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Political, Administrative and Social Life in the Current Romanian Mass Media

The Fire from the *Colectiv* Club

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Abstract

We live in an era of information, when we want to know everything happening around us and to be aware of all kinds of public and personal information. The source which provides this information is mass media, whether it is online or in print, radio, or television. We can argue that television is the most important source of information.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the content of agenda setting for the main news stations and the national television channels regarding topics related to administration, politics and the social scene.

Keywords

Television; agenda setting; audiovisual communication; political scene; media; message.

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I. Introduction

This research aims to analyze the content of agenda setting for the main news stations and the main national channels regarding topics related to administration, politics and the social scene. During the media monitoring, after one day of watching the main news, the fire from The Colectiv Club captured the collective attention of the press. As a result, we decided to concentrate our research on this topic, including all of the possible implications: fire, victims, administrative, political and legislative changes.

Agenda-setting theory argues that while the media (particularly the news outlets) are not always successful in telling us how to think, they are nonetheless successful in telling us what to think about. "This impact of the mass media – the ability to effect cognitive change among individuals, to structure their thinking – has been labeled the agenda-setting function of mass communication. Here may lie the most important effect of mass communication, its ability to mentally order and organize our world for us. In short, the mass media may not be successful in telling us what to think, but they are stunningly successful in telling us what to think about."¹

Agenda-setting theory operates on two levels. In *Theories of Communication*, Littlejohn describes a first level that introduces the common subjects that are most important, while the second level decides what aspects of the subject are important. These two levels of agenda setting lead path into what is the function of this concept. According to Rogers and Dearing in their book *Agenda Setting Research*, the concept of agenda setting is divided into three parts. The first part of the process is the importance of the issues discussed in the media. Second, the issues discussed in the media impact the way the public thinks; this is referred to as the public agenda. Ultimately the public agenda influences the policy agenda. In short, "the media agenda affects the public agenda, and the public agenda affects the policy agenda."²

A combination of gatekeepers, editors, managers and other external influences are factors that also affect agenda setting. Nonmedia sources, government officials and influential individuals affect the agenda-setting process to an extent that depending on the relative power each factor has will eventually influence the media agenda. For example "if the media has close relationship with the elite society, that class will probably affect the media agenda and the public agenda in turn."³

The adequate tools for studying such an approach are the following: media monitoring, observation, and content analysis.

The period under study is between October 29th and November 4th 2015. This time frame was chosen in order to the need to have the most recent news on the topic.

News channels analyzed: Digi 24, Realitatea TV, Antena 3.

The topics analyzed were related to administration, politics and social scenes.

II. Corpus

According to the Oxford English Dictionary,⁴ a piece of news is "newness telling or describing of some recent events or happenings, presented or assimilated as new information; new events as subject of discussion."

It is not the event itself which determines the form, content, significance or truth of the news, but the piece of news is what determines the significance of the event; it results from the features of its semiotics as well as from the system in which it is generated and received.⁵ So, the news does not

¹ Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw. *The Emergence of American Political Issues* (New York. West Publishing Co, 1977), 5.

² Stephen W. Littlejohn. *Theories of Human Communication. Seventh Edition.* (Albuquerque New Mexico: Wadsworth, 2002), 320.

³ Stephen W. Littlejohn. *Theories of Human Communication. Seventh Edition. into the CNN network directly* (Albuquerque, New Mexico: Wadsworth, 2002), 321.

⁴ <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/news> (accessed November 25, 2015).

⁵ John Hartley. *Discursul ştirilor* (Iaşi. Ed. Polirom, 1999), 24.

represent a fact in and of itself, but is rather a discourse on the presented event. This idea is supported by Patrick Charaudeau,⁶ who says that “news transforms facts (which have no significance whatsoever) into events of significance.”

An exact definition for a piece of news cannot be made; it comprises a wide complex of notions that cannot be restrained within the rigid limits of a definition. Mădălina Bălăşescu⁷ maintains that the piece of news is “everything that the journalists are interested in, everything that is broadcasted in journalistic form, all of the information that meets known selection criteria.” The most important news story contains information with a great degree of interest and which affects the widest possible audience.

A high-quality piece of news is centered on the concepts of clarity, conciseness, coherence, accuracy, truthfulness and objectivity. It must comprise facts, situations or opinions regarding an event in order to attract larger public interest.

An event becomes a piece of news if it adheres to the following criteria: time proximity, space proximity, newness, conflict, consequences and its ability to catch human interest. Ion Bucheru⁸ considers that the fact-subject must be interesting, important, new, unknown, significant and visible.

Television brings a lot of modifications to the way in which items of news are produced: it emphasizes the visual character of an event, it can increase the broadcasted information, and deliver public information rapidly. Guy Lochard and Henri Boyer⁹ consider that the most important factors are *a dictatorship of instantaneity, a continuous presence* and *a priority given to visibility*.

Priority given to visibility is an idea also found in Alina Bărgăoanu's book. She states that “if there are no images of an event, then the probability that the event will be broadcasted tends towards zero.”¹⁰ We contend that this statement is not generally valid because there are stories included in the TV News due to important information (the promulgation of a new law, increasing taxes, judicial decisions, etc.), even if exact images do not exist to illustrate the material.

The audio-visual media stresses the reality that can be shown on the screen; nevertheless the meaning of an image can be changed, and the public can instead be watching a reconstruction of reality instead. Guy Lochard and Henri Boyer¹¹ state that “the TV image must not be considered a simple place for the presentation of reality. It is place for the reconstruction of reality, imposing significances in spite of its supposed objectivity.”

The images used in creating a piece of news may come from several sources: the filming crew sent into the field, the TV's archive, various public institutions, companies and organizations, common people that were accidental witnesses of the event and registered the image and press agencies. Many times the reporter cannot be in that place the exact moment an event occurs (such as an accident, a natural disaster, a fire). In order to replay those kinds of subjects, images filmed by witnesses the moment the event happened are often used. Though they do not have good technical quality, the images are included in the piece of news in order to increase the credibility and offer evidence. In the case of the fire from the Colectiv Club, the images registered by the persons who filmed the incident inside the club did not have a good clarity but were broadcasted both by the Romanian TV Stations and by those from abroad because they were sensational, had a strong emotional impact and the images increased the drama of the news story.

The filmed material must respect several basic principles: to be clear, to be correct, to be complete and to be concise. Journalistic discourse follows the idea of keeping the public interest. Its rationality

⁶ Patrick Charaudeau. *Le discours d'information médiatique. La construction du miroir social* (Paris, Ed. Nathan/Institut national de l'audiovisuel, Collection Médias-Recherches, 1997), 40.

⁷ Mădălina Bălăşescu. *Manual de producție de televiziune* [Textbook for the production in television] (Iași, Polirom, 2003), 70.

⁸ Ion Bucheru. *Fenomenul televiziune* [The television phenomenon] (Bucharest: Ed. Fundației România de Măine, 2004), 144.

⁹ Henri Boyer, Guy Lochard. *Comunicarea mediatică* [Media communication] (Iași, Ed. Institutul European, 1998), 101-102.

¹⁰ Alina Bărgăoanu. *Tirania actualității. O introducere în istoria și teoria știrilor* [The tyranny of actuality. Introduction to the history and theory of news] (Bucharest: Ed. Tritonic, 2006), 186.

¹¹ Henri Boyer, Guy Lochard, *Comunicarea mediatică*, 85.

expresses the necessity that the support techniques used must be valid.¹² If breaking news appears, it can also be broadcasted without visual support. Nevertheless, it would be preferable to have pictures or images of some kind, be they generic or graphic representations.

Definition: Breaking news refers to events that are currently developing or “breaking”. Breaking news usually refers to events that are unexpected, such as a plane crash or a building on fire. Breaking news can also refer to news that occurs late in the day, close to a news outlet's usual deadline.

Example: He is great at covering breaking news stories like fires, accidents and shootings.¹³

In *A Vision on Television*, Nicolae Melinescu¹⁴ states that “The influence of information broadcasted through television has surpassed the simple sensational announcement for a long time.” This type of information became an argument in and of itself when an interlocutor invokes it: « I saw it on television ». No doubt can exist beyond this because the supreme proof is that «it was seen». The dominant and dominating characteristic of television is seen here in the way it plays with the image. Since the beginning, its force was beyond doubt as an argument and as proof.

As we have already said, we have chosen a recent period between October 29th and November 4th, 2015 because we wanted to have recent news. Our plan to analyze news from different sectors such as administration or politics was changed by a tragedy which captured the entire attention of news journals and talk-shows. Thus, we decided to make a radiography of this subject based on the principal Romanian channels.

29.10.2015 – 30.10.2015 The top news stories focused on the parliamentary vote regarding Elena Udrea’s arrest, detention and prosecution and the uncertain situation of vice Prime Minister Gabriel Oprea.

31.10.2015 – 32 dead people and 180 injured at a fire during a rock concert.

All TV news stations covered this breaking news, except TVR1 and B1 TV.



Fig. 1. Breaking News on Digi 24

¹² Ioana Vid. “Protestele de la Roșia Montană oglindite în presă” [The protests of Roșia Montană as reflected in mass media], in *Communication, Culture, Creation: New scientifique paradigms* (Novi Sad: Vasile Goldis University Press, 2015), 872.

¹³ <http://journalism.about.com/od/journalismglossary/g/breakingnews.htm> (accessed November, 25, 2015).

¹⁴ Nicolae Melinescu. *O viziune despre televiziune* [A vision on television] (Bucharest: Master Print Super Offset, 2013), 36.

All day Saturday, the news stations had narrations about the fire, about the concert, about what the authorities did, they have transmitted the government meeting; different personalities were interviewed and participants of the concert who escaped were also interviewed.

A three-day period of mourning was declared. All the news stations broadcast the mourning by changing their logo in black and white or by putting a black ribbon on their logo:



Fig. 2. Antena 3: the globe inside the logo is wrapped in a mourning band



Fig. 3. Realitatea TV: the station logo is black in a sign of mourning (as opposed to its usual red color)



Fig. 4. B1 TV: mourning over the logo

- Digi TV: mourning over the logo
- Kanal D: logo channel is black
- Prima TV station: black and white logo
- TVR 1: logo transferred into gray

Another aspect of mourning was that the News channels – Antena 3, Romania TV, Realitatea TV, and B1 – stopped showing nearly all commercials in the three days of national mourning at the request of clients and advertising agencies. For Realitatea TV, the measure was announced live from 11:30 onwards. Romania TV, Realitatea TV and B1 broadcasts had a few advertisements for products sold by teleshopping. Commercials were removed from the informative programs of large generalist positions. According to Paginademedia.ro, advertisers requested that ads would not appear in the newscasts of some TV programs posts and Pro TV, Antena 1 and Kanal D starting on Saturday.

The three days of national mourning radically changed TV programs that gave this time to entertainment shows. The government declared three days of national mourning in memory of the 32 people who died in the fire at Colectiv Club.

On the 1st of November, Antena 3 organized a telethon to support the families of the victims and those wounded by the fire at Club Colectiv.

International channels reported extensively on the fire in Bucharest reporting that 27 people were killed and 146 were hospitalized.

CNN sent an all-night crew reporting fully Breaking News with periodically-updated reports. Pro TV reporter Paul Angelescu entered into the CNN network directly and reported internationally. The site pointed out that CNN is the worst of its kind in recent years after the tragedy of Santa Maria Brazil in 2013 when there were 235 victims, says Pro TV. On CNN, journalist Alessandra Stoicescu reported live.

Reuters wrote that the fire broke out during a rock concert and that the organizers had announced before that there will be a pyrotechnic show. Reuters reminded audience that fireworks were the cause of two other tragedies: the fire in Brazil in 2013 and one in Russia dating from 2009, when there were 156 victims.

The tragedy was covered and the Associated Press and France Press; the story was updated several times during the night, as new data appeared, according to Pro TV.

Al Jazeera aired the night of the event. Journalist Sanda Nicola reported live on a TV channel from Romania.

The sites of two other major TV channels – BBC and Sky News – headlines covered the dramatic events at the club with information collected from Bucharest.

Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday – protests were the top story of news stations. The protesters demanded the resignation of the prime minister and the mayor of section 4, where fire took place.

On Wednesday, Victor Ponta has resigned his term as prime minister, as well as the Romanian Government. The announcement bombshell came after a Tuesday night protest involving 20,000 people. It was breaking news covered by all news channels and Pro TV, which interrupted the scheduled program, TVR 1 and Antena Stars too.

“Victory Street: Ponta resign”, announces Realitatea TV. On the other hand, Romanian TV posted statements by the former prime minister: “I thank the rescuers that they had done their duty.”



Fig. 5 Ponta resigns

B1, all with quotations from Ponta stated “legal liability will be determined by the court”.

The announcement premier was not only on all news stations, but also the general TV channels Pro TV, TVR 1 and Antena Stars. All utilized images, though TVR 1 relied on fewer images and Digi 24 only submitted the audio statement.

III. Conclusion

The Colectiv Club fire was the principle subject of news journals and talk-shows for weeks. At present, two months after the event, there is at least one news story about this topic (for example, the latest count of those dead – 63, news about the litigation against the owners of the club, the health of victims, legislative changes, etc.).

In addition to providing information, the bonding function was very visible during the event: thousands of people went out to demand the prime-minister and other political leaders resign their posts. The endless lines of people waiting to donate blood were another effect of bonding mass-media function.

The manner in which the press covered the topic demonstrates the power of the press to help change political power, to improve legislation and change behaviors.

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