Credibility - an Honest Claim in the Current Romanian Press

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Abstract

In this article we analysed a series of discursive processes used by some Romanian journalists to give credibility to their texts. As a case study we chose the most visited news portal in Romania since the parliamentary elections in 2012. We analysed the few hundred materials written on this temp and managed to establish a writing grid so as to raise the level of reliability of the data.

Keywords: Journalism, Credibility

In our opinion, to continue nevertheless its road to *the producer and consumer at the same time*, a journalistic text can still score in terms of credibility through the freedom of choice this concept expresses. The probability to be believed can be a sign of freedom for the recipient.

The concept supported and still supports transformation. Alexandre Janvier (2007) shows that the credibility was lost since the 90s. This happened because the narration of facts was in systematic competition with and even substituted by comment. *Stricto sensu*, according to the researcher's expression, it is about the presence in the specialists' journalistic spaces, the statements (analysis) of which were / are systematically contradicted by reporters on the ground. Often, the two categories of senders contradicted and not few were the moments when, according to the researcher, they lost the debate. We believe this is how it might be explained these days the need to support a journalistic message with a "specialist's" testimony / explanation.

In this pursuit of audience, in this need to seduce the audience, whether it

is (or maybe precisely because of that) made up of *producers and consumers at the same time*, we can identify another cause of loss credibility, following Ramonet's reasoning (2011). In addition to the competition between professionals and reporters, Ramonet believes that this crisis of credibility is caused by speculative journalism, entertainment show, which triumphs at the detriment of quality requirement.

The journalistic credibility itself has grown today to be explained by the authority of the message sources and the authority of those who support the reporter's message. This state threw the media in a continuous battle to regain its public's trust, the trust of public opinion (Janvier, p. 113-114). The same opinion is shared by Giovanni di Lorenzo (Die Zeit) who knows that people want "information with stamp, i.e. the path of which leads to a reliable source" (Ramonet, p. 131).

The same direction, of building authority, is also pursued by the researcher Patrick Charaudeau (2002). According to him, credibility is a "state" which "arises from someone's judgment who is sure of what he sees and / or hears and, therefore, about the person speaking and who is also judged as credible". The sender enters into a "process of building credibility". Credibility is the result of a process of making the discourse believable, of a discursive strategy (p.154). The sender, the journalist, "brings proof that what he says is true, whether in terms of the existence of facts which speak or in terms of the explanation brought" (p. 155).

Specialized works converge in the idea that the main items of the expertise / credibility for informational sites are: recognized site authority inside and outside the online medium; transparent metering, undertaking a topic, the material is contextualized by quotes, references. Going through these items, we could notice that credibility resources are explainable and arising from the discursive rules of classical communication. We believe that an important source of credit of the published materials will be the foundation and undertaking of a verifiable identity, identity which does not necessarily depend on tradition but rather on the sender's skills of planned communication.

But credibility is also built on language. Claude Jamet, for example, accepts as credible the ascertaining statements and not the performative utterances (1999, p. 9). On the other hand, the same researcher believes that the information is both an illocutionary and a perlocutionary act because information produces opinion (p. 10).

The journalistic text is today a platform on which the sender "imitates interactivity" based on the promise of an "interpretative cooperation" (p. 11) never completed. The sender generates discursive structures and trajectories that support a particular point of view. By credibility, we understand the battle the sender (the media) leads so to be perceived as "power of the truth" and credibility will signify winning this battle, the sender's domination of communication act.

www.adevărul.ro

It seems that the target audience is not the reader with an average intelligence who should be protected from exact numbers, but rather the politician for whom every vote counts. *Adevărul* ober (www.adevarul.ro, 14th of October 2012) chose to present the information on the referendum by analogy, as a strictly timed competition. The stake, the score was set up by the presence / absence at the vote. Thus, all materials relating to the referendum are built around turnout percentage and the total number of registered voters. As it is shown by subsequent events, the lists on which the publication built its speech was strongly questioned.

The sender will undertake the authorship for the information provided through the tension created in writing and through the multitude of details offered. Rarely is the information assigned to a source with verifiable identity.

Most of the articles are made up by comparison with the figure indicating the national average. Therefore, the localities are grouped according to this antagonistic criterion and the articles offer information about "under" or "over" the national average position. In the same key, participation is positive and absenteeism negative.

The publication explicitly encourages turnout by the honours granted, by the rankings they make: gold, silver, bronze, or slacker/chief:

Alba remains the last in the informal top (Dorin Timoneea, adevarul.ro);

Referendum 2012 Olt: With a turnout of 55.53% at 09.00 p.m., Olt holds "silver" (adevarul.ro)

Referendum 2012 Prahova. 41.07% turnout at 08.00 p.m., above the national average (Dava Mihai, adevarul.ro)

Gorj ranking tenth on the national level (Alin Ion, adevarul.ro)

Until 17.00 hours in Botosani county there was a turnout of voters of 34.10%, ranking sixth on the national level (Liliana Anutei, adevarul.ro).

• Dolj County ranks 11th on the national level (Andreea Mitrache, adevarul.ro)

Competitive spirit also intervenes in the assessment of urban and rural areas: "Rural areas lead this time too: 30.28% of the citizens duly complied with their duty and voted. In towns, only 25.41% of voters showed up to vote" (adevarul.ro). This antagonism finds application in comparison of past and present, the comparison between previous elections and the current ones: "time registered at the local elections from June 10th" (adevarul.ro). Creating and maintaining this antithetical perspective of competition is, in our view, a way to give credibility to the speech, giving to the recipient the opportunity to contemplate both competitors: winners and losers.

On the other hand, there are procedures of dissimulation (conscious or not), the method most commonly used being ambiguity. For example, in the not undertaken authorial statement, "said a Romanian who works in France and who was near the polling stations in search for a driver who would take way north" (adevarul.ro), there are provided details about the immediate state of the source, but not basic information - name, age, occupation. Since details are described in specialist textbooks as the primary source of credibility of a journalistic speech, the process is present in this case by duplicating information: indirect style doubled by direct style: "I'm looking for a Romanian driver because I am heading towards Romania" (adevarul.ro). Ambiguity arises in the use / involvement of the sources. For example: "By 08.00 p.m., the turnout in Sibiu County was below the national average communicated to the Central Electoral Commission, which is 37.67%" (Ramona Gaina, adevarul.ro). The reporting journalist does not provide the name of the source, although it was an official one.

The same competition for the authorship of the statement appears in the following situation: "BBC. The referendum for the dismissal of President Traian Băsescu was a subject of great interest yesterday for the international media. Many publications, radio and television had correspondents on the spot" (Viorica Marin, adevarul.ro). We cannot decide whether this statement belongs to BBC institution, as we tend to interpret graphical cues, or if it is only a comment made by the journalist.

Ambiguity is created also linked to the identity of the same person. For example, for the following statement posted on a national news portal, the reader cannot decide if Flavius Boncea is one and the same person described as "former spokesperson": "Flavius Boncea, a convinced monarchist who wanted to exercise his right to participate in the referendum, only managed to cancel his vote. Former spokesman of Timisoara City Hall who entered in the City Council into

the lists for Union for Timis made a remark with a pen next to the question: "Do you agree with President Traian Băsescu's dismissal?" (Local Newsrooms, adevarul.ro).

Ambiguity is encouraged in the following context, as well. The connection between the pizza box and voting is not explicit: "No one from the so-called beach went to the polling station in Sag where it is quiet, cool and where you get your ballot on a pizza box". (Catalin Radu, adevarul.ro)

Incoherence and ambiguity are hidden behind the many details, behind the figures difficult to follow, doubled with different ways of counting: percentages and numbers: "680 vehicles were checked and 1,681 people were identified. Of the 179 confirmed electoral incidents, 63% were reported at sole emergency call number 112" (Ionut Cristian Ungureanu, adevarul.ro).

Contiguous to the incoherence is the irrelevant information offer: "smiled to the bystanders as if they were at a restaurant with expensive menus from a tourist area" (adevarul.ro).

Another method repeatedly applied is the lack of determination. In this context: "President of PDL Iasi, Dumitru Oprea, says that he filed complaints before the County Election Office and Police, as well as criminal complaints before the Prosecutor of the Iaşi Court of Law showing serious irregularities recorded at polling station no. 166 from Tehnoton High school" (Local Newsroom, adevarul.ro); we will not learn by the end of the text which were in fact those irregularities. We will not find neither people's names nor the name of the source in the following situation: "A man from Şicula locality, Arad County, tore off stamped ballot" (Claudiu Untaru Cretu, adevarul.ro). The same type of character without identity appears in the material that tells about the way the vote was conducted in Brussels: "Can I vote with a Belgian passport? Asks a Romanian who came with two other compatriots to vote" (adevarul.ro).

One of the main causes for the loss of confidence in the media comes, as we said above, from professional errors. In addition to incorrect citations, to inconsistency and incoherence, style errors and rehearsals also occur: "After the voting process was suspended at Beba Veche <u>because</u> (sn, X.N.) of a power failure occurred <u>because</u> (sn, XN) of the storm, plague arrived in Timisoara, as well, affecting voting process" (Stefan Both, adevarul.ro) or grammatical errors: "The 12 criminal cases seven of them relate to the offense of obstruction of the crime of obstruction of voting, 4 for the electoral bribery offense and one of them for destruction" (Dana, Mihai, adevarul.ro) or "storm that hit Arad made electoral process to be interrupted in four localities due to power failure. Lucian Cozma,

spokesman of Arad Prefecture stated that at around 08.30 p.m., the electoral process was interrupted in ZADARENI Commune and Cruceni village, belonging to Sagu Commune" (Claudiua Untaru Cretu, adevarul.ro).

Notwithstanding the above, the portal is one of the most visited in Romania.

As a whole, the speech is credible. One of the most effective mechanisms for speech credibility is, in our opinion, the ritualistic repetition. The figures and details from the following examples are reproduced almost in every article, "where the national average is 37.67%" (adevarul.ro), "37.67% of the country's citizens exercised their democratic right to vote", "This time too, the turnout is still higher in rural areas, where 44.39% of voters voted, and in urban areas there was registered a presence of 32.79%" (adevarul.ro), "the turnout in Bistrita-Năsăud at 08.00 p.m. was 28.12 per cent, below the national average communicated by the Central Electoral Commission of 37.67% per cent" (Dan Anghel, adevarul.ro).

Another method is the irony style. Directed competition is accompanied by a rally of the negative side, of those who did not show up at the vote: "Traian Basescu was 'decorated' from morning till evening with complaints and criminal cases" (Local Newsroom, adevarul.ro); "The sides are two on the beach as well, just like everywhere else, in addition to the margin of the undecided people. Some who wear undershorts agree with the president's removal, others say they will not participate in the referendum" [Catalin Radu,] adevarul.ro). On the other hand, those who go to the polls are evaluated positively: "According to data provided by the County Election Bureau, also forwarded by the Central Electoral Bureau it is revealed that by 05.00 p.m., in Olt County there voted 39.37% of the total number of citizens expected to turnout, that is 386,319 people. The most hardworking proved to be voters from rural areas, where 44.39% expressed their electoral choice, while in urban areas 32.79% of the citizens on the electoral rolls voted" (Mugurel Manea, adevarul.ro).

Very many texts include present elements of opinion: "By 05.00 p.m., in Salaj there voted only (sn, xn) 22.31" (Olimpia Man, adevarul.ro); "A little more conscientious (sn, xn) than the average were rural residents with a turnout rate of 24.73 per cent, while the percentage of townspeople turnout was only 19.19 per cent" (Olimpia Man).

On this portal it is univocally built a perspective of the event where information is entirely controlled by the issuing institution, by the press institution, respectively. The event turns within the text into a competition where

one side is beforehand declared winner, the side which includes those who exercised their right to vote. In this context, the receiver is urged to accept the opinion of the majority, the opinion of the winners.

Conclusions

Credibility is an extremely important objective in contemporary journalism. In a moment as tense as the moment of the elections, the Romanian press chooses to abandon objectivity and focus its efforts to convince the public. Lately there has been a great concern of the press to lead its public to believe, to accept one message or another outside the claim of objectivity. By irony, repetition, by cultivating ambiguity, then by overcrowding all insignificant details for the event as a whole, the journalist seek to dominate not only his own mechanisms of speech assembly, but also the potentialities of meaning and textual information. A second voice, a voice of dialogue is not accepted.

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