

ONLINE JOURNALISM BETWEEN REALITY AND FICTION

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Abstract

A brief review of the institution of journalism highlights the main changes that have appeared in the behaviour of the journalist and of the public, as well as the changes in the perception of the two entities regarding the reality in which they live. In its endeavour to inform the public, the journalist's duty is to reflect society in its whole and diversity, also granting press access to minority and individual opinions because the public has the right to know not just the information and ideas received either favourably or indifferently or the ones that are regarded as inoffensive, but also the ones that offend, shock or annoy, since these are the requirements of pluralism, tolerance and open spirit and without them a democratic society could never exist.

Keywords: *journalism, journalist, reality, fiction, truth.*

1. INTRODUCTION

If we refer to the idea of journalism and journalist we notice that both of them are defined as being fields of social support for the public to be informed of what is happening around it, whether it is about novelties in the social or scientific live or about something that the administration does or does not do for the community.

When we use the words informed or information, we think about synonyms such as truth, reality, certainty, evidence or about words which present the idea of useful, necessary, wanted or beneficial.

These words are assimilated to journalism because the expectations of the public are determinant when it comes to the informative side, a side in which we consider that journalism really strives to search for authentic data and information, based on reliable sources. We also expect the journalist to develop on the formative side, which has to be confirmed by his degree of knowledge and experience and demanded by the audience.

It is assumed that the two sides are qualitatively certified not only by a person's membership to the journalist profession but also by the fact that that person has the vocation of being permanently interested in what is going on around him and in everything that is connected to his profession.

Besides the perception about the alleged concern for everything that is new and important to the public, it induces the supposition that the journalist respects the deontological code his profession and that he fights for this code to become law for his colleagues and a reference point for his collaborators.

Without an exhaustive analysis of this code, it is necessary to point out some elements which refer to the journalist's role and conduct and, last but not least, the editing rules for journalistic materials.

Analysing the role of the journalist it is necessary to point out the fact that he is obliged to exercise his inviolable right to free expression, in the virtue of the public's right to be informed and that he must look for, respect and broadcast facts the same way they can be known through reasonable verifications, but with the condition of expressing opinions on a factual basis.

When drafting news or analysis, the journalist has to delimit the information from his personal opinions, to reasonably verify the information before publishing, to make the effort of presenting the points of view of all involved parties and to uphold the rules of quoting.

2. CLASSICAL VERSUS ON-LINE JOURNALISM

An empirical analysis leads us to the idea that the former is profound and realistic whereas the

latter is accessible, rapidly built, superficial, abundant and, at times, detached from reality.

The freedom of speech characteristic to the period following 1990, brought in the traditional Romanian media a mosaic of newspapers and magazines, each of them trying to find its place in the large number of existing fields.

The names of newspapers and magazines changed and new ones appeared, but the people in charge of the editorial policies were the same, such as: Cornel Nistorescu, Ion Cristoiu, Dumitru Tinu, Sorin Roșca Stănescu, Horia Alexandrescu, journalists with an undisputable professional value (even if not always moral) and represented a real proof for the development of some authentic journalism schools.

Even though some of the people were accused of partisanship or even of manipulation, we have to acknowledge the fact that important Romanian political analysts, investigation journalists or cultural figures were formed within these publications.

Without praising these journalists, it is important to emphasize the significance that they had in forming and developing some political opinions as well as the way in which they presented authentic social and political radiographs.

The knowledge and perception of the public was significantly influenced not only by the ideas that they presented but also by the way in which they built the articles, counting on making the reader loyal with the help of the analysis and not just due to the title and information.

The traditional pyramidal structure, adopted in writing by the old journalists, places the introduction, the development of the text and the article's background elements in a solid block with interconnected sections.

The thorough development, which included a joint collaboration, starting from the title and up to the form of the paragraphs, brought and triggered the construction of ideas in coherent and logical blocks, offering the reader the image of a story from head to tail.

The predisposition for editorials brought the necessary added value not only in the field of knowledge but also in that of style, aiming to value the beauty of the Romanian language.

Traditional journalism found the necessary time, maybe also determined by the reader's desire to deepen, to mark the depth of a successful story, of a contribution to the common construction and, last but not least, it challenged the writer to follow the story up to its end. This type of journalism represented an ineffective form of journalistic construction also for the simple reason that the value of the articles was measured according to the sales volume and not to the advertising quantity.

An empirical analysis on the texts written by journalist Cornel Nistorescu highlights the fact that the ones who want to preserve a high standard for the leading article have to regard the documenting methods, the ideas presented, and the clarity of the sentences and of the language as quality standards. Moreover, if we look at the present form (which we will present as a comparison) of the leading article, we will notice that it is kept constant, without the author using inter-titles or information houses.

The leading article *Song of America*, published in September 2001 in the newspaper "Evenimentul zilei" talked about the American tragedy and why Americans are so united among themselves, pointing out that: *"They do not look one like the other even if you paint them! They speak all the languages of the Earth and represent a dizzying amalgam of civilizations... And yet the American tragedy turned three hundred million people into a tight hand on the heart. Nobody tried to blame The White House, the army or the secret services. Nobody ran to withdrew money from the banks. Nobody clustered in the neighbouring streets. ... With every occasion they got, they started singing their traditional song: God Bless America!"* (ADEVĂRUL, 2009).

Sixteen years later, the same journalist describes Romania in a March 2017 article published in the newspaper "Cotidianul" and entitled *My weaknesses for the railway*, in which he points out that: *"The state of the railway transportations represents a perfect image of the Romanian society: nicked, dirty, grey, as a sign of decline. The tired life on the railway is similar to withdrawing from a fight, with a slow loss of territories. One hundred fifty years ago the railway represented the sign of European invasion on the Romanian territory. Today, it seems to present an withdrawal following a conquest of almost*

150 years. The Romanian railway was the pride of all Romanians. They called it "the second army." Both the first and the second were equally important for the needs of Romania and for the idea of a fulfilled country. For a long time, the development of the railway was also the key to an era (NISTORESCU, 2017)."

Reading these two articles we can identify both the emotion that the author wants to present and the figures of speech that this journalist, having a literary spirit, uses, paying attention not only to the content, but also to the form of the writing. Using this stylistic approach, the author includes the reader in the emotion of the story, making him identify himself with the problem and developing his feeling of care related to everything that is happening around him.

As the word often presents a reversed value scale, due to the appearance of new concepts such as globalization, technologization, correct political speech, terrorism, immigration, etc., things are the same with mass media, which switched to a more rapid and different manner of information delivery, at times creating forms which lacked any essence.

This new manner of drafting articles is called the reversed pyramid (GHID JURNALISM, 2009) and it assumes placing the most important information from the article in the first paragraphs because the reader does not have the necessary patience to go through the entire material. Therefore, the last paragraphs contain background information which are not necessary in order to understand the main idea of the article, but they facilitate the reader's knowledge stock.

We therefore notice that the journalist has no longer an interest in bringing the essence to its real form, to identify the reasons and to expose the effects.

Contemporary journalism is unreal because by structuring the contents on a reverse pyramid, the reader does no longer have the possibility to use the elements of logic. He will only see the emotional elements and he will see only the trees without having access to the forest.

The unreal dose of this new type of journalism stems from the fact that readers, who are more or less familiarized with the subject of the article, have the possibility of directly reaching the level they are interested in or which offers them new

information, unlike any information they knew before.

In order not to be accused of superficiality, the new type of journalism offers the reader constant updates, explanatory texts, interactive elements, and unprocessed data, offering him the possibility to research, a situation which happens quite rarely.

Here are the recommendations that Crawford Kilian, writer and article author with a Canadian background, offers those who want to have a career in journalism (COMAN, 2000).

The use of simple and informative titles is the first advice which is reflected in the very clear tendency of looking for shocking headlines or of hyperbolizing subjects, characters or events, leading either to perceiving crisis and conflicts in every event or to not acknowledging the fact that the emperor is naked.

The use of quotations inside the text represents another recommendation which, in my opinion, offers the article credibility but it partially reduces the prestige of the analyst, meaning the idea that the journalist's statements are valid only if they are confirmed by another specialist.

The use of some outstanding statements in order to surprise the readers represents a piece of advice which makes us think of the manipulation of emotion which will replace reason, advice which together with the suggestion of promising a conflict shows us that online journalism is unreal, phantasmagorical, hyperbolized and maybe even demonished.

In order to exemplify it is indicated to use some sources which belong to journals and other that come from the area of blogs.

A good example might be the magazine "Cadran politic", where in October 2017, the author Radu Florea, using the title Brexit does not have any concept, presented the above mentioned situation using a subtitle such as *The German industry perceived "with concern" the progress of the Brexit negotiations, as stated by Joachim Lang, the leader of the German Industry Federation (BDI):*

He later on spoke about the fact that:

"Great Britain is the third export destination from Germany and the fifth most important commercial partner. ... There is no clear concept for Brexit in Great Britain, despite the fact that it is spoken much about it", he added.

.... The German Industry Federation said that it set up an operative work team in order to prepare the plans for UK to exit the EU in March 2019.

According to the press agency Reuters, this operative work team includes important companies such as Airbus, Siemens and Deutsche Bank.

.... German companies in Great Britain and Northern Ireland have to improve in the case that the Brexit becomes very tough" added Lang.

Analysing the title our expectations lead to the political and economic realities of Great Britain, thinking that there is a problem regarding the Brexit strategy from the European Union.

The first subtitle leads us to Germany, from where we have a statement with connotations related to the production and export of German vehicles and not related to Brexit.

The article also refers to a mixture of information related to the intentions of the German group to create an export strategy combined with information about the inactivity of some British parties.

Therefore we notice that in online journalism we can find attraction, information groups, but we can also easily identify forms that lack any essence.

Going further in the area of blogs because they also enter in the area of online journalism, analysing Radu Tudor's blog, in an October 2017 article, entitled Piranha 5, a very good start for the endowment of the Romanian Army, we can notice that the blogger (a well-known political analyst) is not very good at weapon systems, but he speaks about these aspects in the following manner (RADU, 2017):

"The collaboration agreement between the Ministry of Economics and General Dynamics, the American weapon producer, was signed on Tuesday, in front of the Mihai Tudose, the Romanian Prime Minister, an agreement regarding the production and delivery of the Piranha 5 armoured vehicles.

Prime Minister Mihai Tudose took part in the signing ceremony of the Understanding Memorandum and the Collaboration agreement between the Ministry of Economics and Romarm, through the Bucharest Mechanical Plant the American company General Dynamics, which owns the plant of the Swiss armoured transporters Mowag", states the Government...

The Understanding memorandum, signed today, establishes the preliminary guidelines of the cooperation, as well as the future actions that have

the purpose of forming a mixed society between the Bucharest Mechanical Plant and the company General Dynamics, in order to produce armoured vehicles for the Romanian Army. Within the future society, the Bucharest Mechanical Plant will participate with assets consisting of manufacturing lines and employees, who will attend training courses at the American company headquarters. ...

The closing of this collaboration between a Romanian state company and the American company General Dynamics represents an extraordinary moment for the Romanian defence industry", stated Prime Minister Mihai Tudose, quoted by Mediafax."

Analysing the content we notice that we do not have information about what Piranha 5 represents and about the requirements of the army. Instead, we only have information on the signing of the memorandum between a Romanian and an American company and on the agreement between a Romanian company and the Romanian Ministry of Economics.

Here we also notice a structure of the article, but the content is far from the reader's expectations.

3. INSTEAD OF CONCLUSIONS

Without being nostalgic about the past, without claiming that the journalist has to be a writer and without considering that all the information delivered has to represent knowledge, we are obliged to admit the fact that online journalism tends towards superficiality and an area of fiction, creating forms without any essence and last but not least, it is predisposed to acceptance without any control filters.

Alexandru Lebedev (the founder of the website for diez.md.) claims that: "I would say that the other existing genres, audio, video and written text are combined in an amalgam which generally offers a new form to this type of journalism.

The journalist's ethic is pretty much the same in every environment. Of course, this side of speed with the classical rule of offering the information from two-three sources up to its publishing is a little bit different. News is now constantly updated. If you write in the media or on TV, you need to hand in the reportage by six o'clock and if you do not have the information, you do not deliver it, since it is not balanced, now, with each new

information that appears, you update the news. It is a sort of continuous news. If you have information, you deliver it. The reader sees it and can come up with sources and details that you did not know."

In online, a material can be corrected, completed or updated at any time. However, ethics remains the same as in the traditional journalism and news on a particular site has to fulfill the same criteria as radio, TV or newspaper news (MEDIA AZI, n.d.).

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