virtual ritual of narcissistic self-display on social networks”.

Social networks are “a phenomenal way to spread information. When you put a photo on your personal profile page, you don't have to e-mail friends or call them to tell them about it. (...) You don't have to do anything; communication is instant and automatic” (Tapscott, 2009, p. 56). Politicians can benefit from this by being assured that whatever photographs they post on their profile, their public will notice without delay and without any interpretation from journalists. This is especially useful if they want to present a certain favourable aspect to their public: for example, by frequently posting photographs in which they are surrounded by ordinary people they can depict their care and involvement in community problems. In this sense, studies show that in photo albums “it is important to see if the political actor is portrayed alone or rather surrounded by people. In the first case, the user's attention will be focused on who and what the politician represents as an individual, while in the second case the attention will fall on the community, the beneficiaries of the politician's actions. In the latter case, the political actor wishes to communicate that he/she is close to the people and pays attention to their needs” (Toader *et al*, 2011, p. 151).

5. Towards Building a Political Identity on Facebook Through Photographs – A Content Analysis Approach

This study aims to analyze personal branding on Facebook, specifically by reviewing photographs posted by the three Romanian women politicians. Our purpose was to identify the way in which Elena Udrea, Alina Gorghiu and Oana Niculescu-Mizil use visual means to create their online persona. For this reason, we need to answer the following research questions:

Q1. “Which layer is prominent in the case of these women politicians – the professional or the personal one?”. This question has spawned another important issue to be answered:

Q2. “Do these women politicians create their image by choosing to appear in photographs alone, or alongside other people – and if so, what type of people do they decide to present to their audience (other politicians, ordinary people or family members)?”

As studies (Tudor, 2008; Sălcudeanu *et al.*, 2009; Toader *et al.*, 2011) show, Romanian political branding on Facebook it is still an emerging area with great potential in supporting a politician's reputation-building endeavours.

Methodology

After considering Facebook pages of Romanian women politicians we have selected the top three, using the total number of “likes” as a criterion, following our initial assumption that there is a positive correlation between this number and the popularity of the politician. Hence, according to FaceBrands.ro, the top three women indexed in the “Political” section are the following: Elena Udrea – PDL (<http://www.facebook.com/EUdrea>, with 30,507 fans), Alina

Gorghiu – PNL (<http://www.facebook.com/alina.gorghiu>, with 5,721 fans) and Oana Niculescu-Mizil – PSD (<http://facebook.com/pages/Oana-Niculescu-Mizil>, with 1,361 fans).

We focused our attention on studying the way they build their image on Facebook, through photographs, without taking into consideration the profile pictures or other wall photos. For this study, a quantitative content analysis was conducted on photographs from all albums uploaded on the official Facebook pages of the politicians during January 2011 – January 2012. Consequently, we analyzed the following elements

We analyzed photographs based on their belonging to the professional sphere or the personal one. Moreover, we were interested in examining whether the politician is depicted alone, surrounded by others or whether no one is included in the photograph. Furthermore, if the politician appears alongside other people, our interest was to discover the typology of the latter based on the following scheme: other political figures, ordinary people, public persons or family members. In short, our interest was to find out if the previously mentioned politicians are more interested in promoting a professional image of themselves or rather a personal one that is more family or socially-oriented. Together with the typology of characters that accompany the politician in the photo, our aim was to observe the strategies that politicians employ in order to build their online image.

Findings

As previously stated, we have analyzed photographs posted between January 2011 and January 2012 on the Facebook public profiles of each woman politician. A total of 1258 photographs were analyzed (Elena Udrea – N=520, Alina Gorghiu – N=351, Oana Niculescu-Mizil – N=387).

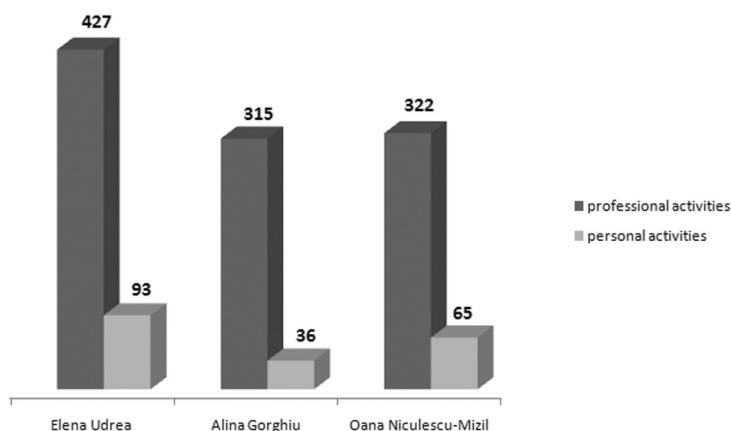
All these photographs contain pieces of information regarding the politician's life, thus helping create their image in the online medium. If we take into account the fact that Facebook allows users to set privacy options on the material they post, we can conclude that the three politicians have consented to keep these Photo Albums open to the public, therefore using them as image vectors. The simple action of creating these albums and publishing them on Facebook demonstrates intentionality, therefore analyzing their content will obviously offer a description of how the politician would like to be perceived by the public.

By analyzing the "Photograph Theme" indicator, we have concluded that in Elena Udrea's case, the dominant theme was that of professional activities (82.1% of cases). The same is applicable for Alina Gorghiu – with 89.7% – and Oana Niculescu-Mizil – with 83.2% – of photographs depicting each of them in activities connected to their professional life. The next relevant fact in our research shows that Elena Udrea and Oana Niculescu-Mizil concentrate more on the personal sphere (with 17.9%, respectively 16.8%) than Alina Gorghiu, who has less photographs in this category (only 10.3%).

Related to our second indicator, that focuses on the choice of the politician to appear in photographs alone or together with other people, results show that Elena Udrea prefers to be depicted alongside others (70.6%), followed by Alina Gorghiu (48.1%). In Oana Niculescu-Mizil's case, 52.5% of photos focus on others and exclude her. Furthermore, 11% (57 units) of Elena Udrea's photographs portray her alone in various situations– which is considerably more than in Gorghiu's and Mizil's instance, who both have very few photographs (9, respectively 10 pictures) in which they are alone. The "no people" indicator shows a certain similarity between two politicians, namely Elena Udrea and Oana Niculescu-Mizil, reaching a

12.1% for the PDL member and 13.4% for the PSD one. Alina Gorghiu has a considerably lower percent of photographs in this category – 2%, as she places more importance on human presence.

Figure 1. Actual number of photographs belonging to each politician.



Taking into account the fact that both politicians have a considerable amount of people included in their photographs, we were also interested in finding out what types of people they prefer to use in order to build their image upon. The “classification of people” unit in our analysis delivered the following data: Elena Udrea obtained the highest score (25%) in regard to “ordinary people”, closely followed by “politicians” (16.5%) and “public persons” (11%).

In what concerns “family members”, Udrea has only one photograph (0.2% of 520 pictures) available. In comparison, Alina Gorghiu’s photographs are mostly in reference to “ordinary people” (63.5%) and “politicians” (6.3%). A relevant difference is that Alina Gorghiu has no photograph of herself next to family members and just two pictures that show her alongside public persons outside the political sphere. On the other hand, Oana Niculescu-Mizil’s Facebook page obtains the highest score as regard to family members (10.6%, amounting to 41 photographs). In addition, the latter also has a large amount of pictures depicting “ordinary people” (53%). However, the other two typologies we were interested in – “politicians” and “public persons” – have a relatively low frequency in Mizil’s case (4.1%, respectively 3.6%).

Discussion

Our findings outline the fact that all three politicians whose photographs were analyzed predominantly illustrate professional activities on their Facebook profile. Due to the fact that from the total sample of analyzed photographs (N=1258), official ones represent an overwhelming 84.6%, we can argue that the three women politicians do not take a step further from presenting the formal aspects of their lives, as we would have expected them to do while on Facebook. We based this assumption on the vast literature concerning the presentation of self on Facebook (Shih, 2009; Tapscott, 2009; Wittkower, 2010). Accordingly, we can state that these Romanian politicians do not explore this social network’s capabilities to their full

extent and do not make use of its main characteristic, which postulates more informality in communication, whether textual or visual.

As shown by some authors, “politicians need to learn the rules and language of Facebook, if they wish to communicate by using this virtual space” (Toader *et al.*, 2011, p. 144). Furthermore, if they consider the Facebook profile as a “communication medium auxiliary to traditional ones” (Toader *et al.*, 2011, p. 168), politicians should use it as a resource providing an additional type of information that completes their image. As theory (Shih, 2009; Wittkower, 2010) shows, traditional broadcasting media only have limited space and time, hence focusing on the official layers of a politician’s personality. Facebook also offers politicians the chance to present other layers, should they choose to. By not accepting this opportunity of revealing all personality facets, we infer that politicians have not yet completely committed to the new realities of social networking. At the same time, while being a politician, it is somehow difficult to determine what is acceptable or not for sharing in Facebook photographs. Thus, it is understandable why the predominant theme adopted by all three politicians is the professional one – that provides a safer approach, while at the same time maintaining a distance between the politicians and their public.

As previous research (Hellweg, 2011) has pointed out, in the electoral period, the abundance of personal information fragments on social networking websites provokes an unwanted effect among voters, who give politicians less credibility and trust. Although, it is important to signal the need of further exploration in this area, as to observe if the same conclusion applies to politicians that are not involved in a campaign, but simply building their Facebook identity. The difference is that while campaigning for a public office, the attention of the audience is obviously directed towards the professional image of the politician and informal inputs could be perceived as interfering with the relevant messages. However, our interest is to see if, in the long run, creating a more personal identity on Facebook would not prove beneficial to the politician. Hellweg (2011, p. 30) approaches this issue as well, reasoning that “politicians who provide updates on their personal life interspersed with professional and pertinent content are seen as using social media most effectively.”

The involvement of other people in photographs is another important aspect of our research. The cumulated percent of all three politicians represented in pictures with other people reaches 52.3%, as compared to the two of them being showed in photographs alone (6.0% of all photographs), which indicates that the three women politicians are not displaying a narcissistic personality on Facebook, but rather an overall image that points towards an interest in community activities. In the case of Alina Gorghiu and Oana-Niculescu Mizil this is especially true, as they only have a few sets of photographs in which they appear alone. Elena Udrea, on the other hand, displays a more egocentric self, with a total of 57 photographs presenting her without any surrounding people. Still, the results are extremely low, as compared to the overall amount of analyzed data.

If these three politicians do include other people in their photographs, who do they include and who do they choose to leave out? What typologies of people do we encounter in their Facebook imagery? First of all, we have “ordinary people” (accounting for 44.4% or 558 photographs of 1258). When taking into account the presence of “politicians” (only 9.9% of the overall photographs) and “public persons” (5.8%), it is obvious that even though their endorsement is appreciated, ordinary people are more prone to being a good image vector for Udrea, Gorghiu and Niculescu-Mizil. This data provides useful information for our analysis, as we can infer the fact that the women politicians prefer to be perceived as caring personal-

ities, close to their public, involved in the social realities of Romania. On the other hand, by selecting photographs in which they appear next to other political figures, these three women politicians intend to enhance their professional image and instill the idea of competence and credibility. Moreover, this idea is supported by the choice of professional activities posted in Facebook albums.

The 3.3% percent concerning “family members” in photographs (cumulated between Elena Udrea – 1 photo – and Oana Niculescu-Mizil – 41 photos) represents a very low score when we take into account our initial hypothesis that Facebook pictures should be more personable and uncover other layers of the politician’s life than those traditionally presented in the media.

After analyzing the 1258 photographs belonging to the three women politicians, we consider that another important aspect when talking about Facebook-enabled communication is that of picture selection when creating albums. During our research, we have observed that all three political actors frequently post photographs that are either redundant or have a very poor quality (in terms of technical aspects). When discussing redundancy we take into account the repetition of the same image (people, situation, setting) with very few or no differences, which is disturbing for the viewer. The same photograph often repeats itself for 5 to even 10 times – an obvious attempt to capture a good picture from the photographer’s part, but with the intention of operating a certain selection when choosing the right image. Nevertheless, the politicians do not make any effort to exclude any of these “attempts” and thus we encounter several similar (if not identical) images on their profile pages. A possible interpretation of this fact could point in the direction of spontaneity from the politicians’ side: all photographs from a certain event are posted indiscriminately, conveying the idea of total transparency. This supposition may or may not be true – but we are inclining towards dismissing it, as it is difficult to accept the premise that a politician would make all photographs public, with no selection whatsoever. In addition, the action of displaying several shots of the same image contrasts with the idea of naturalness and spontaneity, rather pointing towards a “staged” session.

When taking into account the fact that Facebook imposes a limit on photograph storage (maximum 200 photos per album), we are compelled to notice that this social network advocates the idea of posting rather succinct and pertinent information. Moreover, this thought is supported by researchers (Tapscott, 2009; Joshi & Rutledge, 2011) that accentuate the need for keeping messages short and relevant while online.

6. Conclusions

This analysis provides interesting findings: to begin with, our initial hypothesis assumed that if politicians create Facebook profiles, they are more likely to present a more personal (and personable) facet of their lives. At the same time, if this assumption had proven to be true, politicians would have been expected to appear more in photos alongside family members or even on their own, but on certain informal occasions. The overall conclusion of this study is that on Facebook, similar to the way in which they communicate on other media outlets, the three women politicians center on displaying their professional life. They rely on the presence of ordinary people to create an image of caring personalities, but still with a focus on formal activities. However, we discovered that the percentage of photographs in which they seek endorsement from other political actors is relatively low – therefore partially support-

ing our thesis. It would be interesting to further explore if this approach is carefully designed or actually completely unplanned, as it might represent a step towards a more unconventional communication style on Facebook.

Of the three analyzed profiles, Elena Udrea's is the one that uses an online communication strategy that predominantly concentrates on personal aspects that depict her as an individual. In comparison, Oana Niculescu-Mizil appears in several photographs next to her family members, however participating in professional activities. The presence of family members in photographs is in strict connection to the low percentage of personal activities – almost inexistent in the case of Elena Udrea and Alina Gorghiu, but approached by Oana Niculescu-Mizil, who appears in 41 photos together with her nieces. Alina Gorghiu represents a special case in this regard, as she does not appear in any picture together with family members during the analyzed period. By linking this fact with the lack of photographs depicting her in personal circumstances, we can infer that, out of the three women politicians, she is the one that mostly values the official aspects in building her online brand image.

Consequently, Elena Udrea and Oana Niculescu-Mizil are the ones that use Facebook in the most personal way, by choosing to display not only professional facets, but also private ones, although these two politicians have a different approach in this sense. Nevertheless, our research shows that the way in which all three politicians use Facebook photographs to convey their messages does not entirely match the recommendations of social media experts.

Nowadays, creating a personal brand is essential for a politician. All available communicational resources (be they traditional or newly developed) should be used in this sense, as "personal branding strategy is absolutely critical to long-lasting success in politics" (Omojola, 2008, p. 129). While the importance of social media continues to expand in all areas of communication, it seems that building a political identity online will have to meet various challenges.

New media offer opportunities, but they also pose obstacles in creating a more informal connection with the public. Politicians like Elena Udrea, Alina Gorghiu and Oana Niculescu-Mizil understand the importance of a Facebook presence, but still use a strategy of online communication that resembles the one they utilize offline, by continuing to consolidate their already established professional image and withdrawing from disclosing more personal information.

It seems that, even though social media have inherent informal features that provide access to other people's lives, it is debatable whether audiences are comfortable with political figures that disclose information in the same way ordinary people do. While they are interested in finding out the "juicy" facts about politicians – the parts that prove them to be "human" as well, the aforementioned studies (Shih, 2009; Wittkower, 2010) indicate the public becomes judgmental when politicians disclose more than they "are supposed to". At the same time, our research showed that politicians remain in a prolonged "stand-by", most probably due to uncertainty regarding the nature of Facebook in the Romanian context. This could be triggered by the lack of research in this field that up to now cannot provide a definite answer concerning the benefits and the risks of a more personable display online.

While offering a chance for visibility and transparency by freely using textual and visual means, the new online reality makes us question the boundary between what is and what is not acceptable on Facebook, in terms of disclosure. Furthermore, in the case of building a political brand by revealing personal information, Facebook faces an interesting dilemma: "How much is too much?"

Rezumat: Este unanim recunoscut faptul că mass-media sociale devin din ce în ce mai importante în toate domeniile circumscrise comunicării. Așadar, și branding-ul politic ar putea beneficia de pe urma acestei dezvoltări a rețelelor sociale, care, prin comparație cu mass-media tradiționale, propun un grad mai mare de autenticitate în construirea relațiilor personale și profesionale. Această lucrare analizează modul în care trei femei implicate în viața politică din România utilizează rețeaua Facebook pentru a se promova. Pornind de la posibilitatea existenței unei maniere mai personale în care Elena Udrea, Alina Gorghiu și Oana-Niculescu Mizil comunică pe Facebook, am analizat albumele de fotografii pe care le postează online. Rezultatele obținute evidențiază faptul că politicianele prezintă în mod predominant aspecte ce țin de poziția lor oficială și de activitățile profesionale desfășurate, nefăcând distincție între oportunitățile oferite de mass-media sociale și alte mijloace de comunicare.

Cuvinte-cheie: rețele sociale; Facebook; politicieni români; fotografii pe Facebook; branding politic online.

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Antonio MOMOC*

The presidential candidates on Twitter during the 2009 Romanian elections**

Abstract: What changes introduced Twitter in political communication? Which are the advantages and disadvantages of Twitter usage in electoral communication for candidates and for voters? As the specialized literature barely mentions the use of Twitter in the Romanian elections, we shall answer the question regarding the way in which the 2009 presidential candidates used their own Twitter accounts. This article starts from the assumption that presidential candidates use the online communication tools in order to convey negative messages about their opponents. The hypothesis of the study was that the candidates used Internet, especially social media, in the negative campaign for attacking the competitors. The hypothesis was contradicted by the results of the research, which was conducted on the official Twitter accounts of the presidential campaign candidates.

Keywords: presidential elections; Twitter; social media.

1. Introduction

Facebook, Twitter and YouTube were first used in a presidential campaign in Romania in 2009. In December 2011, Internet Usage in the European Union – EU27 (Internet World Stats, 2012) counted 8,578,484 internet users in Romania. In December 2009 there were already 7.430.000 internet users. The politicians could not remain indifferent to the new media that could have helped them reach their target audience.

The purpose of monitoring the 2009 online presidential campaign was to identify the candidates who used new media in their electoral communication. Who and why blogged during the electoral campaign? Which politicians had a Facebook account? Which candidates uploaded their campaign videos on a video-sharing content website? Who had a Twitter account and updated the followers with his daily activities? Was the 2009 online campaign a positive or negative one?

Some of these questions have already been answered in other studies (Momoc, 2011). Previous investigations had to answer on whether the blogs, Facebook posts and YouTube videos were used to insult the counter-candidates and on whether the social media were used as interactive communication tools typical for the web 2.0 era. The results showed that the candidates of the most important parties had Facebook accounts in 2009, their posts concerned

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political topics, and their predominant attitude was positive. Most of the videos uploaded on YouTube by the candidates were either electoral clips, broadcasted on TV, or images recorded during their outdoor campaign at the meetings with the voters.

The politicians did not offer consistent online feedback to the comments they received. Overall, interactivity on social media was missing. The blogger politicians rarely used the opportunity to reply on their fans' comments. The candidates had very rare reactions at what their blog's readers posted. In some candidates' cases, their blog did not contain any information about their personal life.

The blogosphere and the Facebook social network fragmented virtual space in 2009 (Momoc, 2011). The candidates used their blog in a biased manner, only to transmit their point of view, not also to mention adverse opinions. Each candidate isolated himself from the others and had a dialogue only with "the readers who shared his ideology" (Sălcudeanu, Aparaschivei & Toader, 2009, p. 48). As a result, the online environment functioned less as a debate platform between the candidates and more like an individual political PR tool for each candidate (Momoc, 2011).

We are not aware of any writings published so far regarding the manner in which the Twitter micro-blogging platform has been used in the 2009 presidential campaign in Romania. It is important to analyze the impact of Twitter in the 2009 presidential campaign in order to understand the role of new media tools in the political communication, because Twitter is (even more than Facebook) designed to be used on special smartphone devices connected to internet.

While Facebook can easily be used by anyone with internet access regardless of the device, Twitter is addressed to a special audience, with above average incomes, who afford to pay a mobile internet subscription and to purchase an Android phone or an iPhone. Since Twitter has such a specific and clearly defined audience, in order to reach the voters through this platform, the political candidates should pay special attention to this type of new media and design specific actions for it within their campaign strategy.

It is known that according to the market study entitled *The market of internet access services*, conducted by Gallup Inc. (in March-April 2010) for The National Authority for Communications Management and Regulation (ANCOM), mobility does not constitute a bench-mark for the Romanian households endowment with computers: only 12% of the household owned a laptop/mini-laptop. The demographic profile of the internet user illustrated that the person is predominantly urban (66%), is very young (16-34 years, 76%) or young (35-54 years, 56%), has superior education (88%) or medium (51%), and comes from households with an average income per person of over 800 lei (69%). The main location where users access internet is their home (42%), while their workplace and their school (16%) represent secondary locations. The mobile phone or laptop constitutes marginal ways of accessing internet (3%). The use of mobile access (2%) and of combined fixed-mobile access (3%) is reduced.

Of all those having active internet connections, the percentage of Romanians who access mobile websites using their iPhone or Android phone – needed for accessing Twitter – is small. According to GfK's CEE Telecom Study 2011 (GfK Belgrade, 2011), Romania has the smallest number of smart phone owners in the Central Eastern Europe region. Romania is the last on the list of countries whose mobile phone users access internet over phone: 8,4%. So just 8,4% of the mobile telephony operators' clients in Romania own a smartphone, compared to an average of 14% in the Central and Eastern European countries. So the presidential elections candidates have to address to the voters who have these demographic features.

The specialized literature is in an incipient phase of the analysis regarding who and how is using Twitter in Romania. From our knowledge, there is not much information about what Romanian politicians talk about on Twitter – namely, the candidates at the presidential elections – and this study aims to fill this gap.

2. Political and electoral communication. Permanent campaigning

Theoreticians (Sorice, 2011, p. 39) make a distinction between political and electoral communication, pointing out that political communication implies building a relationship between politicians and citizens when discussing different public themes, based on the “logic of developing inter-relationships”. Electoral communication, however, has the objective to obtain the voting agreement and is based on the “logic of persuasion”. The North-American model of electoral communication, which also expanded in Europe, is influenced by the particularities of the American political system, meaning a majority election system, the existence of two big parties and the personalization of power (Sorice, 2011).

The theory of the *permanent campaigning* concept dates from the early '80s and was attributed to Sidney Blumenthal (1982), the one who observed it during the Reagan administration term of office and then under Clinton's presidency. Among the factors that contributed to the birth of permanent campaigning were “the majority election system with uninominal vote and the apparition of certain models of *performing society*” (Sorice, 2011) in states with ultra-liberal economy that led to transforming the political competition in an economic one.

Now the *horse race* type of electoral competition submits to the logic of the political spectacle and of the staging. The regimes that function based on the majority elections system are inclined to transform the democratic regime into a presidential regime (Poguntke & Webb, 2005). In a presidential regime in which the potential candidates for presidency are in a permanent competition the distance between the electoral campaign periods and the political cycle (the period of the term of office *per se*) tends to disappear. The objective of the electoral campaigns is not just the consensus between the party and the loyal voters of its candidate, but is rather to reach the segment that is constituted by the undecided or fluctuant electors.

3. Online political communication

Although the television continues to be the main media channel who helps candidates win the elections, the electoral campaigns are starting to also be won on the internet or with the help of internet. The audio-video political communication is periodically intensifying close to the elections, turning into electoral communication. Politicians are trying to relate with the audience, especially during the electoral campaign period. Candidates are more visible on the traditional media, making efforts to communicate their values and to explain their political positions, particularly during the electoral period.

However, “Internet is an environment that sanctions you if you abandon it, because being constant in the online marks authenticity and seriousness” (Ulmanu, 2011, p. 195) Internet is the medium that can support political communication in the “logic of developing inter-relationships”.

Having a personal communication platform became a must in political communication web 2.0 era, especially as the politician does not always have access to mass-media, so the only means of communication through which he or she can express an opinion might be the blog, the Facebook or the Twitter account. Political communication on social media facilitates permanent campaigning.

In fact, candidates can only place electoral messages (in the “logic of persuasion”) on mass-media during the electoral periods. In the electoral campaign, candidates have to choose between paid and unpaid messages. Political actors prefer *political Public Relations* as opposed to *electoral advertising*, and that is not only due to the fact that sometimes political advertising has to be paid. The advertising message is perceived by its receiver as being if not necessarily “propagandistic”, then at least biased (McNair, 2007, p. 169). Although the advertising message from the electoral video clip is completely controlled by the politicians, electoral advertising involves a series of disadvantages. The audience understands the message as a politically charged message, reflecting the interests of the one who is promoting it. Hence, the efficiency of political advertising as a persuasion means will always be limited. Understanding that the message is biased, the reader, TV viewer or radio listener can distance oneself from it – to resist and reject it.

Although less expensive than the candidate’s advertising budget, Public Relations actions have the disadvantage that they are not reflected by the journalists exactly as the politician desires. When the candidates try to determine mass-media to include the political activities they are involved in on their agenda, the politicians are aware of the disadvantage of the traditional media, which filter the candidates’ messages in order to decide what deserves attention and what does not.

Brian McNair (2007, p. 170) underlines that political actors have come to believe in the importance that the “free means of communication” can have in achieving their objectives, as opposed to the “paid alternatives”. “Free means of communication” define those communication channels where politicians benefit of exposure without having to pay any media costs for this privilege. It is what Lynda Lee Kaid and Christina Holtz-Bacha (2006, pp. 3-6) call “unpaid publicity or uncontrolled media”.

These uncontrolled media (Blog, Facebook, Twitter) can be different forms of unpaid publicity and free media through which politicians are trying to influence the mass-media traditional agenda and to transmit to their own public certain messages without any interference from the gatekeepers. When the promotion is done via mass-media, the control of the political parties decreases: the important message is the one that mass-media intend to promote.

New media are not mediated by gatekeepers, as it happens in the case of the traditional media. Instead, in the online political communication via social media (Facebook, Twitter) the messages are not filtered anymore by journalists. Social media grants the politicians the opportunity to fix a great drawback of political communication: the lack of permanent and authentic dialogue with the represented citizens. Social media can help the political actors to actually be in a permanent campaign.

One of the causes of the electors’ disappointment and lack of interest regarding the political process, resulting in absenteeism and negative vote, is that access to the political representatives is often impossible or difficult. Communication reaches its peak in the weeks before the poll, which coincide with the official electoral campaign period. Usually, when the elections are getting close, candidates start to be concerned about their image in mass-media and

about their relationship with the voters. The electors are annoyed by the sudden intensification of the electoral communication conveyed by the candidates.

Functioning by the logic of credibility and of informing their audience, mass-media are partially substituting the politicians' communications deficiency by publishing information about their political activity. But TV, radio and print do not provide the proper environment for a real dialogue between the electors and the elected (Ulmanu, 2011, p. 209). However, political communication via social media is produced in real time, especially on micro-blogging platforms such as Twitter.

Theoretically, in the web 2.0 era the fact that intermediation typical for traditional media is cancelled should privilege both the citizens' access to political communications, as well as the citizens' possibility to get involved in taking political decisions. In reality, though, this happens just partially. The future researches on the new media effects in politics will be able to show if the citizens' participation and involvement is an automatic consequence of the new media impact. (Sorice, 2011, p. 108).

In his book called *New New Media* (2009), Paul Levinson introduced the concept of "new new media" to make the distinction between "old new media" and "new new media". Summarizing, in the age of new new media, media consumers are also producing content, transforming from consumers into producers of messages. Scholars like Paul Levinson believe that new media help recover the direct Athenian democracy. While in the representative, indirect democracy some of the political representatives speak on behalf of many citizens, in the direct democracy each citizen speaks for himself. In the age of the printing machine, of the radio or of television, the mass-media system allowed few to talk on behalf of everyone: journalists, editors, writers, business owners, parliamentarians. In the age of internet and social media, each citizen becomes an information producer and each expresses his/her values in the name of the personal or group interest. Thus, in the author's opinion, the web 2.0 era becomes the age in which direct democracy is restored.

4. Optimistic vs. pessimistic web 2.0 theories

Starting with what was called "the web 2.0 revolution", a series of optimistic media theories emerged explaining how new media influenced modern democracy and new political communication. According to this optimistic vision of the technological determinism, political culture transforms being influenced by inventions via new media. As internet penetration in the rural environment gets deeper, people will be better informed, more active and harder to manipulate (Ulmanu, 2011, p. 206).

The optimist ideology of web 2.0 participation claims that internet determines pluralism of ideas, dialogue and freedom of expression. The theoreticians who are optimistic regarding new media participation claim that, while old media (traditional media like print, radio and television) are controlled by their owners and messages are filtered by the gatekeepers, new media (Internet and Facebook, Twitter, Youtube) are uncontrolled media and independently express solely the users' interests. From this perspective, old media would represent their owners' point of view and would support the socio-economic interests of the ones who have the power. New media and especially social media or so called new new media (Levinson, 2009) are uncontrolled media and belong to each citizen who has internet access. Since

they are not controlled anymore by the gatekeepers, new media are free media and democratization tools of the contemporary society.

The optimistic social media theoreticians consider that new media have the ability to turn closed societies into open societies. For example, the theoreticians of web 2.0 participation see the social media as a “catalyst of the revolts in the Arabian world” (Ulmanu, 2011, p. 141) and consider internet had the most important role for mobilizing people and for initiating collective actions. In 2011 in Cairo the young revolutionaries used Twitter and Facebook to organize their street actions. In the volume entitled *The book of faces, Facebook revolution in the social space* Brăduț Ulmanu (2011, pp. 150-151) talks about a “viral character” of the revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Siria. “The part played by the informal social networks and by the foreign radio stations that were spreading information about people’s mentality in Romania in 1989 was undertaken by Facebook and Twitter in the Egypt of 2011” (Ulmanu, 2011, pp. 151-156).

On the other side, the pessimistic media theoreticians claim that new media have no real influence in political culture. According to this pessimistic vision, even if the public uses social media that will not automatically lead to the democratization of the society. The social media influence upon democracy is a fake transformation, misleading the internet users, and in fact, constitutes techno-populism (Graham, 2002).

The pessimistic scholars allege that new media offer populists and radicals additional opportunities to express politically, on top of the fact that such media do not democratize public space. Populists pretend they speak on behalf of the people, constantly invoking people’s sufferings (Germani, 1978). In the electoral campaign, most candidates borrow this particularity of the populist speech. They use social media as a platform for accusing the mass-media owners, the parliamentarians or the Government that they make it impossible for the candidates to use other communication channels besides the online. This is how Remus Cernea, the candidate of the Green Party, communicated on his blog during the presidential elections in 2009 (Momoc, 2011).

Populists pretend either that they do not have access to the traditional channels controlled by the corrupt parties that have the power, or that new media are the only communication tools that are not censored by the state institutions. Thus, the political participation degree increases during electoral campaigns, as populists manage to integrate into the social groups with a low socio-political status. Hence, new media give birth to a new populism.

The pessimistic theoreticians (DeBlasio & Sorice, 2008) make distinctions between interaction and involvement of the public, and their researches show that citizens can have internet access, can interact online, but would not necessarily get politically involved, sometimes even boycotting the elections. Social networking does not always represent a form of political participatory action. Even though the users tried to interact with the candidates, the politicians did not respond and did not communicate with the voters via social media (De Blasio & Sorice, 2008).

Social media does not necessarily translate into social or political participation. We do not know if Facebook or Twitter can really improve political participation. From what we are aware, there are no studies to assess the percentage of undecided voters who are mobilized to go to the poll via social media, nor are there studies concerning the percentage of voters who are loyal to a certain candidate, but are demobilized and do not go to the poll.

Is internet (particularly, social media) the new space of public debate and of dialogue between political offers and programs that are competing? Or, on the contrary, are social me-

dia the new political communication tools at the disposal of all candidates, so, by using them, radical candidates can gain just as much trust and sympathy as the moderates? This article tries to identify how and why Twitter was used during the 2009 presidential elections: for mobilizing citizens to vote and for promoting a rationale competition between public policies through a positive campaign or for discrediting the rivals through a negative campaign?

5. Negative and positive campaigning

In any political-institutional context, the electoral campaign is the product of the two main actors of political communication: the political-electoral system, together with the mass-media system. The voters are the third actor in the political communication process: spectators, in the age of television, and users, in the age of internet.

From the political actors' perspective, the electoral campaign is a targeted communication with the precise and declared aim to obtain the mandate by winning the votes. The electoral messages are subscribed in the "logic of persuasion" and take the shape of propaganda or advertising.

From the mass-media perspective, the electoral campaign does not have the purpose to persuade the recipient, but to inform him/her regarding the candidates, to entertain him/her by staging the political game. "The essential function of the journalists' messages is the informative-referential one, and not the persuasive one" (Mazzoleni, 1998, p. 140).

At least theoretically, in the web 2.0 age the voter does not passively listen to the radio transmissions or watch TV talk-shows anymore. The elector gets even more involved and passionate if he can contribute with online attacks against the competitors of the candidate that he/she supports (Momoc, 2010). The strategic planners also aim at involving the party members and the candidate's sympathizers in the online campaign of the party in the sense of defending the candidate and for engaging them in attacks against the opponents.

From the point of view of the messages they contain, electoral campaigns divide in two categories: positive and negative, each of them revealing a topic or an image referring to the candidate. If in the USA of the '80s positive campaigns were more used than negative campaigns, the trend has changed, so negative campaigns dominate today (Tudor, 2008). From USA to Germany, passing through Italy and France, and after 1989 in Central and Eastern Europe, too, electoral campaigns recorded cases of candidates who relentlessly attacked their opponents.

Positive campaigns try to get the electors' support for a candidate, insisting on his/her strong points or qualities. The negative campaigns try to attract the support for a candidate by attempting to "convince the voters that choosing the counter-candidate would be a mistake" either due to reasons related to his/her personality, or because of certain claims that he/she made (Tudor, 2008, p. 121). Nevertheless, "simply accusing a political opponent is not the same with attacking in a negative campaign" (Mazzoleni, 1998, p. 167).

"It is legitimate to publicly criticize the behavior of a politician who was in the Government until recently. The public also tolerates the critics regarding the character of the politician - how loyal he is to his wife, the family life, lying, drugs or alcohol consumption." (Mazzoleni, 1998, p. 167). Even if "opposing" advertising (video clips, posters, outdoor panels, leaflets) or "critical" speech in the media debates cannot be accounted as negative campaign, negative campaigning marks a shift in electoral communication because it presents

the counter-candidate from a bad angle instead of explaining the platform, experience and qualities of the one who attacks.

“Negative campaigning is associated with attacks that are irrelevant or inappropriate to the business at hand, namely, qualifications for running for office and capability of handling if elected. The line, to be sure, is thin. Calling an opponent a spouse abuser, if true, is not negative campaigning, as it reflects on the worthiness of the person to be given the public trust; but if the charge is not true, it is merely a character assassination and constitutes entirely negative campaigning” (Sher, 1997, p. 17).

Even if some of the voters may be disturbed or annoyed by the aggressiveness of the campaign, negative advertising makes it worth it because the attacks generate mostly useful information, based on reality and that influence the vote decision (Salmore, & Salmore, 1989). Negative campaigns are efficient, increase the voters’ attention towards the political life, but have major repercussions on the political class overall (Tudor, 2008).

In practice, it is hard to conceive an entirely negative or positive electoral campaign. Electoral campaigns are composed of a mix of negative and positive tactics, with the purpose to disseminate the electoral message. A campaign can be negative if most of its messages were negative – and the same goes for classifying a campaign as a positive one.

A negative campaign does not necessarily aim at increasing the number of votes, but at enhancing the disorientation of the already disappointed voters. The strategic planners act in order to keep the undecided voters away from the polls and to determine the captive voters to go and vote. So the primary purpose of the negative campaign is to make the undecided voters become so confused and disgusted that they choose not to participate in the election process (Momoc, 2010).

Sher (1997) talks about the boomerang effect of the negative campaign, in the sense that there are cases when the voters can take the victim’s side, and the negative campaign is triggering the electors’ compassion, especially when the accusations are hard to prove or turn out to be groundless. In the case of Romania, suspicion can go as far as claiming that the victim himself/herself generated the attacks upon him/her, so that the audience perceives him/her as a victim and, therefore, rally with him/her.

The online positive campaign includes re-running electoral topics from the traditional media political communication. The candidate uses the main positive subjects of his electoral program both in audio/video-clips, print ads or outdoor billboards, as well as in his blog articles, Facebook or Twitter posts.

The negative electoral campaign points out the weaknesses of the counter-candidates and makes a mockery out of the threats coming from the competitors. “The twisted effect of the negative campaign is that some candidates might actually benefit from the attacks launched by other competitors: certain candidates conducting a positive campaign can earn the votes of the electors who decide not to vote for the candidates they once preferred, but who are running a negative campaign, which their voters do not approve.” (Momoc, 2010, p. 90).

6. Twitter and Facebook in Romania

During the 2009 Romanian presidential elections, Facebook and Twitter were not considered platforms with an electoral stake. In November 2009 Facebook recorded only 414.000 accounts originating in Romania. According to the Facebrands.ro - Facebook Pages Moni-

toring Service in Romania (2012), on January 1st 2010 there were only 518.140 Facebook users, while on January 1st 2011 their number reached 2.405.920. On January 1st 2012, Facebrands.ro registered 4.161.340 Facebook accounts.

As per ZeList Monitor: Blogosphere, Twittersphere and Online Media Monitoring Service (Săndulescu, 2011) in 2006 in Romania there were only 23 Twitter accounts. The biggest growth was registered in 2009, when 26.882 Twitter accounts were created compared to 4.471 accounts existing in 2008. Until February 15th 2011, the number of Twitter accounts opened by Romanian users was of 50.152.

There is a huge gap between the number of Twitter users and the number of Facebook users in Romania: in 2009 there were 414.000 Facebook accounts vs. 26.882 Twitter accounts. In 2011 there were 2.405.920 Facebook users vs. 50.152 Twitter users. To have an image of the whole picture, we must add that, while Traian Băsescu had approximately 3000 followers on Twitter at the beginning of 2011, in the USA, Barack Obama's Twitter account was followed by 2,7 million persons in November 2009 and in May 2011 it had reached 7,8 million (Ulmanu, 2011, p. 197, p. 195).

Nowadays, when internet access is not only reserved for the educated, high income persons, having an Android phone or iPhone and paying a mobile telephony subscription keep on being a luxury in Romania. Who are the politicians using Twitter during the elections and addressing to this specific category?

Although the smartphone owners mainly use Facebook, the smartphone represents the most appropriate device for accessing Twitter due to the platform characteristics that allows its users to communicate via short messages of only 140 characters. (Twitter is also known as "the SMS of the internet"). The research hypothesis regarding the 2009 electoral communication is that, if Twitter is mainly accessed from the smartphones, then the candidates who would supposedly use this channel should be those politicians who are addressing mainly to the target audience with these consumption characteristics: they own and they can afford a smartphone and a mobile internet subscription.

7. Research hypothesis

The Romanian electoral campaigns orchestrated in the print press and online are not subject to the National Audiovisual Council (CNA) control. The political competitors use the advantage of the internet, namely that the online means of expression are not affected by the CNA censorship. This article is part of a more complex research based on the hypothesis claiming that the negative campaigns during the Romanian presidential elections are conducted mostly on the internet. The attacks against opponents, insult, defamation, calumny, rumors and distortion often take place on the internet.

The hypothesis of this research is that, if internet space is not subject of the CNA terms and conditions, then the candidates who have Twitter accounts will use their tweets mostly to attack their competitors in an online negative campaign. Another assumption was that especially the candidates with a liberal economic program will use Twitter, considering the socio-economic features of those using smartphones for micro-blogging.

The empirical research started from the following questions: did the candidates use Twitter to promote their campaign themes, to mobilize the electors to the poll, or did the candidates use Twitter to attack their counter-candidates?

8. The dimensions of the corpus analyzed

The investigated sample consisted in the active online archive of the Twitter posts of the 12 candidates racing for the elections in 2009. The analyzed Twitter accounts were the ones accessible online at the date of this research, conducted in March 2012. Only 7 Twitter accounts of the presidential elections candidates were identified online. The posts of candidates Ovidiu Iane (Romanian Ecologist Party), Remus Cernea (Green Party), Eduard Manole (independent), Constantin Rotaru (Socialist Alliance), Ninel Potârca (independent) could not be identified online. Most probably the communication teams of the Green Party and of the Romanian Ecologist Party deleted the archives with posts.

The investigated period was the official electoral campaign month: November 2009. Although the electoral campaign took place between October 23rd and November 21st 2009, the 7 candidates kept their November archive active online. Some of them created an official account and actually starting to post on Twitter from November 1st (as in the case of candidate Traian Băsescu). Where identified online, the posts in the week after the first ballot (on November 22nd 2009) were also analyzed, because the candidates who did not make it into the second ballot advised their voters with which of the 2 candidates (Băsescu and Geoana, the winners of the first ballot) to vote in the second ballot. This trend could be noticed especially for the candidate positioned on the third place in the electoral race: Crin Antonescu.

9. Research method

The content analysis method was used for answering the question on whether the Twitter accounts were used to promote campaign themes or to denigrate the counter-candidates. Whenever the post was about the candidate himself, his campaign or his political party, the post attitude has been classified as being self-centered and positive. If the tweet was about the political counter-candidates, if the candidate criticized his competitors or if he attacked the opponents, the attitude was classified as negative.

The qualitative method of content analysis as explained by Alex Mucchielli (2002) implies the following steps: Encoding, Categorization and Establishing the relationships (or Data interpretation). Encoding aims to extract the essential of the testimony posted on the blog by using the blog post key-words. Any qualitative analysis condenses continuous and abundant data. This means that the key-words or expressions that summarize the phrases of interest must be very accurate and true to the tweet testimony. By simply reading the key-words, an uninformed reader should be able to reconstitute the tweet testimony without having to read it. For Encoding, the questions we use are “What subject do we have here? What is this about?” The answers to these questions become key-words or summarizing expressions.

The Categorization is illustrated by transposing the key-words into concepts. A category is a word that abstractly defines a cultural, social or psychological phenomenon as it is perceived in a data corpus. The category leads to theoretic concepts, which establish the relationships between the categories.

The expression “reforming the Parliament” is a code. The expression “State reform”, for the same extract is a category. The first expression is extracted from a tweet on Traian Băsescu’s Twitter account and we may have to return to this essential element along our analysis. The second expression is richer, more evocative; this is why it is strong.

Establishing the relationship refers to the candidate's attitude (favorable or unfavorable) regarding the theme he is debating ("State reform"), and also to the attitude (negative or positive) that he shows related to the key-words he is using.

10. The presidential candidates on Twitter in November 2009

Of the 12 candidates enrolled in the race for presidency at Cotroceni in November 2009, only 7 had a Twitter account. Using content analysis as explained by Alex Mucchielli (2002), I have monitored the candidate's attitude in their tweets: as mentioned, whenever the tweet was about himself, his campaign, his political party, I classified his attitude as being self-centered and positive. If the tweet criticized the other candidates, or if attacked the competitors, the attitude was classified as negative.

The Social Democratic Party candidate, Mircea Geoană, had the most Twitter posts in November 2009: 74 tweets, of which 63 positive, 9 negative and 2 neutral. He was the candidate with the biggest number of posts on his campaign blog after Remus Cernea from the Green Party (Momoc, 2011). Geoană scored third in terms of Facebook posts in 2009, after Cernea and Crin Antonescu from the National Liberal Party.

The Twitter channel on which the PSD candidate, Mircea Geoană, communicated during the 2009 elections was https://twitter.com/#!/mircea_geoana. Of the 74 total tweets (context units), candidate Mircea Geoană had a positive general campaign attitude with 63 positive attitudes. His favorite attack targets were Traian Băsescu (in 9 tweets) and Prime Minister Emil Boc (mentioned in 3 tweets together with President Băsescu).

The used key-words (numbering units) were: 17 Romania, 9 Băsescu, 9 vote, 7 government, 6 work places, 5 "Together we win", 5 industry, 4 president, 4 project, 4 trust, 3 Mircea Geoană, 3 Boc, 3 energy, 3 youth, 3 agriculture, 3 program, 3 democracy and the key-words state, economic re-launch, to save, Romanians, crisis, people, Antonescu, PSD, PNL, culture, elections are mentioned twice. Once mentioned words: housing, work, external markets, European funds, power abuse, money, orange clan, majority, budget, parliament, IMF, common-sense, circus, debate, anti-crisis, poverty, whiskey, friends, press, NGO, Romanian people. Thus, the following themes (recording units) prevailed: 27 mobilize to vote Mircea Geoană President, 23 economic solutions, 9 topics to attack Traian Băsescu, 6 solutions for the political crisis, 3 electoral debate with Traian Băsescu in the first ballot, 3 tweets on Mircea Geoană – the man, 2 information about a meeting with political leaders, 1 information about the presence in a TV.

Mircea Geoană preferred to tweet short messages for mobilizing people to vote, most tweets in the same day being the ones on the first day of the first ballot. Each mention of the name of Traian Băsescu was an attack of the incumbent President. The candidate did not use Twitter to inform the readers about his offline campaign or about his presence in radio or TV shows.

The independent candidate Sorin Oprescu had 68 tweets in November 2009, all positive. The independent candidate Sorin Oprescu used his Twitter account in the campaign: <https://twitter.com/#!/sorinoprescu>. The used key-words (numbering units) were: 55 Sorin Oprescu, 10 press conference, 6 "Go Romania!", 6 visit, 5 guest, 5 Iris concert, 3 vote, 2 Vatican, 2 workers, 2 factory and once for monastery, hospital, medical employees, customs ship yard, Pope Benedict the 16th, Romanian Catholic Church, students' leaders, PSD members,

independent president. The campaign claim *Go Romania* (“Hai România!”) can be found in 6 tweets.

Most of the posts are related to Oprescu’s campaign actions, participation at TV shows and meetings with the voters. The topics of the 68 posts were: 21 announcements about the candidate’s presence in TV shows, 16 electoral visits, meetings with voters (in hospitals, clinics, markets, factories, customs ship yards etc.), 8 press conferences with the candidate televised live, 7 announcements about local or central press conferences, 6 rock concerts in the presence of the candidate, 4 mobilize to vote, 2 outdoor events, 1 online chat with the candidate, 1 letter to the supporters and fans, 1 Happy Birthday message, 1 condolences message.

The candidate of the Democratic Union of the Magyars in Romania (UDMR), Kelemen Hunor, had 46 tweets, of which only one negative. Kelemen Hunor, the candidate of the Democratic Union of the Magyars in Romania (UDMR), used the account <http://twitter.com/hunorkelemen> in the 2009 campaign. Key-words (numbering units): 7 guest, 3 meeting, 3 press conference and once for city halls, vice-city halls, representatives, Hungarian, visit, parliament, government, UDMR, young volunteer, program, campaign, road. Topics (recording units): 16 announcements about the presence in TV shows, 10 electoral visits or meetings with the voters, 7 mobilize to vote, 5 announcements of press conferences, 2 announcements about the presence in radio shows, 2 meetings with local authorities, 1 announcement about a public statement in the Parliament, 1 the candidate’s position on the lack of a TV electoral debate with all the candidates from the first ballot, 1 announcement about the presence in an online TV show, 1 message for thanking the voters. In November 2009, Hunor used Twitter to inform the readers about his campaign actions and about his presence in the TV and radio shows.

The candidate Traian Băsescu, winner of both ballots, had 24 tweets: 7 positive, 14 negative, 3 neutral. The negative posts on the President’s Twitter account were double compared to the positive ones. Romanian President, Traian Băsescu, used his Twitter account <https://twitter.com/#!/tbasescu> in the 2009 campaign. In his first tweet on November 2nd 2009, the candidate informed his interlocutors (Followers) about his official profile on this channel. Băsescu accused the existence of some fake, unofficial Twitter accounts, created to launch rumors or lies on his behalf: “Because in the past these have been fake accounts made on my name, I have decided to be myself here. The confirmation is on www.basescu.ro”.

The used key-words (numbering units) were: 5 Mircea Geoană, 4 reform, 3 news televisions, 2 campaign, 2 state, 2 President and one for fake accounts, actions, to communicate, source, deforms, reality, uninominal, parliament, parliamentarians, Patriciu, strike, PSD, irresponsible, electoral interest, Antonescu, Oprescu, Băsescu, referendum, political class, the true majority, set-up, Romanians, Romania.

The following themes (recording units) prevailed on Băsescu’s Twitter account: 4 attacks on Mircea Geoană, his main counter-candidate, 2 attacks on the news televisions, 2 attacks on Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the union leaders, 1 attack on those who use the candidate’s name in the online, 1 attack on the Parliament, 1 attack on the parliamentarians, 1 attack on Dinu Patriciu, 1 opening of the official Twitter communication platform, 1 setting up of an online communication channel, 1 information about the launch of an online TV channel of the candidate, 1 thanking message, 1 link to a radio show, 1 announcement of an outdoor event, 1 link to caricatures, 1 on the reform of the political class, 1 link to the chat of an online newspaper, 1 electoral thanking message, 1 announcement on the presence in a TV show.

The Twitter communication campaign had all the features of a professional communication campaign, being totally in line with what the candidate conveyed via the traditional advertising. Traian Băsescu's communication on Twitter was coherent and complementary with his offline one. The positive campaign topics displayed in outdoor or on TV were also presented on Twitter. For example, the candidate posted: "You get what all Romanians get. Firstly, the pursuit of the state reform. I have introduced the uninominal [vote], now we are reforming the Parliament".

The 2009 presidential campaign was doubled by a campaign for a Referendum supported by the President, who demanded that the number of parliamentarians was reduced and the elimination of one of the two Chambers of the Parliament. Băsescu's slogan against Parliament was: "The real majority is you (the people)."

The presidential slogan of the 2009 presidential campaign of the Democrat-Liberal Party candidate was: "Băsescu fights for you". Traian Băsescu's positive campaign developed two populist themes, both invoking the people. The first campaign theme insisted on the idea of majority, having the message: "You (the people) are the real majority". The second campaign theme was to identify the enemy with the institution of two-chamber Parliament. On this topic, Băsescu speculated the Referendum from an electoral perspective, to attract sympathy and votes by proposing the introduction of the one-chamber Parliament and the reduction of the number of parliamentarians. The essential message of the candidate was: "They won't escape of what they are afraid!" On November 23rd, a day after the first ballot in which Traian Băsescu came out first in the electoral options, Băsescu's campaign claim "You are the true majority" was reran through a positive tweet: "You showed that you are the true majority!"

The content analysis on the National Liberal Party candidate, Crin Antonescu's Twitter account showed that of the 15 total posts (context units), 10 displayed positive attitudes and 5 negative attitudes. The Twitter account of the National Liberal Party (PNL), Crin Antonescu, was <https://twitter.com/#!/crinantonescu09>. The most frequently used key-words (numbering units) in his Tweets were: 6 vote, 3 Romania, 2 Mircea Geoană, 2 crisis, 1 smart people, 1 The Superior Council of Magistracy, 1 character, 1 revolution, 1 common-sense, 1 money, 1 exit poll, 1 voting machine, 1 agreement. Therefore, the themes (recording units) could be identified as: 10 mobilizing voters to the poll, 2 solutions for the economic crisis, 2 political crisis, 1 juridical action.

Before the first ballot, one of Crin Antonescu's attack targets was the SDP candidate, Mircea Geoană. Afterwards, Antonescu explained on Twitter why he supported the SDP candidate in the second ballot and encouraged his fans to vote for Geoană. Most tweets in November 2009 contained the recommendation for his supporters to vote the PSD candidate.

The positive messages were inspired from the offline positive campaign of the liberal candidate who promoted the slogan *The revolution of common-sense* on the traditional media channels. His posts contained the message: "On November 22nd, come to the Revolution!"

Only 5 of the 7 candidates with active accounts used Twitter to convey campaign messages. The New Generation Party (PNG) candidate, Gigi Becali, and the Great Romania Party (PRM) candidate, Corneliu Vadim Tudor, abandoned their Twitter accounts, just like they did with their political blogs: the two did not use this online platform in 2009 for transmitting their electoral messages. They decided to ignore their Twitter accounts, just like their blogs: Gigi Becali had a single post on his campaign blog and a single tweet on his Twitter account. Becali and Vadim Tudor did not have Facebook accounts at the 2009 elections (Moc, 2011). The candidate of the New Generation Party (PNG), Gigi Becali, had a Twitter

account at the date of the 2009 elections: <https://twitter.com/#!/gigibecali>. Corneliu Vadim Tudor, the candidate of the Great Romania Party (PRM), owned a Twitter account with the URL <https://twitter.com/#!/vadimtudor>. It contains only 3 tweets sent in April-May 2009, and none from November 2009.

The candidate of the Romanian Ecologist Party (PER), Ovidiu Iane, did not have a Twitter account in 2009. Iane created his Twitter account in May 2011, after he became a member of the Green Party.

Remus Cernea, the one who ran on behalf of the Green Party at the 2009 presidential elections owns a Twitter account today with the address <https://twitter.com/#!/remuscernea>. His oldest posts date from April 2010. His communication team belonging to the Movement of the Agrarian Democratic Green deleted the online archive of the Twitter account from the 2009 campaign, when Cernea ran for the Green Party. The candidate of the Socialist Alliance, Constantin Rotaru, did not have a Twitter account then and he does not own one now, either (in March 2012). The independent candidate Ninel Potârcă, the Romany's' representative, did not have a Twitter account during the 2009 presidential elections. The independent candidate and businessman Eduard Manole did not post any tweet on Twitter account.

11. Conclusions

Most candidates used their Twitter account during 2009 elections to promote the offline campaign actions, namely their participations at radio and TV shows. The politicians tried to use Twitter for attracting the attention of the online audience towards the offline events that they were going to attend. Twitter was used by Sorin Oprescu and Kelemen Hunor for informing the readers about their presence in TV or radio shows. Only the candidates who made it in the second ballot, Traian Băsescu and Mircea Geoană, used Twitter rather to attack each other and less for posting tweets about their offline activities.

Social media (especially Twitter) was used by the presidential candidates to generate news in the traditional media. The candidates of the big parties (especially M. Geoană - Social Democratic Party and C. Antonescu - National Liberal Party) used Twitter as a Public Relations tool to increase their notoriety, improve their political reputation, re-confirm their offline image and influence the public's behaviors. However, most of the candidates' tweets during the presidential campaign aimed to mobilize people at the vote or at joining the candidates' campaign actions.

Five of the candidates seemed to be aware of the significant role played by the mobilizing of voters through content oriented web sites, blogs and social networks. The social-democrat candidate, Mircea Geoană, and the ex-social-democrat, Sorin Oprescu, tried to attract the attention of the public via Twitter. Their interest was to involve a huge number of sympathizers in their offline campaign, to collect information about them, and to remind them to go and vote on the Election Day. They tried to use social networks for mobilizing the young and dynamic voters, who were on Twitter via their smartphones.

Except for candidate Traian Băsescu, who conducted a negative campaign on Twitter, all the other candidates posted more positive messages than negative ones. As opposed to the research hypothesis, the communication campaign on Twitter was a positive one. The campaign attitude displayed on the candidates' Twitter accounts in 2009 was rather positive than negative, as the politicians focused their Tweets on their own campaign activities. The image

promoted by the leaders of the Romanian parties is a political one, as the tweets did not contain messages about their personal life.

Overall, candidates did not debate their program or the public policies proposed by the counter-candidates on their Twitter account. Nor were their own ideas or political projects a subject of debate on Twitter. The online platform was scarcely used by the Romanian politicians for communicating with the electors or for receiving the voters' feed-back in the 2009 presidential campaign. The posts were few (if compared with the Facebook posts) and informative: the candidates promoted information about the street actions from the offline campaign, announced outdoor events and raised awareness on the TV and radio shows they were invited to.

Traian Băsescu and Crin Antonescu did use the online campaigns in a complementary way to the offline traditional campaign: they sent unitary messages via Twitter, which were aiming to meet the voters' expectations, to humanize and bring the politicians closer to the citizens. These politicians (and also Geoană, Oprescu and Hunor) understood that the big number of devices on the Romanian internet market (laptops, notebooks, smartphones etc.) increased the time their audience was spending on social networks and in the online space.

Subsequently to the fact that Romanian internet users still prefer to access internet from their computer or laptop versus from their mobile phone, the smartphones market is still minimal and Twitter is not as successful as Facebook. But the politicians will keep adapting to the market and to the communication tools evolution: they will adjust their messages and the channels they use according to the internet consumption behavior their target audience will display.

Rezumat: Articolul este parte dintr-o cercetare postdoctorală mai amplă care tratează relația dintre new media și new populism. Cercetarea pornește de la observația că există un optimism teoretic cu privire la rolul new media în democratizarea și liberalizarea societăților contemporane. Acest optimism este pus sub semnul întrebării prin cercetări empirice și este investigat sub forma întrebării dacă nu cumva candidații populiști folosesc new media în egală măsură cu candidații democrați. O altă întrebare a cercetării este aceea dacă nu cumva candidații radicali folosesc social media în campanii negative având în vedere faptul că mediul online se situează în afara oricărei cenzuri. Se disting candidații moderați de cei radicali prin derularea unor campanii pozitive pe internet?

În articole anterioare am investigat relația dintre new media și candidații populiști așa cum s-a manifestat în campania prezidențială din 2009 pe conturile de Facebook, pe canalul oficial Youtube și pe blogurile de campanie ale candidaților. În articolul *Candidații prezidențiali pe Twitter în campania electorală din 2009* am încercat să răspundem la întrebarea dacă această platformă de micro-blogging a fost folosită de către candidați pentru a denigra concurența sau pentru a informa alegătorii fideli despre acțiunile din campania outdoor și pentru a mobiliza electoratul la urne. Prin metoda analizei de conținut am stabilit că cele mai multe mesaje transmise de către candidați pe Twitter au fost pozitive, cu excepția celor transmise de către Traian Băsescu ale cărui postări negative au fost de două ori mai multe decât cele pozitive.

Cercetarea a pornit de la presupunerea că politicienii folosesc în campanie un anumit canal de comunicare în funcție de resursele pe care le au la dispoziție și de targetul care folosește respectivul canal. Dacă în urma analizei de piață un candidat este informat că publicul său țintă se află pe Facebook sau pe Twitter, atunci respectivul candidat va investi resurse de timp și bani și va comunica cu publicul său pe respectivele rețele sociale. Pornind de la datele demografice ale utilizatorului de Twitter (tânăr, urban, venituri medii și peste medii) am presupus că în special candidații liberali sau creștin-populari vor utiliza platforma. Investigația pe baza metodei analizei de conținut a arătat că mai ales candidatul social-democrat Mircea Geoană și indepen-

dentul Sorin Oprescu, fost social-democrat, au fost cei care au folosit Twitter pentru a comunica cu electoratul lor.

Cuvinte-cheie: alegeri prezidențiale; Twitter; rețele sociale.

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Ruxandra BOICU*

Responses to Politically Biased Blog Posts. An Analysis of Comments on a Romanian Journalist's Blog

Abstract: This paper proposes to examine some discursive strategies through which ideological bias is negotiated on the journalist's blog. Blogging is a suitable medium to propagate biased ideas, being recommended by its interactional qualities, as a catalyst of journalist-readers contact. The journalist's blog "personalizes" the journalist and secondly promotes the media institution that s/he represents (Boicu, 2011c). Essential conditions for efficient political communication attested by statistics are detailed in the analytic framework section: the communicator's opinion leader ethos, a numerous and consensual community of practice under the communicator's influence, an ideal communication medium. Given the fact that "Harsh Words" ("Vorbe grele"), Victor Ciutacu's personal blog, is read both as a means of promoting "Intact Media Group" "ideology" (an informal type of corporate blog) and, as the blogger/journalist's space of personal marketing, I decided to use this blog as the research corpus (monitoring one blog category for one year). In terms of methodological approach, this study relies on content and discourse analysis, in the sense that verbal interaction within the blogging community is interpreted in the complexity of context (both virtual and real preconditions of communication). The objective of the research is to expose the mechanisms of manipulation through biased communication, under the appearance of dictating strict moral and communication rules specific to blogging.

Keywords: blogging communication; blogger's ethos; norms of blogging community.

1. Introduction

Blogging novelty and increasing popularity recommends this medium of computer mediated communication (CMC) as an adequate vehicle for political communication. This may explain the politicians' interest in opening personal blogs. Blogging communication had already developed in more technologically advanced countries when it appeared in Romania (in the years 2000). It is not only the politicians who have joined Romanian blogosphere, so far, but also public figures in general, some of whom are notorious mainstream journalists. For journalists, there is a double stake in keeping personal blogs. First, they promote their favourable self-image, through the possibilities that blogging offers to create an ethos of approachability and familiarity with the readers, as against the narrow interaction possibilities of traditional journalism. Blogging is mainly recommended by its interactional qualities, as a catalyst of journalist-readers contact. The journalist's blog personalizes the journalist and secondly promotes the media institution that s/he represents (Boicu, 2011c).

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This paper proposes to examine some discursive strategies through which political communication is performed on the journalist's blog. In the analytic framework section, there are details on essential conditions for efficient political communication, such as the communicator's opinion leader ethos, a numerous and consensual community of practice under the communicator's influence, an ideal communication medium.

Given the fact that "Harsh Words" ("Vorbe grele"), Victor Ciutacu's personal blog, is read both as a means of promoting "Intact Media Group" trust "ideology" (an informal type of corporate blog) and, as the blogger/journalist's space of personal marketing, I decided to use this blog as the research corpus (monitoring one blog category for one year).

In terms of methodological approach, this research relies on content and discourse analysis, in the sense that verbal interaction within the blogging community is studied in the complexity of context. The aspects of context that are instrumental to the present qualitative analysis are communication practices in Romania's both established and new media, mainly in the field of political analysis. In addition to that, discourse analysis is meant to reveal discourse power of acting on people for producing significant changes (ideological changes included).

The objective of the research is to expose the mechanisms of manipulation through the blogger's biased selection of the posted news and through his managerial work consisting in the imposition of strict moral and communication rules specific to blogging. Actually, the study of biased communication is closely related to a broader research project on blogging practices in Romanian journalism. I contributed to the project with the examination of the debate between blogger and readers about the norms they negotiate in the process of identification of their emerging community of practice. It is interesting to notice that, during the monitored year, the community members become ever more aware of the characteristics of blogging as their own construction. Their awareness is manifest in their meta-comments on the blogging genre, in terms of communicational and relational norms.

In this article, I insist on the underlying premise of the members' communication, the shared values of the "Intact" media consumers. Their common goal is to criticize the representatives of the political power before and during 2009 (mainly President Traian Băsescu, Prime minister, Emil Boc, and the minister of tourism, Elena Udrea), with the far-fetched pretention that everything they undertook in politics was wrong.

2. Ciutacu's Blog

The reason for studying this blog was its popularity. In 2009, the monitored year, Victor Ciutacu's blog was the sixth most commented blog in the ZeList. In the middle of the year (in July 2009), it climbed onto the first position. We may infer that the blogger would communicate effectively since he was able to gather the largest group of readers.

Ciutacu created his blog in 2007. It bears the name "Vorbe grele" ("Harsh Words"), the same that its owner gave to the TV show he hosts at Antena 3. There are more than one suggestions triggered by the blog title. The name of the TV show might echo Tim Sebastian's "Hard Talk" for the BBC World Service, announcing an ambitious project of assertive and even hostile interviewing. But the way in which the TV journalist actually hosts the show does not seem to confirm the above-mentioned similarity (Boicu, 2011c). "Harsh Words" seems a more appropriate name for his blogging practices, as far as harshness is concerned. For in-

stance, the blogger has a clearly stated policy of message filtering. Every main post is preceded by the warning that comments must be approved before publication. This announces the strict control that the owner exerts on the communication on his blog. Not only does he filter the entering comments, but he also intervenes in order to reprimand deviant readers.

It is also worth mentioning that, across the 22 topic categories of the blog, posts are not thematically distinct, in spite of the different category names. Irrespective of category, the posts are selected so as to serve his strategy of persistently denigrating the politicians that ruled the country at that moment. For instance, there is no significant difference between the posts contents under “Ce-i place geniului” [What the genius likes] and under “Ce-mi provoaca scarba” [What makes me sick]. Likewise, concerning the number of posts, the category for which the author shows a clear preference is the latter (265 vs. 124), within which Ciutacu has accumulated the greatest number of posts and comments. His harsh criticism seems better defined by a negative attitude. Besides the thematic uniformity of his posts, the above-mentioned blog categories prove that the blogger is a self-centered person. All the more so as on the blog homepage there is an illustrative self-introduction: “Știu că-s arogant și genial, dar îmi place să mi-o spună și alții. Oare o să mă iertați vreodată că-s cel mai bun?” [I know I am arrogant and a man of genius. Would you ever forgive me for being the best?].

3. Analytic framework

3.1. Ethos

Most “[r]hetoric” studies, Amossy (2001) included, point out that Aristotle built an oratory theory through the articulation of three factors: the orator, her/his discourse/speech and her/his audience. To summarize this classical approach, the orator uses the force of discourse in order to influence the audience and to make them react in keeping with her/his intentions. While *ethos* designates the image of self that the orator shapes through discourse, *logos* (reason and discourse) is meant to persuade the audience while *pathos*, to move them.

Ethos shaping has become significant in modern sociology (Bourdieu, 1980), discourse analysis (Maingueneau, 1999; Charaudeau, 2005) or in the argumentation theory (Amossy, 2001). Sociologists consider that ethos “is inscribed in a symbolic exchange governed by social mechanisms and external institutional positions” (Amossy, 2001, p. 6). In this sense, Bourdieu (1980) claims that the force of discourse originates in the speaker’s extra-discursive status.

Contrary to this point of view, in discourse studies, Maingueneau (1999) continues Aristotle and thus explains that ethos is a purely discursive entity. Agreeing with Maingueneau and developing a theory of ethos at the intersection of media and politics, Charaudeau (2005) emphasizes the contribution of the public to the configuration of the politician’s ethos. Extending Charaudeau’s theory to public figures in general, their image depends on the public’s readiness to identify with them, recognizing their energy and force of character. In the case under analysis, a popular journalist such as V. Ciutacu will attempt at increasing the number of followers through a discursive ethos of courage, daring and pride, in close relation to the qualities required by the historical circumstances and the public agenda.

According to Amossy (2001) who reconciles the extreme points of view on ethos as a uniquely intra- or extra-discursive construction, in the case of well-known personalities, their

public image that coincides with *pre-existent* ethos (preceding a certain verbal interaction) is the creation of the media. The author associates pre-existent or “prior” ethos to the notion of stereotype, a preexistent cultural representation that the members of the same community share. The media is the vehicle of stereotypes about well-known personalities, famous journalists, such as Victor Ciutacu. Being a media professional, Victor Ciutacu’s public image was a symbiosis between what the Antena 3 TV viewers or the “Jurnalul Național” readers already knew about him in 2007, when he became a blogger. At that time, he was the editor-in-chief of the “Jurnalul Național” that was ranked the first on the list of Romania’s central quality dailies, for several years on end, with a readership of 698,000, in October, 2009. (SNA Focus, offered by BRAT; source: www.jurnalul.ro, October 30, 2009). Under these circumstances, Victor Ciutacu had the necessary notoriety and prestige for starting a successful blogging activity. Soon, on “Harsh Words, he describes himself as an *authoritarian blog owner*, who admits being discretionary, “even a dictator” and who runs the blog as if it were his private property. At the same time, the blogger confesses that he is proud of his work for the “Intact Media Group”, headed by “Felix” (nick-name that the media gave to Dan Voiculescu).

Introducing himself in these terms, the blogger indicated to potential blog commenters how to identify him as *an important employee of the “Intact” trust*, as a journalist and political analyst, given the content and orientation of his media products. E-users who were familiar with his journalistic activity were prepared to find the *ideological bias of the “Intact” trust on Ciutacu’s blog too*. Actually, even at present, the implicit prerequisite for the readers who intend to leave comments on it is to be readers of Jurnalul Național and mainly TV viewers of the authors’ work for Antena 3. Moreover, commenters are encouraged to watch the Antena 3 shows hosted by Ciutacu’s friends, Mihai Gâdea and Mircea Badea.

The blog audience is thus narrowed to the public that meets these requirements, sharing the information supplied and interpreted by the trust. The blog readers expect the same type of journalism and political analysis that they find in Ciutacu’s offline professional practices (Boicu, 2011c). What is new information for them is Ciutacu’s dictatorial style of leading the blogging community and spreading the ideology of the trust.

3.2. Norms of the blogging community

Blogger and readers share interests both in interacting on the Internet and in the content of their posts. In the process of developing their common project, the participants create and feel bound to observe explicit or implicit norms. Norms are associated with a standard to which people are expected to conform even if they do or do not do so. It is the very negotiation of norms that makes the participants develop the sense of belonging to the same community (Gibbs, 1965).

“A community of practice (CofP) is a group of people brought together by some mutual endeavor, some common enterprise in which they are engaged and to which they bring a shared repertoire of resources, including linguistic resources, and for which they are mutually accountable” (McConnell-Ginet, 2003, p. 71). The CofP approach focuses on the practice that legitimates participants as group members. Within the fluid, dynamic and emergent computer-mediated community, it also indicates the degree to which they participate in the group activities. Wenger (1998, p. 73 *apud* Holmes and Stubbe, 2003, p. 580) identifies three criterial features of a CofP: (1) mutual engagement, (2) a joint negotiated enterprise, and (3) a shared repertoire of negotiable resources accumulated over time.

Community members strive for differentiating themselves as a group from other more or less similar social formations. Negotiating their shared norms, they negotiate the identity of their community (Boicu, 2011a). The intrinsic interconnection between community norms and community identity is suggestively rendered by Bousfield (2007, p. 2188): “Indeed, a ‘norm’ must surely be considered one of the necessary constituent components for an activity type ‘X’ to be an activity type ‘X’, or for a community of practice ‘Y’ *to be* a community of practice ‘Y’” [my emphasis].

There are blogging norms that derive from the constraints of the technical medium, while other norms are negotiable within the social framework. Besides exchanging opinions in a technically constrained interaction, bloggers and readers are committed to a relational activity regulated by the social norms of the respective practice. “Relational work refers to all aspects of the work invested by individuals in the construction, maintenance, reproduction and transformation of interpersonal relationships among those engaged in social practice” (Locher and Watts, 2008, p. 96). Relational work is adjusted to the blog members’ expectations about the norms of their community of practice. Members’ behaviour in relation to one another may or may not be judged to be appropriate. It is the members who produce and share interpretations of appropriate interpersonal and intersubjective behaviour.

Conforming to the Internet technology is not sufficient for complete integration of users into one of the computer-mediated communities. They are expected to comply with Netiquette [or e-politeness] that is meant to govern their verbal interaction. For instance, writers are asked to keep their posts “on topic” and relevant [...] so that readers do not waste time reading messages that are not about what they expect” (Graham, 2007, p. 745).

Likewise, it is considered inappropriate to “blat” (re-post private messages publicly) without the original author’s permission and thereby violate the original writer’s privacy. “Unlike reporting speech in spoken interaction, blatting, since it involves a written (and therefore accurate) record, may expose the writer to greater risk than a spoken, third-party report and is therefore negatively marked in CMC” (Graham, 2007, p. 745).

The analyzed posts (see *infra*) reveal how conflicts originate in the participants’ disagreement on interpretations of appropriate behaviour in the blogging community of practice, as well as how the community members assess their conflicts.

On “Harsh Words”, relational work within the community is polarized. There is a high power distance between the two poles: blogger and readers. Posting on blogging rules, V. Ciutacu does not hesitate to call them “my rules” and when he was asked about the membership of the message filtering commission, his answer was abrupt: “It [the commission] is made up *by me, me and me*” [my emphasis].

The blogger implicitly discriminates between faithful readers who support his ideological stand expressed both off- and on-line and other commenters whose disagreement is more manifest. It is worth mentioning that the hard core of his readers’ group is as narrow as ten active members, who post their comments with a relative frequency. They interact with the author, posting several times under the monitored blog category, entitled “The Day’s Replies” (“Replicile zilei”). Nevertheless, only 5 to 7 commenters out of the above-mentioned ten leave posts during a longer period of time and under more than one category. The small number of faithful readers seems paradoxical if we think that “Harsh Words” was the most commented blog in July 2009 (monitored year). Its 2009 popularity may be explained by the significant number of commenters who contributed with one or two posts and left the blog for good afterwards (Boicu, 2011c).

3.3. Blogging within CMC genres

Blogging is a form of online communication related to, yet distinct from, other online media such as instant messaging, chat, email, and newsgroups. Due to its considerable popularity, blogging has become a mainstream use of the Internet (Nardi et al. 2004, p. 15). Considered to be a distinct communication channel (Gumbrecht, 2004), medium (Nardi et al., 2004) or genre (Herring, 2007), blogging is constrained by various factors, both of technical and social nature.

Herring devised the multi-faceted classification of computer mediated discourse (CMD) that places blogging communication between websites, interpreted as “static and formal” (Nardi et al., 2004, p. 7) and asynchronous computer-mediated communication of the email type. Since there is no time boundary in blogging, readers may leave their comments at any time, finding the blogger’s posts in the blog archive. Besides limited one-to-many interactivity, Herring (2007) referred to asymmetrical communication rights between blogger and blog reader; bloggers have the right to control the content of their blogs and to receive feedback from their audience.

Within the group of bloggers that Nardi et al. (2004) interviewed in their ethnographic research, in order to compare and contrast blogging with other CMC genres (email and homepage, for instance), blogging was seen as less intrusive than emailing. “Readers go to the blog in a completely ‘voluntary’ manner, when they have time. [...] What drew both writers and readers to blogs was the rhythm of frequent, usually brief posts, with the immediacy of reverse chronological order”. (2004, p. 7). On the other hand, blogging enabled the participants to interact more than it would be possible to do on homepages, where they felt distracted by too numerous visual materials on the same page (Boicu, 2011a).

Although more informal than homepages, blogs are expected to deal with serious issues. Most readers declared that they blogged to comment on topics they found relevant and important. A blog, said one, can be “a point of view, not just chatter” (Nardi et al., 2004, p. 7). Generally speaking, bloggers have a regular audience reading their posts and anticipating new ones. Blogging could be, “solving one of the key problems of any writing, i.e., knowing who to write for” (Nardi et al., 2004, p. 10). Even if some readers are anonymous, as loyal members of a blogging community, they form a better identifiable audience for sharing common interests than in the case of other CMC genres.

Comments are inherent to communication in general and to blogging in particular, because they “enhance the sense of community that you get” (Gumbrecht, 2004, p. 4). Even if blogger and commenters do not all know one another face-to-face, they feel familiar enough to exchange opinions through the blog and even to make private confessions.

Due to the type of community engendered, blogging seems to be an ideal vehicle for spreading political beliefs and increasing the number of followers. Other electronic genres supporting communities range from chat, group websites, listservs, to MOOs and MUDs. They do not offer the advantages of blogging. Synchronous media encourage forums for textual interaction but they have no archives, while chatting, listservs and other highly interactive media may become too “adversarial”. When conflict is generated among blogging community members and it grows too personal, it is channeled to email or chatting. “When discussion heats up, it may be removed to other media, leaving the blog a relatively peaceful forum, averting “flames” and open conflict and aggression among community members” (Nardi et al., 2004, p. 12).

3.4. Norms in blogging and journalism

Blogging is seen as an alternative to traditional media, mainly to print press. Columnists take advantage of the first hand information that they receive through blogging, in order to improve their off-line newswriting. Considering that Victor Ciutacu is mainly appreciated for his editorials for the “Jurnalul Național”, researchers may expect that he also observes the standards of established journalism in blogging. If it is subject to research with a view to assessing new media journalistic features, “Harsh Words” will not correspond to the standards of professional journalism. What is expected from journalists, according to some North American journalist bloggers, is “*fair and balanced news*” [my emphasis] (Regan, 2003, p. 70). Likewise, Toolan (2003, p. 93) explains that: “Journalists should operate in ways that *don't display bias or predisposition. These are ethical considerations ...*” [my emphasis]. These high expectations about blogging as journalism were expressed at the beginning of the years 2000, in the United States, when blogging was a promising genre, used by journalists as a source of information. Grabowicz (2003, p. 76), another American journalist blogger, considers that: “[T]here are *many values* in journalism that need to be preserved [both in traditional and new media journalism] – honesty, integrity, accuracy, fairness, inquisitiveness and thoroughness”.

These are not the qualities of the monitored blog. Victor Ciutacu seems that he is less interested in the informative character of communication on his blog, than he is in the relational virtues of blogging, relying on sharing personal experience and opinion. Unlike communication through mainstream media, blogging excels in interactivity and promotion of social bonds. As online communication, it stands for a “perpetual feedback loop” (Andrews, 2003, p. 64). “[B]loggers promise a more immediate experience [than print journalism]” (Regan, 2003, p. 69). In print journalism, readers are kept at a certain distance.

“Bloggers value informal conversation, egalitarianism, subjective points of view, and colorful writing” (Lasica, 2003, p. 71).

Journalists' practices may be influenced by blogging: journalists may adopt some blogging practices in their professional activities (Drulă, 2011). Communicational and interactional qualities of blogging are being used by print and TV journalists such as Victor Ciutacu and his “Intact” fellows to their advantage, in order to extend their influence and manipulate their readers. Consequently, biased political communication seems a profitable business for “Intact” journalists. Blogging communication on “Harsh Words” may have contributed to the great number of copies sold by the “Jurnalul Național” (698,000 in 2009, our reference year).

4. Corpus and methodology

Downloaded from Victor Ciutacu's blog “Vorbe Grele” (“Harsh Words”), the research data consist of 670 posts; they contain the blogger's 9 main posts and the readers' comments under the topic category entitled “Replicile zilei” (“The Day's Replies”), written throughout the year 2009. The author's posts are excerpts from journalistic texts published online or photos/videos broadcast in “Antena 3” TV shows. Usually, these “quotations” are accompanied by Ciutacu's short comments. The content of the main posts challenges the readers to produce critical comments addressing the government and the presidency.

As far as the readers' comments, they express various points of view concerning the blogger's post, most of them in agreement with “Intact Media Group” dominant outlook (see

supra), or appreciations of the talk shows hosted by Ciutacu and his friends. When they do not display the participants' life experience, the posts contain jokes, original rhymes, fragments of classic poetry and famous quotations. Ciutacu posts 36 comments, out of the total of 661 comments. They are concise and firm. Although his participation in communication is actually reduced to few comments, 89 of the readers' comments are explicitly addressed to him, personally, as proved by the use of his name (in numerous versions). Because of discourse ambiguity, it is often difficult to find the reference of the addressee, unless it is made explicit through the use of names or personal pronouns.

Methodologically, the 670 texts have been subject to content analysis, in order to be grouped in keeping with the types of norms imposed by the blog owner and negotiated by the blogging community. If communication (blogging) norms and relational norms (Netiquette and blogger-readers relationship) are debated through 15% of the comments, ideological norms are implicit or explicit in 95% of the comments. The content of the posts has been also discursively interpreted in both local and global contexts.

The analysis proper consists in the discursive interpretation of a few comments that illustrate how ideological bias is usually masked by the concern for and the debate on blogging norms. The second set of examples reveal explicit reference to Romania's political life and personalities, following the blog owner's bias, previously known by the readers and openly announced by Victor Ciutacu in his self-presentation on "Harsh Words" (see *supra*).

5. Discursive interpretation of an Anti-Power "ideology"

5.1. Implicit political bias

Authoritarian ethos is efficient to assure power distance, as revealed by the imposition of norms:

Netiquette norms - Blatting

(1) @Costin Tanasescu: *te rog mult sa te opresti cu **copy/paste-urile***

[Please, I do ask you to stop **copy/pasting**]

By Victor Ciutacu on 29 October 2009 at 9:45 pm

As Costin Tanasescu reproduced/quoted a paragraph from the minister of tourism, Elena Udrea's blog, Victor Ciutacu (V.C.) imperatively asks Costin Tanasescu not to infringe the rules of CMC. In fact, Netiquette prohibits quoting from private correspondence on the Net (e.g. on email); consequently, Ciutacu is wrong because Udrea's blog is public (Boicu, 2011a, p. 58). The polite order that V.C. is giving proves that he has the blog owner's undeniable authority of asking his readers to observe the rules of blogging.

All the more so, the owner's communicative intention is to appear to "do justice" under the mask of objectivity, since he interferes when one of his main political adversary (Elena Udrea)'s blog is quoted by copy/pasting.

(2) *Victore, **copy-paste-urile mele**, sunt informatii interesante luate de pe internet. **Vreau sa scapam de Tiran** si asta poate m-a inversunat. Faptul ca **portocalii** ne injura la drumul mare, ma irita. **Am inteles mesajul tau.***

[Victor, **my copy-pasting** is interesting information taken from the internet. **I wish we would rid the country of the Tyrant** and maybe that has infuriated me. The fact that **the orange** are swearing **at us** out and loud irritates me. **I've got your point.**]

By Costin Tanasescu on 29 October 2009 at 10:41 pm

Costin Tanasescu's answer comes at a considerable distance from the blogger's request (1), but it shows a more than clarifying attitude of obedience. Introduced by "Victore", the direct and informal address implied in the use of V.C.'s first name, the reader's justification of using copy/paste relies on the relevance of the information for their common goal (emphasized by the sense of affiliation, manifest in the use of the personal pronoun in the first person plural) of chasing *the Tyrant and his orange followers* (a hint at President Traian Băsescu and the Liberal Democratic Party in power, whose symbolic colour is orange).

Actually s/he defends her/himself and tries to ingratiate with V.C.. Ending her/his intervention with "I've got your message", the commenter reassures the blog owner of her/his loyalty. Apparently, obedience refers to blogging rules acceptance. Moreover, I consider that s/he agrees not to use *orange sources* any more, so that the blog could not be discredited for unfair treatment of the political adversary.

Netiquette norms - Chatting

When Dan and [L]upi are engaged in a conflictive exchange of several mutually addressed replies, V.C. firmly intervenes to do order on his blog. He prohibits chatting, as nonspecific to blogging as a "more balanced" genre. Very soon after C.V.'s intervention, Dan respectfully admits her/his mistake:

(3) *Aveți dreptate domnule Ciutacu.*

[**You are right** Mr Ciutacu]

By Dan on 21 January 2009 at 6:29 pm

Ciutacu's firm intervention is applauded by another reader:

(4) *Foarte bine, Victore,*

Fă ordine. Aici se discută probleme serioase. Mă mir că Lupi, pe care îl apreciez de când tot citesc tot ce scrieți voi pe acest blog, intră în asemenea discuții sterile.

SALUTĂRI TUTUROR!

[Well done, Victor, Impose order. **Serious issues are being talked about here. I am surprised that Lupi whom I appreciate** since I have been reading what you have written on this blog, gets into such **sterile discussions**. Greetings to all of you!]

By HAPAX on 21 January 2009 at 6:52 pm

HAPAX is not a regular participant, as s/he explains, but s/he is the only commenter who interprets the verbal conflict produced. S/he ironically agrees to V.C.'s authoritative imposition, confirming that, unlike chatting, blogging as a medium/genre is not propitious to sterile discussions, such as the dispute between Dan and lupi.

Towards the end of the troubled day of the 21st of January, the initiator of the conflict is ready to excuse before the blogging community.

(5) *@ TUTUROR – Ini cer iertare pentru ca am abuzat in interventiile mele si in polemica mea cu un anume blogger !! Totusi , datzi-mi voie sa cred ca se poate purta si un dialog , nu doar sa ne inshiruim si sa ne incolonam postarile , precum indienii*

„in sir indian”!!! [...] [Everybody – I apologize for the abuse in my polemic against a certain blogger!! Yet, allow me to believe that we can engage in a dialogue too, rather than standing in a file to post our comments one after another, like the Indians, “in an Indian file”!!!]

By lupi on 21 January 2009 at 10:05 pm

Long after Ciutacu’s warning and HAPAX’s opinion on chatting/disputing, lupi apologizes for her/his quarrelsome attitude, although in a sarcastic tone, when s/he refers to “a certain blogger”. Afterwards, “s/he interprets the prohibition of chatting as an anti-dialogue norm. Blogging as preached by Ciutacu is compared with “the Indian file”” (Boicu, 2011a, p. 59) aligning the readers who approve of and support political bias promoted through blogging. Actually, s/he negotiates the significance of this norm, insinuating there are political reasons implied in Ciutacu’s application of blogging rules.

Unlike [L]upi in (5), a loyal reader makes her/his obedience explicit, when involved in a dispute:

(6) *Eu pun punct aici, in primul rand pentru ca lui Ciutacu nu-i place chat-ul pe blogul sau, iar in al doilea, nu vad de ce as mai continua.* [I’ll put an end here, first of all because **Ciutacu doesn’t like chatting on his blog**, and secondly I don’t see why I should continue.]

By violet on 10 September 2009 at 6:57 pm

[V]iolet declares s/he is willing to observe the anti-chatting/quarrelling norm imposed by Ciutacu. Implicitly, she agrees to Ciutacu’s conditions in general, his political views included.

Netiquette norms - Deviation from the main post topic

At the beginning of the monitored year, the blogger uses his authority again, this time in order to counter-attack insinuation on profitability of journalism and criticism of financial competition between two media moguls such as Dan Voiculescu (Intact Media Group) and Sorin Ovidiu Vântu (Realitatea Media Trust):

(7) @relu: Voiculescu-si conserva profitul, Vantu-si mareste pierderile. e simplu. da’ce lagatura are asta cu subiectul sub care postezi? ca nu ma prind...[Voiculescu preserves his profit while Vantu is increasing his losses. It’s that simple but what’s the link between this and the subject under which you are posting? ‘cause I don’t get it...]

By Victor Ciutacu on 22 January 2009 at 1:28 am

[R]elu is not a regular commenter. Ciutacu takes advantage of the reader’s “ignorance” of the blogging community norms so as to teach her/him a lesson about one general rule of blogging, namely that deviation from the main post topic is not accepted. All the more so as relu’s question contains criticism of journalism being practised as profitable business. The blogger defies the reader by answering that Voiculescu’s trust for which he works is capable to preserve its profit even in times of crisis, while Vantu, his market competitor, is not. In this way, Ciutacu contributes to the construction of an ethos of power that deserves respect for Voiculescu and “Intact” employees.

Political bias and the pride of trust belonging make the blog owner himself trespass topic observance, as mentioned in (7):

(8) *Sa stii ca nu sunt la subiect dar am o “nedumerire” si nu stiu cui sa o “zic”*
ELENA UDREA poate sa fie ministru’ turismului?

*Eu acum ceva vreme vroiam sa deschid o agentie de turism, dar nu pot pt. ca nu sunt licentiat in turism. Nu mai dezvolt subiectul, dar **daca vreti voi il puteti dezvolta.***

[You should know **I won’t stick to the subject** but “something is not clear” to me and I don’t know to whom I can “speak” about it. **Can Elena Udrea be the Minister of Tourism?** Some time ago I wanted to open a tourism agency, but I couldn’t do it because I don’t have a diploma in tourism. I won’t enlarge on this subject, **but if you wish you can enlarge on it.**]

By Ciutacu on 2 February 2009 at 9:37 pm

Ciutacu starts his comment by admitting that he is going to break conformity to the topic of the main post. He justifies his rule breaking by the responsibility to “signal an act of discrimination between ordinary people and the members of Parliament who are entitled to manage domains without having the necessary educational qualifications” (Boicu, 2011a, p. 59). Since he afforded making an exception to the blogging rule, he is “generously” inviting the community members to enlarge on his comment and to join him (trespassing the rule too).

Netiquette norms - Injurious language (relational work marked by impoliteness)

Reader A.M. disagrees with the blogger’s point of view on the Gordunov case. S/he speaks in favour of the state representative and the district police who are in charge of the murder investigation. In addition to that, A.M. implies that s/he considers her/himself entitled to give lessons to the blogging community who share Ciutacu’s interpretation of facts and to criticize the commenters’ lack of objectivity.

A.M.’s post receives the following reaction:

(9) *@A.M: ti-am postat comentariul numai pentru a-ti confirma **ca esti un imbecil***

*[I’ve posted your comment just for showing you that **you’re an imbecil**]*

By Victor Ciutacu on 2 February 2009 at 3:06 pm

Without any arguments against A.M.’s interpretation of the public scandal, Ciutacu offends her/him by attacking her/him *ad personam*. It is not the unique example of the blogger’s brutal reaction against newcomers who disagree to his authoritative point of view.

Nevertheless, Ciutacu has the opposite attitude towards another reader, later on, during the monitored year:

(10) *@Marius: **la viitoarea jignire a oricui de aici, pleci oricunde altundeva***

[the next time you insult anybody here you shall leave for wherever it may be]

By Victor Ciutacu on 10 September 2009 at 3:23 pm

The context of Ciutacu’s outburst in (10) was a controversy between Marius and [V]iolet, engendered by two different approaches to a posted topic, at the end of which Marius suddenly infuriates and offends [V]iolet. The former accuses the latter of stupidity. The offence is aggravated by [V]iolet’s previous “confession” that *she would be* a respectable mature lady, a university graduate.

On the other hand, Marius previously “unveiled” *his* private identity as a young man of 24. Marius “justifies her/his rudeness by addressing the insult in both grammatical genders, which questions [V]iolet’s declared/pretended identity” (Boicu 2011a, p. 60), implying that [V]iolet could be a liar.

The opponents' statuses on the blog are distinct. Ciutacu's attitude towards them depends on their degree of obedience. "[V]iolet has proved to be an active and obedient community member, while Marius, although an active commenter too, frequently criticizes the shared interpretation of the main post" (Boicu, 2011a, p. 60).

To put an end to this quarrel, Ciutacu threatens Marius with expulsion from the blog, in case s/he keeps disturbing the "peaceful atmosphere" of general agreement within the community and, pretending to do justice to everybody "here", he actually protects and favours [V]iolet in exchange for her/his loyalty. In this way he marginalizes Marius, influencing the others to perceive her/him as "difficult".

Marius's response is posted at a short distance after (10):

(11) *Oricum am observat ca esti foarte sensibil la jigniri si cuvinte mai contondente. Din pacate doar cand iti sunt adresate...nu si cand le adresezi.* [Anyhow I noticed you are very sensitive to insults and harsher words. Unfortunately, it is only when they are addressed to you ...but not when you address them to the others]

By Marius on 10 September 2009 at 3:44 pm

Marius counter-attacks Ciutacu personally, accusing him of discretionary treatments of injurious remarks: the blogger uses them brutally against the others, but he is oversensitive when they are used against him.

Journalistic norms

(12) **Ce ar mai putea face un jurnalist in afara de a scrie articole in ziare, pe blog, de a-si ridica glasul la emisiuni politice? Cum altfel ar putea ajunge la mintea si sufletul poporului in pragul alegerilor?...**

[What could a journalist do, besides writing articles in newspapers, on blogs, having his voice heard at political shows? How else could s/he reach the people's mind and soul right before the election? ...]

By I.I. on October 30, 2009 at 11:49 am

Post (12) reveals the support that the commenter extends to Ciutacu, perceived as an influential opinion leader in Romanian society at a crucial moment, before the presidential election that was to be organized in November 2009. V.C.'s status as a successful blogger is associated with his contribution to traditional media (political columns in newspapers and political TV shows). I.I. seems to be a frustrated blogging citizen who cries out that the media have no practical effects. From a constant follower such as I.I., the message may be perceived as a call to action, since it voices the others' wish to see Ciutacu and his fellow TV journalist friends committed to politics (Boicu, 2011c).

Moreover, the reader is stating that blogging, as well as mainstream media, should accomplish one of their essential goals of "reaching people's mind [through *logos*] and soul [through *pathos*]"

(13) **Pe net intra oameni de la un anumit nivel in sus.**

Oricat ar parea de exagerat, poate ca ar trebui ca intr-o emisiune cu rating mare de la Intact, dar si in Jurnal, sa fie facuta si „traducerea” faptelor [...] un desen trebuie facut! S-ar putea ca, deodata, **sa se simta niste oameni mai destepti, mai luminati.**

[The net is accessed by people above the average. However exaggerate it might seem, a high-rated Intact TV show, or the Jurnal [Național] should provide the

“translation” of facts, a well-done drawing! All of a sudden, some people might feel clever, more enlightened...]

By violet on October 29, 2009 at 7:54 pm

Explaining that the members of the blogging community are conversant with the medium, and therefore more intelligent than the consumers of traditional media products, [V]iolet questions TV viewers’ capacity of understanding politics. Consequently, s/he recommends an educational project of vulgarization of the flaws in the Power policies to be developed by “Intact” journalists. As “professionals” they have the mission of “translating” politics so that common people could understand it before the election.

5.2. Explicit anti-Bănescu ideology

Support by loyal followers

(14) *M-am hotarat. Fac ii fac blog colectiv Oficiosului! [...]*

Doua reguluia:

1. *Vor fi admisi sa posteze articole numai unii dintre cei care au fost in prealabil admisi in calitate de comentatori pe blogul lui Ciutacu.*

2. *Nu vor fi admisi cei tolerati de Ciutacu si care put de la o posta a PORTOCALIUI INCHIS.*

[I’ve made up my mind. I’ll make a collective blog for the Officious!

There are two rules:

1. The people admitted to post articles will be **only some of those who have been previously admitted as commenters on Ciutacu’s blog**

2. **We won’t admit people tolerated by Ciutacu and who stink of dark orange from far away]**

By FuXi on March 30, 2009 at 5:55 pm

FuXi attacks Evenimentul Zilei (“the Officious Newspaper”) for being humbly loyal to the Government. Through post (14), the reader teaches the newspaper staff a lesson. S/he offers to open a mock blog whose members would be the toughest *anti-orange* commenters from Ciutacu’s blog.

Admittance of ideological bias

(15) *@begone Lasati-ne in pace daca nu intelegeti ca dictatura este manifestata in mai multe feluri si daca va place asa n-aveti decat sa-l votati. Sunteti mai rau decat sustinatorii pe fata aai lui Basescu. Atatia oameni de pe blog vad la fel problema, iar dvs sunteti mai intept?*

[Leave us alone if you don’t understand that dictatorship is manifest in several ways and if you like it you are free to vote for him. **You are worse than Bănescu’s declared supporters. There are so many people on the blog who see the problem in the same way, are you wiser than they are?**]

By Asztalos Floare on October 30, 2009 at 2:55 am

[B]egone has warned the community against comparing Bănescu with Hitler (main post topic). Asztalos Floare reprimands begone for deviation from *anti – Bănescu ideology*. Since begone’s warning is her/his only post within the “The Day’s Replies” category, “the reader

is treated as an illegitimate participant, whose interpretation of the situation is contrary to the majority/main stance (Boicu, 2011a, p. 60). Asztalos Floare is proud to admit that s/he belongs to the majority who share *anti* – Băsescu opinions on Ciutacu's blog.

One reader who has declared against comparing Băsescu with Hitler and who has already posted several criticisms of the *anti* – Băsescu ideology adopted on “Harsh Words” ironically accepts to withdraw from the blog:

(16) *Gata domnul Ciutacu, nu mai postez. Ma scuzati. Jos palaria si...jos Basescu! Tschuss!*

[O.K. Mr Ciutacu, I'll stop posting. Sorry. **I take off my hat and...down with Basescu!**]

By Seful on October 31, 2009 at 4:27 pm

Leaving Ciutacu's community, Seful implies her/his opinions do not coincide with the ideology shared by the majority. Mocking at the idea of consensus, he expresses “respect” for Ciutacu “and greets the community with their favourite slogan “down with Basescu!”.

Disagreement to biased journalism

(17) *Am 24 de ani, n-am nici o legatura cu politica si vreau sa traiesc intr-o tara decenta. Dar nu se poate, ba victore, sa faceti presa la modul asta. Gandeste-te la tine si la familia ta, [...]*

Sunt dispus sa stau de vorba cu oricare dintre voi pentru ca imi este greu daca nu imposibil de imaginat cum o persoana intreaga la minte poate sa se comporte asa cum o faceti voi in emisiunile de la antena3.

[I am 24, I am not at all involved in politics and I want to live in a decent country. But **it's inadmissible, you Victor, that you do press in this way. Think of yourself and your family, [...]** I am ready to speak to any of you because **it is difficult if not impossible to me to imagine how a sane person can behave the way you do at antenna 3 shows.**]

By Marius on September 20, 2009 at 2:43 pm

Marius is entitled by a great number of posts, across the blog categories, to protest against the biased journalism professed at Antenna 3 shows. His protest against *anti-Power* ideology is not substantiated by ethical values of journalism/blogging. It is not clear whether Marius considers their journalistic practice to be ethically wrong or simply dangerous. The second interpretation is rather more explicit in the message: as a representative of the younger generation, s/he declares in favour of the reformation of Romanian society, but not in the way proposed by insane and irresponsible journalists/bloggers/opinion leaders.

6. Conclusions

The analysis of the previous examples has proved that there is a lively debate on Romanian politics in 2009, and, in particular, on the presidency of Traian Băsescu (since 2007). Victor Ciutacu's comments are not frequent across the monitored category. Nevertheless, his “presence” on the blog is marked in several ways. He selects the main posts, he is often addressed personally by the readers, he interferes, even if briefly, whenever he or his allies are

verbally attacked. The blogger acts as if he were a vigilant guardian of order, understood as respect for his ideology. His dictatorial ethos helps him impose the “Intact” ideological norm on “Harsh Words”.

The blogger and journalist disseminates anti-Bănescu views, taking advantage of the qualities of blogging communication, its interactional benefits, whose efficiency is enhanced by the great number of readers. Victor Ciutacu continues his off-line policy of aiming at important targets: President Bănescu and his close “entourage”, Elena Udrea, Emil Boc, etc. His more or less transparent objective is to help increase the number of the people dissatisfied with the Power politics at that time. “Building a faithful audience is one of the key social actions that diaries [blogs] perform in this context, and the establishment of community is arguably the exigence to which bloggers use diaries to respond” (McNeill, 2005, p. 1).

Ciutacu’s blogging community is built around common identity traits of its members. Hypothetically, they are familiar with CMC, familiar with blogging and willing to interact with V. Ciutacu. Within this emerging community, as the analysis revealed, the members are interested in the norms to be adopted. Some norms are interpreted as objective constraints of the medium (technical and social), other norms are negotiated with a view to improving communicational and relational bonds. As to subjective norms, they stand for prerequisites before becoming a member of Ciutacu’s blogging community. They concern sharing the same values: the so called “patriotic feelings” on whose behalf the blogger encourages his readers to utter “Harsh Words” against the president and the government.

Sometimes, this common anti-Power ideology is insidiously hidden behind the promotion of “Netiquette” (communicational, interactional and relational norms on the Net). Most members of the community openly sanction “ideological” deviations, as well as contradiction or criticism of the blog owner.

What the community do not sanction (and that could be interesting for further research), is incorrect writing (making grammar or spelling mistakes) and, more importantly, using injurious or gross language. The readers immitate the blogger’s ostentatious verbal behaviur and feel free to unleash offence against their political targets, as far as they are protected by anonymity.

Greatly influenced by the owner’s dictatorial ethos, political communication on behalf of “Intact” is supported by Victor Ciutacu’s subjectivity. His strategies of political communication become effective when his ideas are echoed by his readers almost unanimously. That is why, we may conclude that, on “Harsh Words”, political communication is a collective, negotiated creation, a cumulative effect, promoted through an adequate channel.

Rezumat: Acest articol își propune să examineze câteva strategii discursive prin care partizanatul ideologic este negociat pe blogul jurnalistului. Blogul reprezintă un mediu adecvat propagării ideilor, fiind recomandat de calitățile sale interacționale. Blogul jurnalistului îl “personalizează” pe acesta și, în al doilea rând, promovează instituția media pe care autorul o reprezintă (Boicu, 2011c). În secțiunea dedicată cadrului analitic sunt detaliate condițiile esențiale pentru o comunicare care a fost statistic dovedită drept eficientă: ethosul liderului de opinie pe care comunicatorul trebuie să-l înfățișeze, existența unei comunități de practici numeroase și consensuale, un mijloc ideal de comunicare la dispoziția jurnalistului. Datorită faptului că “Vorbe grele”, blogul personal al lui Victor Ciutacu, este receptat ca mijloc de promovare a ideologiei “Intact Media Group” (un tip informal de blog corporatist), precum și ca spațiul folosit de bloggerul jurnalist pentru a face marketing personal, am decis să folosesc acest blog drept corpus al cercetării (monitorizând

o categorie a blogului timp de un an). În privința abordării metodologice, acest studiu se bazează pe analiza de conținut și pe analiza discursului, în sensul că interacțiunea verbală în sânul comunității de practici este interpretată în funcție de complexitatea contextului (atât pre-condițiile virtuale, cât și cele reale ale comunicării). Obiectivul cercetării este expunerea mecanismelor de manipulare a audiențelor prin comunicare parțiană, sub aparența impunerii regulilor stricte morale și comunicaționale specifice activității de blogging.

Cuvinte-cheie: comunicarea pe blog; ethosul bloggerului; normele comunității formate prin blogging.

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Essay

Vineet KAUL*

Journalism in the Age of Digital Technology

1. Introduction

In today's fast-paced society, more and more people are turning to their computers, cell phones, and Bluetooth devices for updates ranging from Facebook to weather predictions. Especially with the explosion of social networking and the development of smart phones, technology is quickly becoming the primary way of receiving information. New technological dependence for information does have benefits- instant notifications of news and emails allows society members to be aware of what is going on in the world in only a few seconds. With communication being an important part of any culture, the way in which information is spread has to adapt to fit the way people live. Journalism was once largely print based when the majority of people wanted to take time to read newspapers. Now as people are turning to the internet for their information needs, print journalism is slowly being cast aside and some even consider print journalism a dying art, as shown by the steady decline of print newspaper sales. Journalism departments all over the world have to rethink the way journalism is being taught, as techniques of fifteen years ago are not applicable today. The journalism landscape is constantly changing, with new technologies and media re-defining the relationship between the news media and the public. Human nature being what it is, some people fear change while others eagerly embrace it. Some are excited by the opportunity to profit from changing circumstances. Others are inclined to follow the rule of the "dangerous precedent," which states that absolutely nothing should ever be done for the first time. In today's world, however, it is impossible for anyone to escape the relentless process of change. This is especially true for those working in journalism and communications.

Newspapers have been the major media of journalistic materials from the era of pigeons to Wi-Fi internet. Unlike the incremental developments of the past, today's telecommunications revolution marks a fundamental change of direction. We are faced with the challenge, and the opportunity, of doing things in an entirely different way. New technology is reshaping the most fundamental aspects of our communications system, and we are now forced to reconsider our most basic assumptions about how that system will be used to gather and to distribute the news. This article will offer a brief glimpse of the shape of things to come, followed by some difficult, and still unanswered, questions that should concern anyone who cares about journalism and its impact on society.

Journalists are the vehicles of serious information, neither the amateur nor the expert, who now carries an essential mission – collecting, analysing, commenting, and investigating. Aug-

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mented journalism is about enriching the audience, creating a more democratic system incorporating the public's production. The public cannot replace journalists or the work they do – but journalism is also not a zero-sum game. The new public participation will not enrich journalism on its own, but rather it complements augmented journalism structured around social ties.

The greatest enemy to traditional media is not the Internet, but the public's available time. There isn't a content shortage – quite the opposite – but just a lack of time, leading to critical constraints around quality filtering. Faced with vast information along with the exponential growth of solicitations and stimuli throughout the day, attention is the scarcest commodity. Journalists must find the important signal in the clutter and save time for people.

2. Technology and Journalism Practices

Over the past quarter century, dramatic technological advances in the production, manipulation, and dissemination of images have transformed the practices of journalism, entertainment, and advertising as well as the visual environment itself. In an age of ubiquitous information news junkies have never had it so good, at the touch of a button, online news is available everywhere from the “Times of India” on the web to online versions of the “The Hindustan Times” daily. With massive changes in the media environment and its technologies, interrogating the nature of news journalism is one of the most urgent tasks we face in defining the public interest today. The implications are serious, not just for the future of the news, but also for the practice of democracy. The essential notion is that journalism traditionally has been very effective at shining a spotlight on the problems and developments of the day. But, traditional journalism, for a variety of reasons, has often failed to place those stories in enough contexts to understanding them fully. One of the most significant reasons has been technological. Moreover, the traditional, analog media have been largely one-way in their information flow, from the journalist to the public. This passive audience model has limited the involvement or engagement of the public in journalism and public affairs.

The arrival of the digital revolution—the evolution of the Internet, the emergence of new forms of media, and the rise of online social networks—has reshaped the media landscape and made “the press” of 2011 something that many could not have imagined. From digital retouching to wholesale deception, the media world is now beset by an unprecedented range of professional challenges. Not only because of the different media that arise, but the new dynamics of work. Every day the new devices and tools are added in exponential growth that sometimes appears to cause an excess of choices and opportunities that journalists and audience don't know yet. These new frontiers of media have enriched news and information resources and reshaped what has traditionally been the realm of print press, broadcasters, and news agencies. The challenge is to optimize fully the potential of the Internet and digital media without compromising civil liberties.

Digital technologies have charted revolutionary changes in journalism and fundamentally altered the nature and function of media in our society, reinventing age-old practices of public communication and at times circumventing traditional media and challenging its privileged role as gatekeepers of news and entertainment. There are myriad ways in which digital technologies have impacted on the practice of journalism, from the way reporters gather information and present news stories to how news organizations structure themselves and do business. Digital technologies have expanded quickly, permeating society with new formats

and possibilities of communication. Hypertext, multimedia, hypermedia have become part of the routine of the vast majority of professionals and require schools to change their ways of teaching and learning. If we peer into the future, we can foresee a media landscape dominated by a highly fragmented, though active audience, intense media competition, and scarce advertising dollars. By embracing new technologies, professional journalism and media can hold on to their role as a vital information lifeline and continue to operate as the tool of a successful democracy.

With the dawn of the information age (and electronic journalism), journalists' functions have shifted from information transmission to information processing (Jurgensen & Meyer, 1992; Schudson, 1995). In McLuhan's works, we learn that every medium presents a different sensory experience to extend the self into the world. It comes as no surprise then that journalism's foundation has begun to change with the latest medium – the Internet. The unique Internet attributes of interactivity and multimedia are forcing significant evolutions in journalistic culture as the basic mission of the reporter has evolved for the digital world. Web technology has provided opportunities for sources and audiences to participate in news production. Scholars have begun calling reporters "gatewatchers" (Bruns, 2005) and information "monitors" (Deuze, 2003), insisting that they share authority willingly and embrace "citizen media" (Gillmor, 2004). Buzz words such as "networked journalism" (Jarvis, 2006) and "communal media" (Jenkins, 2006) demonstrate how some people are thinking about the Web technology as an opportunity for a journalistic revolution (Bruns & Jacobs, 2006) where citizens have a responsibility to speak up, create content, and counter mainstream media in virtual venues (Kline & Burnstein, 2005). This largely theoretical essay puts forth a new online model for news production functionality that takes into account the dynamics of information production, dissemination and consumption online.

The world communicates 24/7 without deadlines or geographical barriers. The reader decides what, when and how to read, in addition to having a voice through low-cost digital publications, free of government interference. The digital revolution in information and communication technologies has created the platform for a free flow of information, ideas and knowledge across the globe and myriad ways in which changes and challenges are brought to the purveyors and the consumers of the news. We assume that the journalist is not an endangered species, but one whose functions and routines are being altered drastically. Now a website can operate as a platform upon which citizens may voice their opinions and questions regarding the issues about which they care" (Deuze, 2003, p. 218). Isn't "dialogic" journalism is a more liberating notion of news creation: "The content of a new medium is fully maintained by journalists interacting with citizens" (p. 219)? The audience member (or the receiver) is taking an active role in journalism. At their core, these new models suggest profound changes for journalists' roles and their ultimate control over the news. Digital technology demands more of the reporter, who often has to learn several operating functions, working at the same time as producer, editor and executor. All those functions used to be distributed among various sectors.

Apart from a plethora of content available for dissemination, new technology also makes it possible for patterns of similar events and issues to be associated across various societies. Solutions to local problems are no longer restricted to the community themselves but are picked up by interest groups, the world over and projected as exemplars. Newspapers throughout the world that have invested in other media are beginning to experience both the advantages and difficulties of a convergence whose catalyst is the Internet and whose immediate

future will be the total integration of their news and commercial multimedia operations. As technologies became much more complex, the task of investigating, producing and disseminating news increased not only the skills required of a reporter, but also the speed of publication in the frenetic pace of writing instantaneously and 24/7. Media industry veterans may find the tech-driven changes unfamiliar and uncomfortable at first, but they would do well to embrace the inevitable. We could say that with digitization, the journalist finally became a specialist, not in anything in particular, but in effective ways to perform journalism and make the newspaper quickly and widely available.

The hyper-local media is now accessible on the international platform. New media outlets have now made it possible for highly differentiated local discourse to be available to a wider transnational media. Interest groups now easily access alternative voices that were hitherto available only to a smaller community audience, across national boundaries. Apart from a plethora of content available for dissemination, new technology also makes it possible for patterns of similar events and issues to be associated across various societies. Solutions to local problems are no longer restricted to the community themselves but are picked up by interest groups, the world over and projected as exemplars.

In April 2006, this change was portrayed by one of today's mostrespected magazines, *The Economist*. With the title *Among the Audience*, the research report stated: "The era of mass media is giving way to one of personal and participatory media. That will profoundly change both the media industry and society as a whole." (*The Economist*, April, 2006, p. 3). The Age of Participation goes beyond the so-called Era of the Internet and requires a new way of thinking about the worldwide network of computers, whose initial structure did not anticipate and does not involve the user on a large scale. Classical theories of mass communications are being reworked (McQuail, 1994; Williams *et al.*, 1988) for the new media, because of structural differences between old and new media. The new media has also removed passivity among the media audience by enabling simultaneous reception, alteration and redistribution of cultural objects. It dislocates communicative action from the posts of the nations, provides instantaneous global contact and inserts the late modern subject into a machine apparatus that is networked. Marshal McLuhan had first associated technology with content in his celebrated treatise. He outlined four different media cultures. The first was the ancient culture of oral communication, exemplified by many of the old Sanskrit texts followed by a literature culture using the phonetic alphabet and a handwritten script which coexisted with the oral culture. The third progression, according to McLuhan described as 'The Gutenberg Galaxy' was that of mass-produced mechanical printing. Finally we are in the midst of what is known as the culture of the 'electric media' – radio, television and computers.

But as we have seen earlier, computer mediated communication provides a separate media culture altogether. The important characteristics of the new media are that media texts are dematerialized in the sense that they are separated from their physical – newsprint – form. The data can be compressed into very small spaces and it can be accessed at very high speeds in non-linear ways.

The explosion in new media forms has grabbed the attention of communication scholars in the latter half of the 1990s. The number of studies is burgeoning, and new ones appear at a steadily accelerating pace (Singer, 1998). This new revolution is marked by neologisms. "Blog" became part of the Webster dictionary in 2004, the New Oxford American Dictionary adopted "podcast" in 2005. "Wikis", "Vlogs", "metaverse" and "folksonomies" may be next. They all relate to phenomena that occur in cyberspace with the user in the role of the lead-

ing man. The focus has been primarily on the audience for computer-based media forms, particularly on the uses and effects of these new media (Lievrouw and Livingstone, 2002; Garrison, 1998; Garrison, 2000). With the boost of users looking for information in new places, the mass media industry, in general, seems to have moved to keep their audience's attention by increasingly going online to offer news and information. The audience seems divided between a segment who want headlines and useful information bits and a fraction who want in-depth data documents and in-context reports (Kenney, *et al.*, 2000). Another qualitative aspect is the unique possibility of the Internet to supply links to story sources (Deuze, 1998).

The concept—requiring people to pay for digitally distributed news—sparks broad debate over how journalism might be funded, what journalism means and should mean, who qualifies as a journalist, and journalism's role. Journalism is a public good, but who will pay for it in the future? In the past, media markets in many countries have had both private and public funding. The big media houses, generally run by private companies, are the outlets that offer general international and national news, but these are the very ones facing economic pressures from the rise of digital media. Today, targeted niche markets, such as science, business, and sports, often deliver the profits that media owners seek—as do sensationalist, populist, and biased news. What are the new business models going forward? The use of the Internet as a major information source raises important questions on the future funding of media, on the need for journalists' unions to examine their strategies for organizing new work forces in journalism, and on ways to create new partnerships with citizens to defend press freedom. It is no secret that journalism is undergoing a shift: “We don't own the media anymore,” said the director of the BBC World Service and Global News division back in 2005. Media owners and managers face great challenges adjusting to the new digital world: to continue to fund newsrooms staffed by professional journalists or to rely on blogs and other user-generated content. One of the challenges includes continuity of funding of investigative journalism which has been traditionally supported by well-established media companies. Will this approach be affected by increased reliance on individual digital media users? Are there possible alternative funding models in addition to advertising, subscriptions, and donations? How to ensure that journalism remains independent of political and commercial interference and influence in the face of changing revenue models?

Finding the balance between generating profits in a new business environment—while holding on to well-established journalistic standards and maintaining editorial independence—has emerged as one of the most pressing and urgent issues for journalism in the digital age.

Media as an institution is shocked by its weakened authority and influence, victimized by the desecration of information and is lost in the digital noise. It is faced with a revolution on all fronts: the upheaval of information production, distribution, and consumption. It appears that professional journalism is attacked on all sides – and seems less necessary and useful. However, yet the solution to the “information overload” that overwhelms us daily is journalism! Bear in mind the answer is a new form of journalism – an “augmented journalism,” (Essentially everything that is currently disrupting journalism today did not exist in 2000: high-speed Internet connections, blogs, podcasts, RSS feeds, Google News, Gmail, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, iTunes, apps, flat screens, HD, 3D, WiFi, geotagging, metadata, iPods, mobile internet, smartphones, iPhones, BlackBerry phones, tablets, Andriods, iPad, e-books, streaming videos, etc... a fusion of old fashioned journalism with modern style blogging could lead to something with “augmented value”) enriched with new possibilities of the dig-

ital age. Journalism with added value, which mainly exists on digital platforms but can be transferred to other mediums as well. The transformational crisis will sweep away those who do not have any added value services to offer the public. Now as a digital reporter (not print reporter,) you have to go out and sometimes you need to shoot pictures, you need to shoot video, you need to get the story and you need to ask the right questions. But you have to get it on some sort of digital recording device as well and you have to bring that back into the office and process it. So to be a journalist in the digital age, you have to be able to be an editor, a photographer, a videographer, a reporter, a layout designer and a writer all in one. Those who do survive will offer individuals and communities a better way to understand and participate in civic life, along with enrichment and simplification of people's lives.

Journalism in the digital age faces one overwhelming fact - a shortage of human digits to input all those ones and zeros, a crisis that threatens global discourse over every other crisis a headline writer might care to sub. All around the world, new fangled data journalists are number crunching furiously, except in their own backyard. Without wanting to advocate for a new breed of "journo-geek," let's be thankful for the emergence of the plethora of opportunities. The digital narrative allows us to better comprehend world events (global warming, migration issues, the economic crisis) through graphics, enrichment of experts and victims' testimonies, conversations taking place over various locations, and collaboration with other media. These multiple interconnections and broad guidelines render the process more proactive. Data journalism permits for visual information to be transformed into knowledge, and knowledge constitutes an enormous developmental potential. This does not even include the imminent changes from "augmented reality" and how that will enrich information.

Journalism can rise again. Its power will be less about the production of specific information; rather it will filter the tsunami of the world's information. There will be more emphasis in sorting, selecting, editing, aggregating, and linking elements between events, ideas, and people. Those at the top will provide the best information at the right time to those who need it. We are betting there will be an augmented journalism that is more transparent and humble in its practices, business, investigation, sources, connections, etc.

The revolution experienced by traditional media and journalists is linked to the arrival of new technologies, and thus the new methods of use on the Internet carries are significant. Newspapers hadn't changed for over two hundred years! New technologies led to a profound change in "media relations." There is hope that this will continue to be a key vehicle for serious news, because journalists are more equipped to effectively collect, sort, converse, and link with a range of innovative tools. There is also hope in fighting the tyranny of choice and information overload on the web, which threatens to result in an attention crash. There is hope in the continuous enrichment of information through editorial content and technology.

It is a good period of time for journalists who are, as writer Erik Orsenna (France. Economist, Novelist, Writer) says, "In the business of being vigilant during a time when the world is changing." The digital age is an exciting time for revolutionary journalists and editors. Journalists cannot be spectators in this current revolution, where the biggest enemies are themselves. They cannot ignore the earthquake that is changing the landscape. They can not barricade themselves away from the global conversation and rest upon a pedestal that no longer exists. Like others, journalists reacted slowly but it's clear they must reinvent their role. If not, then new users will decide what content is pertinent. What is really the alternative?

3. Contextualized Journalism

Do digital media and traditional news media have competing or mutually complementary relationships? What is needed for an enabling environment for synergy between the two? How will journalists in traditional print and broadcast media use new tools in their reporting and in distribution of news content? The answer is that the new media present an opportunity to transform the situation by enabling reporters to do five things differently with their stories. First, stories can make connections. They can do this through hypermedia, or links, the connecting tissue fundamental to the World Wide Web, the global publishing medium of the Internet. Through links, reporters can provide additional background or depth to their stories. This is especially important for stories that have long lives, or that run for many days, weeks or months, even years. Many times, readers may forget or simply be unaware of the history of a story, some of the names or terms that are mentioned. Reporters in traditional media don't always have space or time to explain all this background in every story, but through links, they can point to the relevant material.

Second, new media can be interactive. Audience members can interact with each other or with reporters or sources, engaging in a dialog. Rather than sit back and only watch or listen, audience members can participate in a discussion room on line. They can send email to a reporter. The reporter may get an important lead on a story. A factual error might be quickly corrected. Audiences can interact with content. They can navigate through a 360-degree video. They can click on a "hot spot" and access additional information, text, audio or video that further explains a story element.

Third, new media permit a wider or richer use of communication modalities. Words, spoken or written, background sound, still photographs and graphics, motion pictures, and more are all possible in a digital, networked environment. All of these modalities give the reporter more tools to tell a story and can engage audiences more fully by engaging more of the audience members' senses. Research shows that attention, understanding and retention are all increased when more communication modalities are engaged in the classroom. There is no reason why the same can't be true in journalism.

Fourth, content can be more dynamic in a digital environment. It can be updated and kept current in an online medium such as the Internet or digital broadcasting system. Moreover, content is available on-demand and flows continuously from source to receiver and back again. This fluid system keeps the audience and journalist in a constant state of connection, whether the audience or journalist is at home, newsroom, or out and about in their community connected through a mobile phone, two-way pager or wireless personal digital assistant.

Finally, new media make possible a new level of customization never possible before in journalism. Journalists have always strived to make their stories relevant. When stories break on a national, regional or even international stage, good journalists have always tried to localize them. They have always tried to find a local connection, a person, place or consequence for the home town, state or country. But, new media make it possible to take this journalistic ideal of localization to the ultimate level of the individual. Every story can be potentially made relevant to each individual person.

4. Themes Reflecting the Role of the Media in the Digital Age

Trepidation, confusion and celebration are three broad themes reflecting the role of the media in the digital age. The sense of *trepidation* relates to a fear of the unknown and unknowable: a sense that digital technologies are changing at a speed that confounds attempts to master them before they morph into new forms. This fear is somewhat justified by tracing the feedback loop that has developed between YouTube and the mainstream media. The rapid dissemination, interpretation and reconfiguration of the story demonstrate a real challenge to traditional newsgathering.

Another *confusion* created by the new digital technologies is related to the fetishisation of gadgets and the growing gap between users who have always interacted with the digital world and those who have had it thrust upon them. The terms ‘the golden age of gadgets’ and ‘the third age of gadgets’, posited that the ‘harbinger of this change was the iPod’ and a new economy was developing around consumer electronics. This was driven by competition between large computer and electronics companies (Zjawinski, 2003). The cultural status of devices like the iPod and ubiquity of feature-packed mobile phones and other devices generates confusion about their utility (Mollgaard, 2006). While these gadgets are indeed remarkable for their storage capability, multimedia abilities and communication powers, they are in themselves neutral technologies. They require users and content to operate.

There is also confusion about the fundamental differences in the experiences of the digital age of those born before and after 1980. Named the ‘digital immigrants’ and the ‘digital natives’ these two groups are portrayed as living on opposite sides of a chasm of skills and experience in the digital age (Prensky, 2001). This gap in digital competencies relates to the vastly different media and communication experiences these two groups have grown up with. The advent and development of the microchip, the internet and the digital economy have meant a change in the traditional allocation of power between young and old and a shift in values and practices in business, education and entertainment.

The third theme was cautious *celebration*. The power, speed and usefulness of digital creation, transmission and reception open up communication and the media to people in previously unimaginable ways. The creator/consumer audiences that are evident in the new public arenas of YouTube, Blogspot and MySpace indicate that people want to participate in and share their media and information experiences.

These are the three main motivations that are driving these ‘virtual communities’: anticipated reciprocity (the sharing of content), increased recognition (peer esteem) and a sense of efficacy (the achievement felt when creating complex digital content) (Kollock, 1999). These motivations are shaping the content that media organisations produce in that there is increasing recognition that meeting their audiences in the middle ground of cyberspace requires content that is media-rich, targeted carefully and allows user participation in the experience by being able to pass it on to others of their ilk and also contribute their own content.

5. Learning New Media Tools

During 20th century journalism was regarded largely as a trade. Barriers to entry were low - typically just a high school degree was required - and so newsrooms regularly had a healthy influx of young blood. Then j- schools - many of them staffed with theoreticians and

academics rather than real reporters – mush-roomed across the country. Journalism became a middle-class job, then a profession. The pay got better. Newspapers, especially large metro dailies, started taking themselves very seriously. No longer could a talented kid just out of college or even one with a few years experience land a job at a paper in New Delhi or Mumbai. Then from 1990s and 2000s, newsrooms were increasingly dominated by baby boomers at or approaching middle age. Not surprisingly the tone and content of those papers reflected that mindset, from the news sections to the arts and entertainment pages. If music critics raised on the Beatles and the Rolling Stones struggled to keep up with grunge and hip hop, is it any wonder the news business has been so slow to respond to the Internet revolution going on around it?

The digital technology has changed the equation and “News providers throughout the rich world are urgently casting around for new models,” according to a report by the Economist. There is a new world out there, a market driven by highly literate, technology savvy and endlessly searching for new tech consumers. The digital age has barely begun and newspapers are finding ways to adjust. Besides, newspapers are still searching for business and editorial models that are sustainable in this new world of media. The introduction of new media technologies in the newsroom has led to a disintegration of distinct and specialist skills. Instead, the new emphasis is on the “multi-skilling” of journalists. That is, within the newsroom sphere, journalists are now expected to be able to write, edit, present and sometimes film and produce their work in order for their story to make it into the newsroom. Sparks (1991) argues that this multi-skilling of journalists leads to the labour exploitation, as well as detracting the core of journalism away from journalistic principles and practices. Gillian Ursell’s ((2001)) argues that the expectation placed on journalists to be able to perform in such various ways leads to the deskilling of others within the journalistic field, as well as a decrease in exceptional news content and stories.

This has caused many j-schools and media industries insiders to ponder the future of journalism’s amid frequent changes. The salt-flats speed of technology haunts the syllabi of new media journalism professors. Yet for all the time new technologies gobble up, the primary challenge for journalism schools in 2011 is a more basic question of identity: What should a journalism program teach in the digital world? For much of the 20th century, journalism schools had a bit of vocational school in their DNA. Unlike a philosophy professor – who, doesn’t expect his or her students to pay their mortgage on Sartre’s shoulders – a journalism professor could reasonably expect that good students could build careers in journalism. Still, most journalism schools haven’t seen any dip in applications, and in fact many graduate programs have grown. Where will all those graduates work? Is that even the right question for journalism schools anymore, considering the wider value of the skills journalism programs teach?

It is easy to see the negative in the media. Hysteria is loud. It’s true that the cable news networks are disasters of disinformation, that some bloggers nibble at a shrinking buffet of other people’s reporting, and that some newspapers are so broke they’re outsourcing reporting to India. But that sulfuric smell obscures what’s blooming. When I tell my co-students that this is an incredible era to be a journalist, it’s not delusional. Will young people suddenly become avid news consumers when the digital transformation is complete? The evidence suggests not. And while solving journalism’s logistical problems seems tough but doable, discovering how to capture the attention of a generation that cares little for news in any form is another matter entirely.

Media educators cannot remain indifferent to the increasingly significant role that digital media devices play in the education system. This is all the more important given the significance of the issue. When observing the manner in which teachers use such media, there is a fear of a regression in terms of the critical reflection at stake in the use of digital media. The audience wants information. Giving voice to the voiceless has never been easier: find the truth, and tell people about it.

6. The Twenty-First Century Electronic Journalist

Thanks to an abundance of bandwidth, the model for electronic journalism in the digital domain will be the on-line database, rather than the daily newspaper or regularly scheduled television news program. The primary vehicle for news distribution will be a self-defining, open network, rather than traditional point-to-multipoint broadcasting or print. The twenty-first century news machine will be an interactive, multimedia system possessing the power of television, the portability of newspapers, and the flexibility of the telephone network. It will take maximum advantage of an open network that makes much more efficient use of available bandwidth than a one-way, closed system like broadcasting or cable television. Consumers will be able to participate in the news process. Journalism will become less of a lecture and more of a conversation. Journalists will spend less time guessing what their customers might want to know and more time packaging and organizing an almost infinite body of raw material into reliable and useful information packages.

More separate news organizations will appear, each a good deal smaller and more specialized than those we see today. From these smaller and more efficient news operations, a far greater volume and variety of news will emerge, aimed at much smaller audiences than today's news departments. The very notion of "mass" media will fade into history. Before long, the hot news format will be individually customized "information on demand." News gathering and production equipment will continue to get cheaper and easier to use. The news gathering and presentation process that once required a large staff of technical specialists will be performed quite routinely by lone reporters armed with inexpensive camcorders, notebook computers, and portable telephones. The material these newsmen produce will be simultaneously created and distributed in a wide variety of formats. To survive in this more demanding and competitive environment, news producers will have to find new ways to profit from smaller shares of the total audience.

7. The Future of New Technology

When you're finished changing, you're finished.
Benjamin Franklin

Old Benjamin had it spot on – and it is proven throughout the history of journalism. Imagine if the journalists of old had not gone from the trusty town crier and ventured into the modern, and unknown, world of print. Many, many years later we introduced radio and later was the jump to television.

When you think about it, these were big, big changes. They all faced massive challenges, and I am sure massive failures - just look at News 24. But now they are the staples of our media landscape, and trusted information delivery systems.

We now face a new challenge – the deep dark hole of the Internet. Vast, unexplored and seemingly infinite. There are people, journalists, who would rather stay in the safe confines of their trusty, unchanging landscape but as with all development, eventually it will arrive on your doorstep. If it knocks politely or barges in with force depends on how acquainted you have become with it. Unfortunately this applies to all types of change.

People are calling this change Journalism 2.0, but it should really be up to version 10+ by now. To call it a new version is to say it's superseding something outdated that may not be totally true. Television did not replace radio, even though they both use sound as a medium. Pod-casting has not replaced live radio. So why should the Internet or citizen journalism be the replacement of them all.

To push your skills to their boundaries and learn something new, to seek out cross media publication at a range of outlets – to train yourself. It's not unloyal, it's not disrespectful and it certainly doesn't put your integrity in doubt. After all, we are all students, and we are here to learn as much as we can while we have the chance.

8. Do We Still Need Journalists?

In a media world run by digital technologies and an active public, do we still need journalists? Yes, but not in the same way! Journalists have been viewed as scoundrels more than supermen and the fight for the truth is a continuing battle through freedom for speech and some landmark legal judgments. We need journalists because they are committed; their fundamental assets are more relevant than ever: quality writing, reporting and listening with an open mind, an appetite for investigation, ethics, and critical thinking. Yet these alone are no longer sufficient. Expertise, transparency, humility and credibility to regain confidence also need to be added to the list. Now more than ever, we need professional journalists to help distinguish the wheat of reliable news and credible opinion from the chaff of information, rumor and propaganda that clogs the Internet, and to help create the next-generation vehicles for online journalism.

Technology has challenged the core of journalism and the repertoire of technological vehicle for news relay is long and varied, and it depends on who is involved in its delineation: do we speak of distinctions between the spoken words, the printed words; the still image and the moving image. Journalism can rise again. Its power will be less about the production of specific information; rather it will filter the tsunami of the world's information. There will be more emphasis in sorting, selecting, editing, aggregating, and linking elements between events, ideas, and people. Those at the top will provide the best information at the right time to those who need it. We are betting there will be an augmented journalism that is more transparent and humble in its practices, business, investigation, sources, connections, etc.

Journalism's importance is undeniable for though, it has been the target of ongoing discourse both in support and critique of its performance, no existing conversation about journalism suggests its irrelevance. To accomplish this feat, journalism will have to reinvent itself. Everybody fumbles, but it's not longer time to question whether to let the train pass us by or just put one foot out the door. It is time for innovation for transformation. It's not "adapt or

die,” rather “change or die.” For a while traditional media was reluctant in confronting the digital age. Yet the public and advertisers, often more technologically sophisticated, will simply go elsewhere.

There is hope to continue to be a key vehicle for serious news, because journalists are more equipped to effectively collect, sort, converse, and link with a range of innovative tools. There is also hope in fighting the tyranny of choice and information overload on the web, which threatens to result in an attention crash. There is hope in the continuous enrichment of information through editorial content and technology. It’s a good period of time for journalists who are in the business of being vigilant during a time when the world is changing.” It’s good time for journalists because there has never been so much of an appetite for information! The digital age is an exciting time for revolutionary journalists and editors. Journalists cannot be spectators in this current revolution, where the biggest enemies are themselves. They cannot ignore the earthquake that is changing the landscape. They cannot barricade themselves away from the global conversation and rest upon a pedestal that no longer exists.

Journalists have to find the best ways of gathering the facts, and the best ways of communication those facts in language that is stylish, accurate and instantly understood. They must also lead the way in integrity, honesty and tenacity. They have to be ethical. Journalists of the future must take their responsibilities seriously; know about their profession; have competency in the technical and practical skills, and have a thinking approach based on credible, rigorous, academic research that is at all times based on reality. Journalism is in a state of upheaval because of convergence of technology. It would be good to be able to predict that, as part of this international upheaval, journalism would become even freer. This journalist freedom and language is becoming an even more important topic because of the globalization of communication. Today, the printed word changes to the visual image, the computer screen becomes a cinema theater, the telephone changes in to a combination of TV and computer. Multimedia is the future. The journalist of the future, and their audience, will probably be answering their television sets and watching their telephones. Like others, journalists reacted slowly but it’s clear they must reinvent their role. If not, then new users will decide what content is pertinent. What is really the alternative?

9. Conclusion

The real danger is not from monopolistic corporations setting up tollbooths on the electronic superhighway, or from digital pirates hijacking intellectual property. It is from well-intentioned public officials who try to protect outdated, incumbent technologies and seek to regulate content.

New technology soon will provide the power to turn billions of digital bits into unlimited amounts of useful information available to all. But this new power will create the awesome responsibility to preserve every citizen’s freedom of access to that information and the right of everyone to participate in the continuing digital conversation. Traditional journalistic practices developed in an age of scarce distribution. But, journalistic values are not dependent on scarcity, and they need not be compromised by abundance. The value of storytelling will not diminish merely because there is greater access to the underlying raw data. At the same time, however, it would be foolish to ignore the fact that if new technology encourages everyone to speak at the same time, nobody will be heard or understood.

The twenty-first century news machine will soon be a reality, bringing enormous benefits, even as it forces society to make difficult choices. Without a doubt, this new technology will change journalism. It is up to society to make sure that this change is for the better. If the free press and journalistic ethics are to survive the treacherous journey into cyberspace, society needs to answer the tough questions that new technology will raise about the role of journalism in a free society, remembering that technology, no matter how powerful, can only be as useful and worthwhile as human beings decide to make it. As Edward R. Murrow warned many years ago, technology without thoughtful human involvement is merely “lights and wires in a box.”

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Studies and articles

Diana-Maria CISMARU*

Reputation management in online social networks for governmental actors: opportunities and threats

Abstract: The paper discusses the role of social networks as factors of restoring and maintaining balance in a system of communication marked of conflicts and biased attitudes. Online social networks offer for governmental actors the possibility to interact in a two-way model with publics, transforming “politics” in “policies” by stimulating feed-back and participation. The data was collected from an empirical case, a project of reputation management for a minister in a former government in a South-Eastern European country. Findings show that social networks’ communication might have a strong internal and external impact, but the extent of the impact depends on several independent factors, as the previous reputation or the media agenda.

Keywords: social networks; conflict; relationship; publics; media.

1. Introduction

The impact of public relations in society is a recent issue among scholars (Coombs & Holladay, 2009). Public relations are in a different stage of development across countries and might have a different social impact. This is one of the reasons for developing case studies in the South-Eastern European societies, in which public relations are in an earlier stage of development. In Romania, for example, public relations emerged after 1989, and were preceded by political propaganda (Rogojinaru, 2009). In a young democracy with a short history of the public relations field, the practices and the social impact of public relations will be different in comparison with a Western European country (Nastasia, 2009).

In the larger area of public relations’ social impact, several discussions about social media use in practice were opened. According to Sweetser and Lariscy (2008, p. 179) social media are centered on a reading-writing Web, where the online audience moves beyond passive viewing to contributing to the content. Recent studies on the challenges of social media use in organizations (DiStaso, McCorkindale & Wright, 2011) found that social media changes the relationship between a company and employees, and creates difficulties in finding the best way to incorporate social media strategy, or in dedicating the proper staff to implement the tactics. However, there is a consensus among scholars on the importance of social media for organizations: Wright and Hinson (2010) found that that most of PR practitioners from United States considered social media tools important (77% considered Facebook and LinkedIn as important, and 65% considered micro blogging important).

The paper explores the function of social networks in order to create and maintain the balance in the communication system of a governmental actor. The data is collected during the

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implementation of an online reputation management program for a Minister in the former Romanian government. The theoretical frame investigates social media tools in the relationship with media, and the role of public relations (especially, communication strategies in online social networks) in managing conflict between an organization and publics, through the lenses of relationship management theory.

The paper inquires about the role of online social networks in the system that includes a Governmental actor and publics. The main premise of the paper is that communication in online social networks could change in a positive way the whole social climate and the base of the relationship between a governmental actor and stakeholders.

2. Theoretical background

The dialogic model of communication, discussed in the last decade, is tied with the emergence of social media tools in public relations. The literature in the field investigated the moving toward a two-way communication in the online space and the principles for fostering online dialogue (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Bortree and Selzer (2009) found that dialogic strategies lead to greater engagement and satisfaction for the organization websites' visitors. Observing the enormous change from a broadcast entertainment with a centralized control over media product and content to a decentralized, user-driven structure of the online communication, Winograd (2008, p. 156) underlined the lack of control of the communication strategists: the online communication development leads to lower costs, but increases the lack of control on the outcomes of a communication strategy.

Several studies inquired about the slow adaptation of organizations to social media tools. Thus, Callison (2003) discovered that less than only 39% of 500 Fortune companies' websites provided an online newsroom. Also, an analysis on 120 corporate websites from Western Europe, Singapore and United States (Alfonso & Miguel, 2006), found that most online pressrooms are far from being complete and up-to-dated, and there is no significant difference between countries.

During the development of social media practices, new practices emerge and sometimes are opposite to the traditional ones. One of the major changes in public relations practices was the replacement of the traditional press release with the social media press release. Introduced in practice by Defren, 2006 (in cf. with Gallicano & Sweetser, 2008), the frame for social media press release expanded quickly, due to the variety of the information which could be embedded, on multimedia supports. Educators included the social media news release principles and elements into their learning programs (see the guidelines of Gallicano & Sweetser, 2008). The raising importance of the online skills for future practitioners highlights the increasing role of social media as main channel of presentation for organizations.

The social media press release is only an example for the important changes which social media brought in the public relations practice. For example, a practice which began to spread from United States outside is the "media catching" (Waters & Tindall & Morton, 2010), a "turn of tables" between journalist and practitioner. In the study from 2010, the authors explored the change of traditional media relations, from the public relations practitioner who used personal networking with journalists in order to place his materials, to the reversed model. In this new model, journalists ask (through an online technology) specific content from public relations practitioners, in order to fulfill their news demands. These are only examples from

the current changing landscape of the practice of public relations, which asks for superior capacities of adaptation of strategies and tactics.

A challenge, when implementing image building strategies, is the fragmentation of the environment (Gilpin, 2010). The study, after following six months of self-presentation of the chain hypermarket Whole Foods through the online press rooms, blog and microblogging, underlined the difficulty of coordinating image management among various new media channels, due to the difference in the aims, audience and tools for each online environment. Also, Kelleher (2009) discussed the different role of online channels in creating conversation and commitment. As a comment at Gitlin's and Kallaher's studies, social networks are actually more challenging for practice than online press rooms and blogs, because they have a superior level of specificity, interaction and rhythm of actualization of content.

In 2008, Sweetser and Lariscy highlighted the potential of dialogic communication in social networks, by the content analysis of Facebook wall comments in the United States House and Senate in the midterm 2006 elections. The findings of the study show that individuals who wrote on the candidates' wall tend to perceive themselves in terms of a positive relationship with the candidates and post supportive messages.

Beyond the utility as channels and tools in communication strategies, social networks may have an additional value when they are evaluated through the theory of relationship management (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000). Several handbooks emphasized the role of public relations of solving the conflict between an organization and its publics (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 1995). For Plowman (2005, p. 133), "communication skills developed by public relations seem vital to resolve conflict while communication and conflict seem to be endemic to organizations". The role of public relations might be of a critical importance in an environment characterized by chains of crisis, permanent conflict and low social capital of trust, as the empirical study will show in this paper.

In the evaluation of the quality of relationship between organization and publics, the scale of measurement consisted in four constructs (Huang, 2001): reciprocity of control, satisfaction, commitment, trust. Later, a fifth construct has been added to the scale (Bortree, 2007, *apud* Bortree & Waters, 2008). Developing a continuum, Hung (2005) identified six types of relationships between an organization and its publics: one side communal (one part works for another in detriment of own interests), mutual communal (one part works for another even if benefit is unlikely to show); covenantal (both parts work for the common good); exchange relationship (the two parts expect future benefits); contractual/symbiotic relationship (with advantages for both parts) and finally, on the other extreme of the continuum, manipulative relationships (when asymmetrical communication is used to influence the other part) and exploitive relationships.

The evaluation of the relationship on this scale depends on the type of organization. Thus, Bortree and Waters (2008) found that consumer organization relationships are rated by their publics as higher in trust and satisfaction, and lower in conflict than the political organization relationships. This result could lead to the idea that political parties have to defend publics' suspicion, before trying to bring positive variables in the relationship.

Commenting the difference in the pattern of relationships across societies, it is more likely that in unbalanced societies, the extreme types of relationships will be more frequent. For example, in south-eastern societies, on the ground of insufficient regulations and of immaturity of public communication, manipulative relationships could be often identified.

In Romania, because of the recent history, the social capital of trust is low, which is a challenge in the attempt to build effective communication strategies for governmental actors. Thus, the relevance of an empirical case study (using data from an online management reputation program for a governmental actor) has a particular significance, given by the specific conditions of implementation. The empirical case presented in the paper had only negative conditions at start: in the background, non-existence of a habit and availability of governmental actors to two-way communication, a strong negative reputation of the main character, a low social capital of trust, and a low availability of media to cooperation. The study revealed not only how a communication strategy could transform all the negative factors into advantages, but the opportunity to stimulate institutional participation and engagement by online social networks.

3. Research Questions

The following research questions were asked in this research:

1. Could communication in social networks restore the balance, in an unbalanced state of the system, marked by conflicts and biased perceptions?
2. Are the online social networks separated subsystems, with a limited influence on an internal public, or they have a larger influence?
3. What strategic dimensions of communication should be enhanced in order to build and maintain a positive base inside that subsystem?
4. What are the potential threats for the balance of system when developing communication in social networks for governmental actors?

Assumptions

(1) The accounts in social networks could become sectors of positive interaction, which could expand and replicate outside. Previous observation of users' behavior in social media and in social networks showed that social networks are not an isolated environment, but a dynamic source of interpretations and comments. Thus, a positive online environment replicated outside social networks could change in time the whole base for the evolution of a public actor.

(2) The active users in social networks are opinion leaders, who spread their experience outside of the social networks. Informal debates on Facebook remain into the daily memory of participants, who release stories about them in the real environment. Moreover, the participants to these debates are opinion leaders, who are asked in their personal network about their opinion on the events in the public space.

(3) In the strategy of communication, the "human dimension", commonly used by practitioners, should not be preferred any more. Previous recommendations and practice in the public communication insisted on "humanization" of public actors, for the reason of renouncing to the formal attitude, a non-stimulating attitude for public participation. But the extreme "humanization" of institutional actors began to be repetitive and empty of sense for publics. The web 2.0 generation responds only to stimuli tied with their interests, thus their interest should be identified in order to stimulate a two-way communication.

(4) The threats expected for the system balance are: (a) aggressive actions by anonymous users (the anonymous users, who repeatedly create pages and accounts solely with the pur-

pose to attack a public actor); (b) difficulties in the flow of communication, due to the fact to the rich activity of a governmental actor, and the news about his activity have to be precise and clearly transmitted; (c) the limitations of tools in online social networks (when the project has been initiated, postings on Facebook were limited to 420 characters, and Twitter postings were limited, as in present, to 140 characters).

4. Methodology

The data were collected from a project of reputation management conceived and implemented for a Minister in the former Romanian Government. Duration of the project: in January 2011, the research phase, and in May-August 2011, the implementation. Methods of research used were the functional analysis and the content analysis. The frequency analysis has been used for evaluating the audience, the internal and external impact, and the variation of threats in the subsystem of online social networks. The image analysis has been used for strategic dimensions and governmental actor's profile (in order to assess the change in messages and dimensions). For the image analysis, five dimensions were considered: the human (or the personal) dimension, the political dimension, the public dimension, the institutional dimension, and the managerial dimension. For analyzing the content on Twitter, six categories have been considered: general and specific information, professional, attitude, relationship and personal.

The sources for analysis were the reports of implementation (weekly and phase reports) which centralized all the significant data for the evolution of the project. The graphs 1-4 were realized with the internal tools of Facebook. The other graphs were realized as a result of content and image analysis. The tables contain means and percentages, calculated by frequencies from the weekly reports.

5. The diagnosis of the communication system and the actions provided

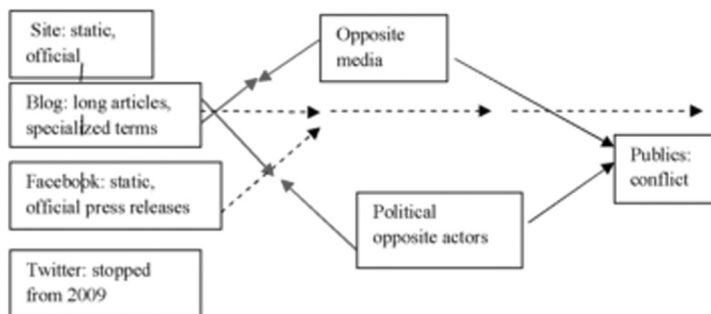
The diagnosis at the beginning (March 1, 2011) identified several characteristics:

(a) The minister had the highest amount of communication from all governmental actors (site, blog, Facebook and Twitter account), with a high frequency of communication on Facebook and blog, while the Twitter account was stopped from 2009, with an audience of 750 users. The Facebook account was conceived as a traditional online newsroom, but this option was not attractive for users (the audience stagnated for months to 5000 fans, with weak activity on the page). The site was rich in information for media online press materials), but media ignored information; also, the blog was not cited.

(b) The notoriety of the minister was high but entirely negative, while the predominant dimensions were the human and the institutional dimension. The start image analysis used the blog postings. The public dimension was tiny and concentrated entirely on the conflict with media (the minister promoted constantly conflict messages on the blog, accusing all media of biased perspectives). In the entire system, communication was only one-way, with no interaction with publics, and the messages were either uselessly "human", either using specialized terms.

(c) The analysis of the stakeholder attitude showed that a majority of the publics were hostile, especially media, and biased TV channels of the opposition had intense campaigns against the minister. Among the leaders of opinion outside politics, no civil stakeholder was “friendly”.

Figure 1. The state of the communication system at March 1, 2011.



Actions in the system

The implementation was preceded of the actions of an alternate temporary team, during March and April 2011. The alternate team changed the design of the Facebook account into a flexible one, and reopened the Twitter account (but without a strategy). Even without objectives, the change attracted a significant increase in fans/followers number.

When started the implementation in May, the objective of the project was to transform the Facebook page in a dynamic and flexible tool, for building a relationship with publics and for being a preferred source for media coverage. Three types of action have been realized: the adaptation of the complex information about minister's activity in an accessible style; the center of weight from one-way information to the publics' opinion, needs and interests; the control of interaction, in order to filter the conflict sources.

For maximizing the internal and external impact, the postings were written as novelties, choosing the most suitable subjects for media. For building a positive climate, the referrals to conflicts with other political actors or with regular media have been eliminated. The only referral which remained was the one to the hostile TV channels of the opposition. This was the strategy meant to channelize the conflict only towards the aggressive channels, and to allow the building of a positive relationship with the other media channels.

Also, for increasing audience, the subjects of public interest were preferred, with an accent on the positive consequences of the minister's actions in the social life. The themes selected were priorities in the public and social agenda (construction of social buildings, environmental and responsibility actions, protection of animals and so on).

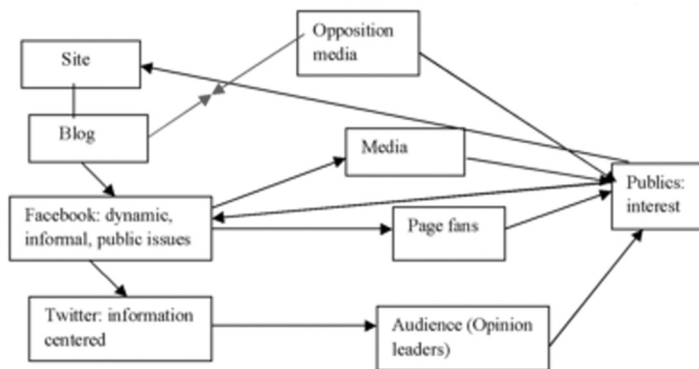
The *Twitter* account was filled gradually with useful tweets about the current projects of the Minister. The actions followed three directions: the change in the content (moving the accent from personal tweets to institutional and public interest tweets), the reduction of negative interaction (negative mentions), and the increase in positive audience. In generating content, the efforts were concentrated in maintaining the frequency of tweets and in choosing subjects tied with social agenda). A second challenge in the implementation of the proj-

ect was the resistant publics on Twitter, which were brought from a negative attitude to a neutral one (but never achieved a positive attitude).

For eliminating threats and controlling the internal environment, several types of actions were organized: for moderators, a code of actions against aggressive users (erasing attacking comments or ban the most provocative users); on the account were published rules of moderation, in order to warn the aggressive users about the sanctions for their actions; a continuous monitoring of the account has been introduced in all aspects.

The secondary threats, the supervision of the news flow and the limitation of content in social networks, were also neutralized: first, by using the most adequate tools from search engines; second, the limit in the length of postings produced difficulties in producing messages about complex issues, but also determined effectiveness, with an obvious increase of the audience.

Figure 2. Diagram of the communication system at the end of implementation (September 1, 2011).



The characteristics of the communication system at the end of implementation (September 1, 2011).

The first important asset in the functions was that communication transformed in a two-way model. Users were giving a consistent feed-back not only through likes, but through comments which showed a high availability to participation. Though limited, users on Twitter give also a feed-back through mentions and retransmit some of the tweets. Also, the minister had various methods in providing feed-back for positive actions of users (like to constructive comments, answering from time to time with an information).

The communication channels multiplied in the system, with a constant increase in the audience, both on Facebook and Twitter accounts. The exposure and reception of the audience (especially on Facebook) increased to 20000 fans (and 400 followers on Twitter) which placed the minister on the first rank between active politicians (the majority of governmental actors had no activity in the online environment).

One of the assets, beneath the participation of the users on Facebook and the two-way communication in the system, is the transformation of the Facebook account as the center of the communication system. The Facebook account became the main intermediate agent in influencing the other elements of the communication system (media and, by media, the other publics, who became interested).

The initial state of generalized conflict with media was limited only to biased TV channels, with a free field of communication towards the other media. The advantage to build positive relationship with media had visible results in the external impact. The threats are maintained under control through effective organization of the moderation of the accounts.

6. Results

Internal impact of Facebook account

This section of the paper presents the results of analysis based on internal statistics from Facebook account, measured with tools available for administrators of account (graphs 1-4). Internal statistics were completed with frequency analysis of the total of postings and feed-back received, provided by the weekly reports of implementation of the reputation management program (table 1).

Table 1. The average activity on the Facebook account.

Month	Average weekly postings	Likes (average on a posting)	Comments (average on a posting)	Increase in fans number (%)
May	7,6	73,5	36,9	7,2
June	7,6	84,9	33,8	8,2
July	6,5	87,1	25,2	3,8
August	9,2	120,6	30,3	7,9

Interpretation. The table shows the increase of activity on the account (raising of positive feed-back and maintenance of interaction), and the constant increase in fan page number. It is a visible growth of positive reactions (likes) and a constant activity through constructive comments (public participation). It is worth to mention that, from the other politicians or governmental actors, none had a comparable evolution during the months of implementation. The total increase of the fan page number is constant, finally with a quarter (from 15000 users to over 20500).

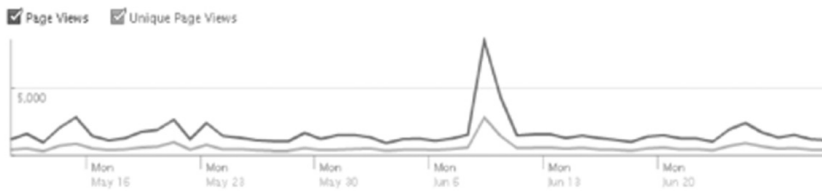
Graph 1. The increase in audience in the first 8 weeks of implementation (May-June, 2011).



Interpretation. The evolution of the account shows the increase of number of active users, in the weekly number as in monthly number. The peak points which generated the greatest internal and external impact were the releasing of moderation rules (June 8) and the publish-

ing of an institutional travel in the mountains (June 24). After each of the two moments, the total number of users jumped with few hundred users.

Graph 2. The evolution of unique visitors during weeks 1-8 of implementation (May-June, 2011).



Interpretation. The graph presents the situation of daily users and of unique visitors (who come on the page by accessing an external link on other sites). The example shows the jump in audience, over 10000 unique visits, in the day of posting moderation rules for users and concentrating the “war with media” in the “war with biased TV channels” (June 8). The agent in attracting audience were the biased TV channels, whose intentions were to criticise the Minister posting but in fact attracted audience.

Graph 3. Daily users and activity during the first 8 weeks of implementation (May-June, 2011).



Interpretation. The graph shows the accentuated increase, at the end of June, also for the number of visits (users who come on the page by clicking the postings on their news feed – blue line) and for the post views (users who only read the news in their news feed – green line). Also, the graph shows the increase in feed-back by likes (violet line).

Graph 4. The increase in the feed-back to postings, during May-June 2011.

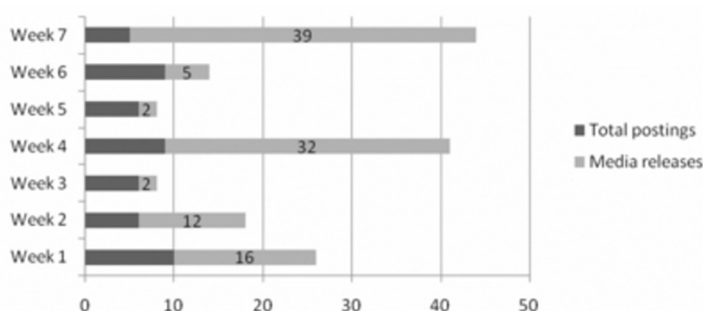


Interpretation. When speaking about two-way communication, a Facebook page offers significant tools for the registration of reactions. In this case, it was the first time, in the Ro-

manian governmental communication, when users could address “directly” to a minister in function. The feed-back increased during the two monitored months until over 600 likes on postings in the 8th week (blue line) and around 300 comments at the end of June (green line – total comments in posts, in a week).

The external impact of Facebook account

This section of the paper presents the results of analysis based on frequency of media coverage of postings (graph 5). An important observation here is that only the citation of a posting and of the Facebook account as source was considered. The aim of the frequency analysis here was to distinguish media coverage of the Facebook postings from media coverage of other related sources (as the blog of the minister).



Graph 5. Media coverage of Facebook materials in the first 8 weeks of implementation.

The graph shows the report between postings (blue bar) and the media coverage of postings from the Facebook account (red bar). An important notice is the variety of sources which released the Facebook messages. The graph shows media coverage on only seven weeks beginning with 11 May, when data were available.

Interpretation. The analysis of materials covered by the press, in parallel with the feedback of publics, shows a difference in selection. The most popular themes on Facebook were the environmental themes, natural landscapes and remember of historic moments: the postings on these subjects attracted the maximum number of likes and comments (between 220-250 likes in average and a maximum of 143 comments to a posting). Though, these subjects were not on the agenda of the press and were not covered. The two postings with a great external impact were the rules of moderation for users and the photos album from the voyage in the mountains (already mentioned in the interpretation of previous graphs).

The changes in the Twitter account

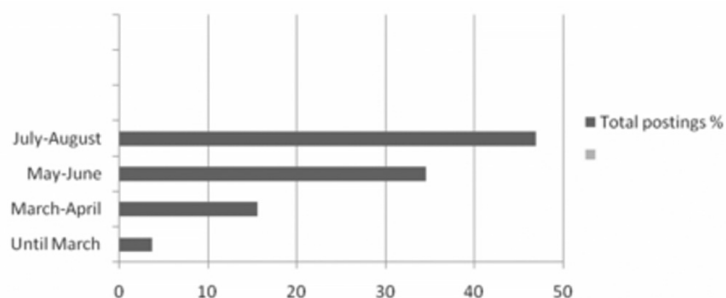
This section inquires about the changes induced in the Twitter account. Because the result of the strategy is less relevant for the research questions, the Twitter account has been treated in a separate section. The results of analysis are based on the frequencies calculated from weekly reports of implementation (table 2), on comparative analysis of frequencies between periods (graph 6) and on classification of tweets posted during implementation of the reputation management strategy (graph 7).

Table 2. The average activity on the Twitter account.

Month	Number of tweets (weekly average)	Retweets (weekly average)	Mentions (weekly average)	Increase in followers (%)
May	9,6	4,3	9	7%
June	11,2	4,4	16,8	2,6%
July	11,7	4,5	28,7	5,4%
August	13,2	2,2	10	6,3%

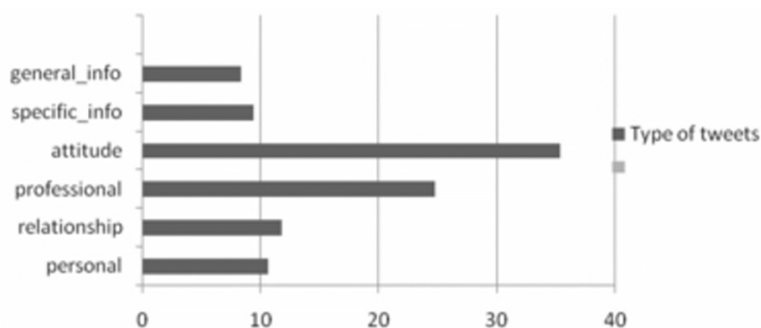
Interpretation. The analysis shows a maintenance in the rhythm of posting and a constant increase in followers' number. The tweets had a moderate impact by retweets. Also, the mentions were frequent, but not always in a positive way. The strategy tried to stimulate as in the case of the Facebook account, positive interactions, by responding only to constructive mentions.

Graph 6. The evolution of tweets' frequency during May and June, 2011.



Interpretation. The total number of tweets doubled in the period of May-June compared with the previous period (March-April), when the account has been opened by an alternate team. The rhythm from May-June has been maintained during July and August, forming a neutral and solid amount of information about the minister's activity. In absolute frequencies, the Twitter number of postings increased from 9 tweets in March 1 until 38 tweets on May 1 and finally until 243 tweets at September 1.

Graph 7. The type of tweets during May and June 2011 (%).



Interpretation. In May and June, compared with the previous months, tweets diversified. The most frequent are the attitude tweets (necessary for the building of an image profile) (35%) and professional tweets with a high amount of information (24%). The account proved to be, through frequency and quality of messages, one of the best in the governmental and political communication at that time. With the exception of the Senate president, the other political figures had a changing view on using Twitter, with long breaks and closure of accounts outside the electoral campaigns. The account was showing consistency and concentration on the information, generating credibility. The other political and institutional figures' accounts (for example, the Mayor of Bucharest) showed no consistency in the messages in their accounts (some of them informal but others formal and distant).

The neutralization of threats

The aim of analysis in this section of the paper was to discover the tendency to increase, maintenance or decrease for aggressive comments and users on the account (generated by the new conditions and climate in the administration and postings on the accounts). The frequencies were calculated from the weekly reports of implementation of the reputation management program (table 3).

Table 3. The neutralization of threats: negative and positive feed-back on Facebook.

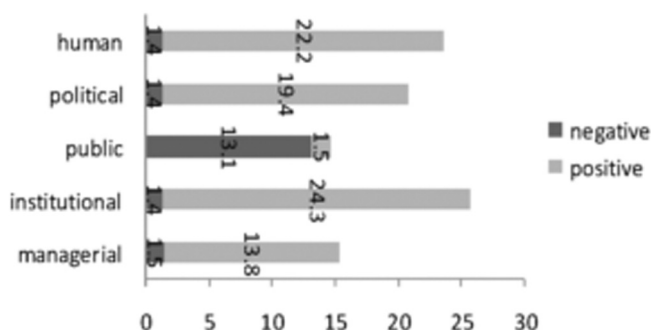
Month	Comments erased (weekly average)	Users banned (weekly average)	Like on constructive comments (weekly average)
May	48,5	28,5	31,5
June	47	26	30
July	15,7	5	24
August	16	5	30,4

Interpretation. The neutralization of threats met a strong resistance from the aggressive users, which had the habit to place negative comments to the postings. The introduction of moderation rules, first implicitly and after explicitly, changed the climate on the account. The number of comments and users banned decreased from a weekly average of 48 comments erased/28 users banned in May, until a low average in July and August. The decrease in the number of negative users is the result of stimulating positive behavior and eliminating the negative behavior. The number of likes from the Minister's account for positive comments has been held constantly during all implementation, with a slight decrease in July.

The change in the strategic dimensions of the profile

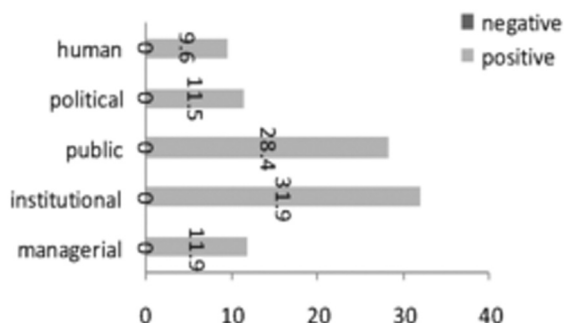
This section inquires about the change in the dimensions' structure and in positive/negative content in self-presentation by postings, after introducing the new strategy of reputation management. The image presented here is the self-presentation by postings: for the initial analysis, by blog postings (graph 8); for the final analysis, by wall postings on Facebook (graph 9).

Graph 8. The strategic dimensions of the profile % (March 1, 2011).



Interpretation. The initial analysis, before implementation, shows a concentration on the human dimension (22%) and also on the institutional dimension (24%). The political dimension was as much as important (19%). The main aspect as subject to change was the negative public dimension (13% referrals to the conflict with the media). It was a rare case when a governmental actor was harming its own profile while speaking repeatedly about the negative attitude of the media and accusing the media.

Graph 9. The strategic dimensions of the profile % (July 1, 2011).



Interpretation. The proportion of strategic dimensions changed after two months of implementation. The institutional dimension is still important, because of the intense activity of the Minister. The human and the political dimension decreased, as according the objectives of communication. The second important dimension was the public dimension (28%) which was changed from predominantly negative into positive. The content analysis demonstrated the change in attitude, in content and orientation of the posts.

7. Discussion

The latest perspectives on the dialogic model (Theunissen & Norbani Wan Noordin, 2012) suggest that the concept “dialogue” in public relations should be revised. Authors say that dialogue has been forcedly equated with two-way symmetrical communication, and a dialogue

in its true meaning would be a challenge for an organization since the true identity of the organization is usually hidden. Translating this view to the governmental actors, there is always a degree of role playing in their public communication, and a true dialogue would lead to the disappointment of publics.

Further questions which should be addressed in research should be about the mechanism of generating agenda in social networks and in mainstream media. Research showed a different hierarchy in preferring subjects between publics and press/mainstream media which covered the subjects. It would be useful for future strategies to find the connection between public agenda and media agenda.

On the other hand, the empirical case discussed in the paper showed a negative ethical evolution in the post-implementation period. The model of “covenantal relationship” (Hung, 2005) experienced during implementation changed very quickly, when situation was favorable, in a “manipulative relationship” (*idem*). In the last months of the Romanian government, December and January, the audience of account has been ranked the first in general ranking of politicians’ accounts on Facebook. The amount and the nuances of positive comments were exaggerated and no message or attitude from the Minister or from administrators of the account came to balance the excess. Finally, the excess has been stopped only by the falling of the Government, in the first week of February 2012.

8. Conclusions

The following conclusions can be drawn from this research:

(1) In hostile environments, communication in social networks could restore the balance only on certain parts of the outside social system. The Facebook account won a constant public of adherents and produced a positive exercise of public participation (with comments, arguments and solutions for public problems). The external impact was intensified through the non-voluntary coverage of both neutral and biased media. In spite of the confirmation of these effects even stronger than expected, there were limitations by the initial state of reputation and by the media agenda. Also, Twitter account had a limited internal impact, probably because of the limited impact of network itself.

(2) The external influence of social networks is important when media become a non-voluntary agent of covering and spreading messages. The second research question referred initially (in expectations) to the action of opinion leaders as agents of spreading messages outside of social networks. The analysis revealed a new factor of spreading, media as agent of multiplying messages, by covering postings as it were press releases. A current Romanian habit in media is based on taking original content written by various sources, if the value of novelty is high; in this view, many messages and photos from the Facebook account of the minister were released or cited with a minimum framing. The TV channels and the press changed in active promoters of the online networks accounts and attracted audience. Also, a surprising conclusion on the effects of communication in social networks was that even the biased TV channels with which the conflict was maintained, transformed in agents of promotion of the accounts, by the “news” provided constantly, which attracted new users on the account.

(3) The change in the strategic dimensions of the profile limited the conflict to the biased TV channels (and permitted to the relationship with the other media to become positive). The change in the content allowed the introduction of “common interests” in equation, bringing

stability in the system. Also, the public issues discussed in an informal manner attracted an increase in the public participation and the relationship type was “covenantal” (in the classification of Hung, 2005) between May and September 1.

(4) Direct threats have been limited and supervised through the effective designing of tasks.. In exchange, indirect threats became significant at the end of the project. The indirect threats were intensified from a sensitive and warm cultural climate: the positive reactions on the minister’s account became exaggerated, allowing the potential transformation of communication in propaganda. Both the owner of the account and the administrators should have strong ethical principles, in order to avoid the exploitation of the intense potential of projection developed in the online network accounts. Finally, also, comes for further research and reflection the question about the ethical limits of ghost writing in the online accounts of the public actors – since publics are attracted of the mirage of “directly” communicating with a governmental actor.

Rezumat: Lucrarea dezbatte rolul rețelelor sociale online ca factori de restabilire și menținere a echilibrului într-un sistem de comunicare caracterizat de conflicte și atitudini partizane. Rețelele sociale online oferă, pentru actorii guvernamentali (și pentru actorii instituționali în general) posibilitatea de a interacționa după un model bidirecțional simetric cu publicurile; prin stimularea participării și feed-back-ului online al utilizatorilor, “politica” este transformată în “politici publice”. Datele au fost colectate dintr-un caz empiric, un program de managementul reputației desfășurat în 2011 pentru unul dintre ministrii fostului guvern din România. Rezultatele cercetării arată ca impactul comunicării prin rețelele sociale online poate fi puternic atât la nivel intern cât și la nivel extern, dar intensitatea impactului depinde de mai mulți factori complementari, precum reputația anterior formată sau agenda media.

Cuvinte-cheie: rețele sociale online; conflict; guvern; publicuri; media.

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Interpersonal perception skills and the effects of gender and gender roles

Abstract: One of the most important aspects of organizational life is interpersonal perception - the process by which one is able to accurately perceive other peoples' behaviors. In a social interaction context such as job interaction, one acquires cumulative contextual knowledge about a target by tracking the person's behavior as it unfolds over the course of the interaction (Ginsburg & Smith, 1993). This study explores the connection between interpersonal perception skills, gender and gender roles. The study hypothesizes that females will be more accurate than males on the Interpersonal Perception Task (IPT) and that individuals who are high solely on either femininity or masculinity scales regardless of biological sex will be less accurate on the IPT than those who are androgynous. A total of 115 communication students took part in the study. Participants were asked to watch a film (IPT) testing ability to decode nonverbal cues during their nonverbal communication course. Gender orientation identity was assessed using the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI). With regard to the hypothesis testing, the present study used Spearman Correlation, Independent samples T test, ANOVA and stepwise regression. The present study's results did not find that men and women differ significantly in terms of empathic accuracy. However, women appear to have greater accuracy at detecting whether or not someone is telling the truth and men appear to have greater accuracy at determining whether or not someone has won a game (competition) or who is the higher status person in an interaction. In reviewing the results, one may tend to agree with Graham & Ickes (1997) that "the empathic advantage that is commonly denoted as 'women's intuition' owes at least as much to a difference in motivation as to a difference in ability" (p. 140) or with Hancock and Ickes (1996) - "If men appear at times to be socially insensitive, it may have more to do with the image they wish to convey than with the ability they possess" (p. 197). Future studies may include the differences based on sexual orientation, educational background and personality factors.

Keywords: interpersonal perception task; gender; gender roles; nonverbal sensitivity.

1. Introduction

Person perception, used interchangeably with "interpersonal perception" and "social perception," has been assumed by many social psychologists to be one of the crucial areas of social psychology on the reasoning that understanding of person perception is the sine qua non for the understanding of interpersonal behavior.

According to Cook (1979), "accuracy of perception is... a very important question from a practical point of view" (p. 99). A person who persistently fails to understand others will find life very difficult and unrewarding. Human society is highly dependent on social interactions for its survival. Without the ability to accurately understand and successfully interact

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with others, one's ability to survive and/or to thrive in the social settings, especially in an organizational one, can be quite challenging, if not impossible. However, despite this great need to understand others, many of us fall short of perfection on this task; through trial and error, most of us continue to learn throughout our lives to more effectively interact with others and better understand the self and the selves of others.

In a social interaction context, one acquires cumulative contextual knowledge about a target by tracking the person's behavior as it unfolds over the course of the interaction. Ickes (1997) proposed that cumulative contextual knowledge is important because it can make a unique contribution to the perceiver's accuracy in "reading" the target person's thoughts and feelings, that is, one that goes beyond the contribution made by the target's immediate verbal and nonverbal cues. In some instances, of course, cumulative contextual knowledge will merely complement and reinforce the knowledge derived from the target's immediate behavior. In other instances, however, cumulative contextual knowledge will add new and independent information that can dramatically qualify the meaning of the more immediate contextual knowledge—and, in some cases, even contradict it entirely (Colvin, Vogt & Ickes, 1997).

Although the results of a number of studies seemed to support the greater importance or primacy of visual cues (DePaulo, Rosenthal, Eisenstat, Rogers, & Finkelstein, 1978), researchers have generally abandoned that position in favor of the context-dependent position espoused by DePaulo and Friedman (1998).

In their significant clue theory, Archer and Akert (1980) explain accuracy as being primarily a function of specific kinds of clues that are extremely meaningful to the task at hand, whereas other clues are uninformative or even misleading. In diffusion theory, Archer and Akert (1980) propose that all cues are informative, even in isolation. In other words, each piece of information provides a unique clue to solving the puzzle. This theory suggests that if different perceivers are presented with different channels of information, each perceiver should be accurate about some aspect of the message to be decoded.

At the most general level, the person perception process is designed to allow perceivers to attain their interaction goals, such as courting favor (Jones, 1990), preserving the relationship (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978), exploiting their partner (Christie & Geis, 1970), and so on.

2. Interpersonal Perception and Gender-Role

A brief overview of the studies conducted that looked at interpersonal perception in light of gender and gender-role differences showed that there are many studies that showed differences between the genders in terms of ability to perceive interpersonal situations. However, there are also many other studies that supported the hypothesis that there are no significant differences between females and males in deciphering interpersonal situations/relations. According to gender stereotypes, females are more interpersonally oriented than males and should therefore be more attuned to the interpersonal characteristics of others.

Bem (1974) advanced the hypothesis that psychologically "androgynous" individuals might be more likely than either masculine or feminine individuals to display sex role adaptability across situations, engaging in situation effective behavior without regard for its stereotype as more appropriate for one sex or the other. Bem and her colleagues have demonstrated that androgynous persons are as independent as masculine persons and as nurturing as fem-

inine persons. Further, androgynous persons reported less discomfort about engaging in cross-gender activities than did traditional persons.

Spence and Helmreich, (1978) have made a distinction between “androgynous” individuals, who are high in both masculinity and femininity, and “undifferentiated” individuals, who are low in both of these characteristics. The concept of psychological androgyny implies that it is possible for an individual to be both masculine and feminine, both instrumental and expressive, depending upon the situational appropriateness of these various modalities; and it further implies that an individual may even blend these complementary modalities into a single act, being able, for example, to fire an employee if the circumstances warrant it, but to do so with sensitivity for the human emotion that such an act inevitably produces. According to empirical research on the concept of androgyny, a more androgynous view of oneself has been found to be accompanied by greater maturity in one’s moral judgments and by a higher level of self-esteem (Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1975).

However, for many individuals, traditional sex roles still produce an unnecessary and perhaps even dysfunctional pattern of avoidance, which prevents the possibility of androgyny from ever becoming a reality. Bem and Lenney (1976) found that sex-typed individuals not only avoided a wide variety of simple, everyday activities just because those activities happen to be stereotyped as more appropriate for the other sex, but they also reported discomfort and even some temporary loss of self-esteem when actually required to perform such activities. This pattern of avoidance is not limited to simple, everyday behaviors but appears to constrict the individual’s instrumental and expressive functioning as well.

Jackson, Ialongo and Stollack (1986) examined the relationship between gender role and person-perception accuracy. Young adults who were masculine, feminine, androgynous, or undifferentiated in their gender role interacted with a child, and with a peer, in role-playing situations that focused on parenting and marital behaviors. Results indicated that androgynous participants were clearly superior in predicting the child’s perceptions of them, but were no better than the other gender-role groups in terms of peer perceptions.

Several studies have examined sex differences in accuracy and confidence on the Interpersonal Perception Task (IPT). The results of two studies indicated that women were significantly more accurate than men (Costanzo & Archer, 1989; Smith, Archer, & Costanzo, 1991). In fact, there is an extensive literature documenting women’s greater nonverbal sensitivity in making judgments of others. Hall (1987) reported that, in over 80 percent of the 120 studies she reviewed, women were more accurate than men in their judgments.

Nevertheless, men reported significantly higher levels of confidence in their answers. In other studies, however, no differences were found in accuracy between men and women on the IPT (Patterson & Stockbridge, 1998).

3. Objectives

This study explores the connection between interpersonal perception skills, gender and gender roles. The study hypothesizes that: females will be more accurate than males on the Interpersonal Perception Task (IPT); individuals who are high solely on either femininity or masculinity scales regardless of biological sex will be less accurate on the IPT than those who are androgynous; gender role will be a greater determinant of empathic accuracy over biological sex.

4. Methodology

Participants

A total of 115 communication students took part in the study, 76 of which were female and 39 of which were male. The age range was 20 to 27, with an average of 21.2 (A.S.=0.85).

Procedure

Participants were asked to watch a 40-minute film (Interpersonal Perception Task - IPT) developed by Costanzo and Archer (1993) to assess the extent to which one is accurate or not in decoding nonverbal cues. Then they were given instructions to answer a multiple-choice questionnaire and to rate some descriptive adjectives on a second questionnaire. The test was administered during their nonverbal communication course.

Measures

Interpersonal Perception Task shows 30 scenes on nonverbal behavior and social perception. IPT incorporates a variety of individuals and situations that allow for a realistic assessment of individuals' ability to decode nonverbal stimuli.

The 30 scenes in the Interpersonal Perception Task include six examples of five nonverbal cue domains, kinship, deception, competition, status, and intimacy. Participants will fill out an answer sheet which yields an accuracy score based on the number of questions answered correctly. The correct answers that coincide with the scenes on the video are fact. "On the IPT, one of the two men really did win the basketball game; one of the men really is the father of both children; one of the two women really is the boss; and one of the two accounts of the woman's childhood really is the truth" (Archer, Costanzo, & Akert, 2001, p. 174). Scores on the Interpersonal Perception Task average 16.5 out of a possible 30 correct (Costanzo & Archer, 1989). Test-retest reliability of the Interpersonal Perception Task was reported as 0.70 for a 5-week interval; internal reliability was reported as 0.52 (Archer & Costanzo, 1989). Other assessments of the Interpersonal Perception Task indicate that it is a valid instrument for research in nonverbal decoding skills. Higher scores indicate more accurate reading of a wide array of nonverbal cues, such as body position, eye movement, and tone of voice. Content validity of the Interpersonal Perception Task was assessed through a rating process which attempted to take into account previous research on behavior exhibited in the Interpersonal Perception Task. Judges viewed each scene blind to the questions and answers and coded them for specific behaviors. Interjudge reliability was 0.81 and the agreement between behaviors predicted by research and the actual behavior in the Interpersonal Perception Task was reported as 83% (Costanzo & Archer, 1989).

Gender orientation (or sex-role) identity was assessed using the *Bem Sex Role Inventory* (BSRI), which was originally developed as a self-report measure of global constructs masculinity (M) and femininity (F) in order to identify gender-typed and nongender-typed (i.e., androgynous and cross-typed) individuals. The BSRI contains 60 descriptive adjectives that individuals rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1: Never or almost never true; 7: Always or almost always true). According to Bem (1974), 20 BSRI items measure masculinity, 20 items measure femininity, and the remaining 20 items are gender-neutral fillers.

5. Results

Data were collected and analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), version 17.0.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of IPT scales.

		kinship	lie	competition	status	intimacy
Total	Mean	3.06	2.43	3.07	2.76	2.56
	Std. Deviation	1.07	1.17	1.18	.99	1.01

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of BSRI scales.

		male_type	female_type	androgynous	undifferentiated
Total	Mean	.07	.50	.11	.31
	Std. Deviation	.25	.50	.31	.46

With regard to the first hypothesis that females will be more accurate than males on the Interpersonal Perception Task (IPT), the present study used Spearman correlation and Independent samples T test.

According to the correlation analysis (table 3), males scored significantly better than females on scale *competition* ($r = -.243$, $p < .01$), and on scale *status* ($r = -.234$, $p < .01$), and females scored significantly better than males on scale *lie* ($r = .193$, $p < .05$).

Table 3. Spearman Correlation between IPT scales and gender.

	gender	kinship	lie	competition	status	intimacy
gender	-	.04	.19*	-.24**	-.23*	.15
kinship		-	.10	.06	.16	.10
lie			-	-.09	-.04	.06
competition				-	.02	-.04
status					-	.16
intimacy						-

* $p < .05$, two-tailed; ** $p < .01$, two-tailed

The contention that males in general will be less accurate than females on the IPT was not supported, in that females and males were only shown to be more accurate than one another on certain subcategories of the IPT scale, namely competition ($t(113) = 2.54$, $p < .05$) status ($t(113) = 2.46$, $p < .05$) and lie ($t(113) = -2.03$, $p < .05$). Thus, overall no significant difference was found between males and females in terms of their total scores on the IPT and thus our first hypothesis is rejected.

With regard to the second hypothesis that individuals high solely on either femininity or masculinity (BSRI) scales regardless of sex will be less accurate on the IPT than those who are androgynous (high on both masculinity and femininity scales), the results of the One-way ANOVAs suggest that the findings were not significant, therefore, the present study found no evidence that Androgyny as indicated by the participants' performance on the BSRI ($F = .36$, $p > .05$) was a better predictor of interpersonal perception accuracy over and above Feminine, Masculine or Undifferentiated participants. Thus, the second hypothesis is also rejected. The same results were obtained also for the IPT subscales namely kinship ($F = .73$, $p > .05$), lie ($F = .21$, $p > .05$), competition ($F = 2.43$, $p > .05$), status ($F = .66$, $p > .05$) or intimacy ($F = .33$, $p > .05$).

Table 4. Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis ($N = 115$).

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.088 ^a	.008	-.010	1.00	.008	.437	2	112	.647
2	.097 ^b	.009	-.017	1.00	.002	.190	1	111	.664

a. Predictors: (Constant), gender, IPT

b. Predictors: (Constant), gender, IPT, gender X IPT

In order to better evaluate the impact of Gender on this relationship we have use a moderated hierarchical regression analysis, with IPT scores as independents, BSRI scores as dependents and Gender as a moderator. Analysis of moderating effects using regression is regarded as being the dominant method in the examination of moderating effects (Aguinis, 2004) and is also recommended by the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing, AERA, APA, NCME, 1999). As one could see in tables below, participants gender did not influence the relation between interpersonal perception skills and gender roles: $\Delta R^2 = .002$ $F(1, 111) = .190$, $p > 0.05$

Table 5. Coefficients.

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
IPT	-.02	.03	-.06
gender	.11	.19	.05
Step 2			
IPT	-.00	.06	-.00
gender	.15	.21	.07
IPT X gender	-.01	.02	-.07

Note. $R^2 = .00$ for Step 1; $R^2 = .00$ for Step 2 ($p > .05$)

6. Conclusions

The first hypothesis that females will be more accurate than males on the IPT was not supported by the results of this study. The fact that no significant differences between males and females were found on the IPT total scale scores, and yet there were significant differences on the various factors subscales of the IPT, suggests that 30 items testing interpersonal perception accuracy may not be enough items to determine statistically significant differences in ability between the genders. Or perhaps, both males and females are equally as accurate perceivers of interpersonal situations but have greater ability to perceive accurately in different types of situations.

Males and females grow up with different sets of social conditioning. In western culture, for example, males are taught to act strong, confident, and be competitive with others. In contrast, females are taught to be nurturing, compassionate, empathic, and cooperative with others. Thus, these biases might be helping to influence the accuracy of perceiving different types of interpersonal situations for males and females in different ways.

Males, on the other hand, may be more confident in their ability to ascertain who is the winner of a competitive athletic game, as evidenced by their scoring better on the Winner/Loser Perception items, based on their frequent involvement in such activities.. Also, males might feel that they are better than females at judging a physical competition's winner versus loser since social expectations are such that they feel superior to women in this arena of life. This superiority "complex", and possibly greater personal experience might lead to more accuracy for males on these items. As well, females' social expectations to be more sympathetic to others may lead to a sense of competency in the arena of perceiving accurately whether someone is telling the truth or not.

In reviewing the results found in the present study, one may tend to agree with Graham and Ickes (1997) that "the empathic advantage that is commonly denoted as 'women's intuition' owes at least as much to a difference in motivation as to a difference in ability" (p. 140). And, as Hancock and Ickes (1996) noted, "If men appear at times to be socially insensitive, it may have more to do with the image they wish to convey than with the ability they possess" (p. 197).

A major limitation of this study is the lack of screening for participants. It would be more ideal to screen for equal numbers of participants for each group compared (feminine females, androgynous females, masculine females, masculine males, androgynous males, and feminine males).

A study to determine the difference in what the PONS (Profile Of Nonverbal Sensitivity) and IPT are measuring would be of interest. Since there is so much debate about what the IPT is in fact measuring, perhaps a study could be designed that would elucidate the differences more clearly. Perhaps controlling variables such as IQ, educational background and socioeconomic background would be helpful in determining whether those who score lower on the IPT or PONS are doing so because they are unable to decode nonverbal and/or social cues, as opposed to being generally deficient intellectually.

Other potential studies include the differences between groups of participants on the IPT based on sexual orientation and some personality factors, such as openness or agreeability.

Rezumat: Unul dintre cele mai importante aspecte ale vieții organizaționale este percepția interpersonală – procesul prin care o persoană este capabilă să perceapă corect comportamentele celorlalți. Într-un context de interacțiune socială cum este cel organizațional, persoana dobândește o serie de informații contextuale cumulative referitoare la un anumit aspect prin observarea comportamentului celorlalți pe măsură ce acesta se derulează în cursul interacțiunii (Ginsburg & Smith, 1993). Prezentul studiu explorează interacțiunea dintre gen, rolul de gen și abilitățile de percepție interpersonală. Ipotezele studiului pornesc de la presupunerea că femeile vor fi mai precise decât bărbații la Interpersonal Perception Task (IPT) și că persoanele care obțin scoruri ridicate la scalele de masculinitate sau femininitate (indiferent de genul biologic) vor fi mai puțin precise la IPT decât persoanele androgine. La studiu au participat 115 studenți la comunicare și relații publice. Participanții au fost invitați să vizioneze un material filmat (IPT) care măsoară abilitatea de a decodifica corect comportamentele nonverbale. Rolul de gen a fost măsurat utilizând Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI). În ceea ce privește testarea ipotezelor, în studiul prezent au fost utilizate corelațiile Spearman, teste de semnificație T, ANOVA și regresia în pași multipli. Rezultatele obținute nu sprijină ipoteza conform căreia între femei și bărbați există diferențe semnificative în ceea ce privește acuratețea decodificării comportamentului nonverbal. Totuși, femeile se pare că au o acuratețe mai ridicată în detectarea minciunii iar bărbații în a detecta corect cine a câștigat un joc (competiție) sau care este persoana cu statut mai înalt într-o interacțiune. În analiza rezultatelor tindem să fim de acord cu Graham și Ickes (1997) care afirmă că “avantajul empatic care este în mod obișnuit denumit “intuiție feminină” se datorează cel puțin în aceeași măsură diferențelor în motivație precum diferențelor în abilitate” (p. 140) sau cu Hancock și Ickes (1996) - “dacă bărbații par uneori că sunt mai puțin sensibili social, s-ar putea ca aceasta să aibă mai mult de-a face cu imaginea pe care aceștia doresc să o promoveze decât cu abilitatea pe care o posedă” (p. 197). Studii viitoare pot include și diferențe bazate pe tipul de orientare sexuală, istoricul educațional și trăsăturile de personalitate.

Cuvinte-cheie: percepție interpersonală; gen; roluri de gen; decodificarea comportamentului nonverbal.

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Book reviews

Aurora IORGOVEANU*

Review of *Doing News Framing Analysis: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives*, by P. D'Angelo and J. A. Kuypers, New York: Routledge, 2010, 376 pages

The academic literature on the topic of framing has known a flourishing development in the last two decades. Scholars in sociology (Gitlin, 1980), mass communication (Entman, 1993; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989), political communication (De Vreese, 2005; Semetko & Boomgaarden, 2007) and public relations (Dan & Ihlen, 2011) consider the news framing process as a challenging research topic, seeking to understand what framing is and how framing works.

A very interesting book on this topic, entitled *Doing News Framing Analysis: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives*, by Paul D'Angelo and Jim A. Kuypers, represents a valuable work within the growing scientific area of study in framing. Although the academic literature shows a great amount of data and information related to framing, it stresses a lack of consistency in how authors define and apply the concept of frame. *Doing News Framing Analysis* brings a great contribution in this respect, being one of the most influential books in the field, which makes some clear conceptual clarifications about the notion of framing. Besides its fresh theoretical dimension, the book also provides particularly useful information concerning the empirical perspective of news framing analysis, which helps researchers to better understand and develop news framing analysis.

The book, edited by Paul D'Angelo and Jim A. Kuypers, represents a collection of thirteen chapters, in which a group of the most influential framing researchers provide substantial contributions to distinct scholarly trajectories. These individual chapters are grouped in three distinctive sections. The first part deals with defining and clarifying the conceptual distinctions between frame, frame building and media frames. The second section offers new perspectives on the complex issue of framing effects and its impact on public opinion formation. More than that, it explores not only the news media framing effects, but also the effects produced by visual images on individuals' attitudes. In the third part of the book, the authors aim at presenting some different theoretical perspectives from which to understand and study the production of frames: political, rhetorical and feminist.

As underlined in the introduction of this study, the main purpose of the volume is not to "judge which theory or method yields the most important empirical findings or insights", but to "present original, big picture articles", that recognize "the integrationist impulses that propel the use of different theoretical and methodological approaches" (D'Angelo & Kuypers,

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2010, p. 3). In short, *Doing News Framing Analysis* offers theoretical insights and practical applications, without deciding whether framing is fragmented or necessarily pluralistic.

Stressing that framing is a multiparadigmatic research program, Paul D'Angelo succeeded to bring together in this volume "big picture articles", providing strong arguments in favor of the idea that framing is a powerful concept, with a great explanatory power.

With a coherent writing style, the book has more strengths than weaknesses. Thus, in the chapter entitled "Finding Frames in a Web of Culture", Reese works across the constructionist and critical paradigms, bringing an original perspective on framing. The author suggests that frames manifest themselves in a number of different sites and across a number of domains: policy, journalistic and public.

Also, through the chapter "Strategies to Take Subjectivity out of Framing Analysis", written by Van Gorp, the book offers new insights about the research techniques, both quantitative and qualitative, that can help to take subjectivity out of framing analysis and validate cultural frames empirically. Another strength of this work consists in Paul Brewer and Kimberly Gross's study about the effects of issue framing on public opinion. The authors' conclusions emphasize new methodological approaches for the study of framing effects, drawing on broader understandings of what constitutes a framing effect.

One of the most valuable contributions of the book is Renita Coleman's study, "Framing the Pictures in Our Heads. Exploring the Framing and Agenda-Setting Effects of Visual Images". Considered a comprehensive synthesis of the literature on visual framing, Coleman's article is unique in the field of mass communication. Particularly useful are the sections discussing the differences between visual and verbal framing, the characteristics of photographs compared with verbal messages, but also the effects produced by news visuals. As well, Coleman offers some intriguing insights about the most predominant methods used to study visual frames.

Besides the many strong points, the critical review of *Doing News Framing Analysis* also reveals some weaknesses. Thus, there is no chapter which develops a common conceptualization for framing, applicable for all the paradigms they are working across. More than that, the book lacks a detailed presentation of the most popular research methods in framing analysis. Even if briefly mentioned in the studies published in this volume, some clarifications about methodological questions regarding coding visual images, a still rather fuzzy aspect of news framing analysis, would have increased the pedagogic value of the book.

Summing up, *Doing News Frame Analysis* offers useful guiding lines on what news frames are, how they can be analyzed in media texts and how framing effects are produced. All in all, the book is a definitive must read for every scholar and student interested in framing theory. The perfect combination between the variety of theoretical and methodological approaches on framing is impressive, stating the power and extensive application of this concept.

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Rodica SĂVULESCU*

Review of *Politica user friendly. Despre consultanți politici și Facebook în România și Republica Moldova [User Friendly Politics. On Political Consultants and Facebook in Romania and The Republic of Moldova]* by Florența Toader, Cătălina Grigorași, Sofia Frunză, Bucharest: Tritonic, 2011, 255 pages

Recent years have raised significant questions about online communication and its future development. Initially considered among the *niche* types of communication, views on the digital sector are now deviating from this paradigm, as the new social realities are placing the Internet in the media forefront: newspaper websites have higher profit margins and more readers than printed versions do, while traditional TV audiences are constantly shrinking due to the various types of content available online. It seems ironical that the Internet, which was only introduced as an appendix in communication plans not so long ago, is now quickly ascending and requiring more attention from communication professionals.

The revolution Internet has brought about cannot be ignored – and its implications on all types of communication necessitate constant exploration, due to the ever-changing nature of this medium. We are now constantly debating new concepts like “social networks” or “consumer generated content”, which demand comprehension from communication professionals, in order to be used efficiently. While literature concerning the Internet and its subjacent components has not been scarce, most studies present either a very theoretical approach on the matter, or they concentrate mostly on the consequences of online communication over human relationships – or the promotional potential for commercial products. But there is still a lot of space that requires examination: in terms of branding and communication, can the new Internet also prove beneficial for other categories than those that we generally refer to as *commercial products*? And, even more specific – can Web 2.0 also be efficient in political communication and image-building efforts?

Questions like the ones above create the focus of *User Friendly Politics. On Political Consultants and Facebook in Romania and The Republic of Moldova*. As the title shows, this study devotes its efforts towards a series of matters that have not yet been fully addressed by recent literature.

The book is structured in three major sections, each written by a different author and concentrating on a certain subject connected to political communication in the digital era, such as the professionalization of political communication and the use of Facebook in the Romanian political sphere as compared to that of the Republic of Moldova. The authors - Florența Toader, Cătălina Grigorași and Sofia Frunză - are all former students of the National School of Political and Administrative Studies and their field of interest revolves around political marketing and communication.

The first chapter of the study, “Talking with political communication specialists. The professionalization of a controversial domain”, is undersigned by Florența Toader. This part of

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the volume is concerned with the ever-growing importance of the role that political consultants have in creating an adequate public persona for politicians. Firstly, the discussion is centered around the concept of *professionalization* of political communication: a notion that is still loosely defined, but focuses the use of specialists and expert techniques in order to obtain electoral success. The author approaches this subject from a historical perspective, arguing that nowadays it is mandatory to use a “professional” approach in political communication, if results are to be expected. This section of the book comprises a series of interviews in which several Romanian political consultants (Bogdan Teodorescu, Dan Andronic and Cezar Caluschi among them) present their views on the matter, by responding to questions regarding their activity, the evolution of electoral campaigns in recent years, and their opinion on the professionalization of political communication. Nevertheless, one of the most interesting topics addressed in these interviews is the evolution of digital political communication. As shown here, the future resides in understanding not only how to create an online connection with the public, but in perpetuating that connection, especially on election dates and even further.

Florența Toader argues the fact that new realities impose new techniques, and politicians should therefore understand that most (if not all) their actions require specialized help - the era of improvising and “playing by ear” is long gone, and evolution is necessary – and that using consultants with different types of expertise should not be considered an exception, but a rule. Nevertheless, most politicians still do not fully comprehend the importance of permanent expert contributions to their efforts of building and maintaining a certain public image – and therefore consultants are used “seasonally”, especially during electoral campaigns.

In the second chapter of the book, Cătălina Grigorași addresses the issue of social media use in Romanian political communication. While briefly presenting the characteristics of social media, the author considers that the main difference between traditional and new media is the fact that the latter involve the user and transform communication into an act of co-creation. This part of the study approaches online political communication diachronically, from its debut in 1992 (as part of Bill Clinton’s presidential campaign) and following its transformations along the years that followed: the use of websites, the introduction of blogs and, more recently, the expansion of social media platforms. Additionally, this segment focuses on the way that Romanian politicians use social media to create a connection with their public – and proposes a comparative analysis of two Facebook pages belonging to Elena Udrea and Victor Ponta, as prominent figures of two important Romanian political parties. By adjoining the relevant elements that create a Facebook profile page, the analysis suggests that, although they employ the same tools supplied by this platform, the two politicians use Facebook in different manners - thus revealing the degree in which they really accept its status as an informal, unmediated, relationship-building network.

The last section of the book is concerned with another thought-provoking aspect of political communication – its author, Sofia Frunză, tackles the subject of social media enabled communication practices in the Moldovan political sphere. After succinctly presenting the realities of political communication in the Republic of Moldova, the discussion offers the reader interesting insights into this specific political area – for example, the fact that almost all Moldovan political leaders have an account on social media websites (be they international, like Facebook or Twitter, or pertaining to the Russian space - Odnoklassniki), except Vladimir Voronin, the leader of the Communist Party.

This chapter also attempts to propose a classification of political actors and their actions on Facebook, by analyzing three profiles of Moldovan politicians (Marian Lupu, Vlad Filat

and Mihai Ghimpu). As a consequence, the distinctive way in which the three politicians use Facebook as a social networking platform enables the author to suggest three types of leaders: “the modest”, “the selective” and “the involved”. She concludes that even though Moldovan politicians employ new online communication platforms, the main elements that would allow them to create a powerful connection with their public are still not fully developed. The main issue seems to be that these politicians have understood the importance of gaining social capital online, but are not yet aware of the steps they should follow in order to achieve this purpose: they do not empower their public on Facebook and interactivity is kept to a minimum.

The aim of *User Friendly Politics* is to answer two main research questions. Firstly, it deals with the possibility of identifying a professionalized approach in contemporary Romanian political communication. Secondly, and in close connection to this subject, it poses an interesting problem: do politicians comprehend the importance of social networking – and do they engage in such online communication in order to generate a better connection with their public? The answers are not yet definite, furthermore, they attract other questions in relation to these subjects. The professionalization of political communication is now more necessary than ever, if we are to take in consideration the fact that most politicians in Romania and the Republic of Moldova do not have a clear image of what social networking is and how it should be approached. Expert advice is obviously in demand, as interactivity and openness are indisputable characteristics of contemporary online communication - but they do not describe political leaders as well.

Apart from comprising statistical information regarding the use of social networks and explaining the features of new media, *User Friendly Politics* contributes to the emerging field of online political communication by introducing a series of case studies that compare the Web 2.0 communication practices in Romania and the Republic of Moldova. Therefore, this book delves more profoundly into the structures of social networking and offers politicians a set of examples that could serve as a starting point in their future efforts or as a foundation for more in-depth studies concerning political communication on Facebook. Politicians, political consultants and communication specialists in general could greatly benefit from this study, as the field of digital communication is still uncharted territory and needs a strong background to flourish.

Call for papers

July 2012

The European Public Sphere in Times of Crisis: Disentangling the Debate

Guest editor: Professor Hans-Jörg Trenz

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The current economic and political crisis fundamentally impacts on how citizens, media, public intellectuals and political elites perceive the legitimacy of the project of European integration. Given the multidimensional character of the current crisis, which affects citizens differently and generates diverse responses across the European political space, the 'Eurocrisis' has an extraordinarily high potential for generating a deep and ongoing politicization of the EU within and across national domestic politics. Understanding how contestations of the 'Eurocrisis' in different public arenas (Eurozone and non Eurozone countries) interrelate is, therefore, particularly pressing. In line with the 'cultural turn' in European integration studies in Europe and worldwide, the special issue invites contributions that deal with recent transformation of political communication, public sphere, the media, protest and mobilization, empirically and theoretically. The special issue on 'The European Public sphere in times of crisis' opens a forum for cutting-edge research in the fields of political communication, the media, collective identity formation and the socio-cultural dynamics of European integration. In particular, through the proposed focus on public sphere transformations in Europe we aim to advance interdisciplinary research in European studies on the topics of a) media, citizens' participation and democratic legitimacy; b) the transformation of citizens' allegiances and identities; and c) the reconfiguration of the political space between the nation state and Europe.

The *Romanian Journal of Communication and Public Relations* invites scholars to contribute to the July 2012 issue with papers on the topic of the European public sphere and the debate surrounding it. Topics may include, but are not limited to:

- Europeanized, transnational, supranational public sphere;
- Forms of Europeanization of national public spheres;
- Media coverage of European actors and themes;
- The role of journalism and the New Media;

- National identity vs. European identity, collective identities, multiple identities;
- ‘Eurocrisis’ and Euroscepticism;
- European integration, political communication, and public mobilization.

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The presidential candidates on Twitter during the 2009
Romanian elections

Journalism in the Age of Digital Technology

Pics or It Didn't Happen: Analyzing Facebook Photographs of
Romanian Women Politicians