THE LAST 20 YEARS OF ROMANIAN JOURNALISM: PRACTICES AND VALUES. A METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH[1]

***Abstract**: The research aims at investigating the way by which Romanian journalists are relating to the notion of credibility, made operational in relation to the dimensions of: truth - non-truth, objectivity -subjectivity, reality - fiction. We propose to explore the positioning of the journalists toward the practices of information, professional norm, and profession values. The journalistic information practices will be analyzed on the ideal (the norm) and representational (the journalists representations about the practices of information) sides. The research is oriented within the sphere of the cultural investigation (Cultural studies) of journalism. The cultural investigation is of an exploratory nature, with a strong interdisciplinary component and was validated scientifically mainly by Anglo-Saxon researchers in specific cultural contexts. Our proposed research adapts the cultural investigation to the Romanian socio-cultural specific and constitutes a base for contouring the professional profile of Romanian journalists.*

***Keywords**: the journalistic information, professional values, practices of information.*

Introduction

The research in Journalism is relatively new in Romania, becoming more visible together with the development of the Journalism education and the structuring of the education in the Sciences of Communication. In the world, there are a number of domains of fundamental research of the Journalism: sociological investigation, studies in language studies, cultural studies and historical research.

Our perspective proposes a derivate approach, from the sphere of the cultural studies, of one of the fundamental practices of journalism: *information* can be profitable to the research field as well as to the evolution of the profession in Romania.

The main objective of a research can be identifying the practices of information as registered today in the Romanian editorial offices, taking as a model similar researches made in Europe and the United States by prestigious researchers, as Theodore Glasser (1995, 1999), Armand Mattelart (1999, 2001, 2003), Silvio Waisbord (2008, 2009), Bonnie Brennen (2000, 2003, 2005), Hanno Hardt (1992, 1998, 2004), and Karin Wahl-Jorgensen (2005, 2008). The interest for this type of research is linked to the ever-increasing idea that the journalism is a cultural fact and a way to conceptualize culture by the means of a representational discourse. At the center of the scientific preoccupations in cultural studies is the triad: *fact-truth-reality*, which is of greatest interest when we discuss the practices of credible information, the concept unifying the three notions being that of *representational discourse*.

The analysis has shown that the discourse promoted by journalists about themselves and about the values, norms and journalistic practices, one that continuously celebrates their own activity, is hiding a series of weak spots of the profession of journalist: commercial logic, illusion of freedom of expression, of objectivity, the complex of hierarchical subordination, the complex of lack of culture etc. Studies have shown that journalists valorize the identification with a professional category echoing the vigilante of the collective imaginary, the adventurer, the traveler (Ruellan, 1993, Rosca, 2000). In this context, we refer to recent researches from certain authors as: Bonnie Brennen, Denis Ruellan, Jo Saltzman, Michael Schudson. About this type of

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researches, Barbie Zelizer stated that the representation of journalism had an impact on the way journalists are maintaining the enthusiasm for this domain (2007, p. 202).

For this reason, an analysis of the discourse of the journalists about the myth of the correct information, about justice and truth, about the freedom of expression constitutes a necessary endeavor in any society, even more in a society like ours, looking for its identity and landmarks. This is the point of such a research, which will use the method of study of multiple cases, by techniques adequate to this type of qualitative demarche: semi-structured interview, observation and discourse analysis.

Premises of the research

In the present context, all the studies and papers about Romanian press were either theoretical synthesis, or punctual case studies, most often starting from cultural stereotypes circulating in the Romanian public space. We could not identify major projects aiming primarily at the evolution of the profession from 1989 up to the present. Until now, the researches in the headed me to realize the necessity of a project that should explore the professional field of the Romanian journalists, in evolution, not sequentially. Consequently, we conceived a research project in order to define a contour of the landmarks of the profession of journalist in the last 20 years Romania.

At this stage, we channeled our efforts on the *practices of credible information* in journalism, because they realize the most important component of the profession of journalist, regardless the historical epoch in which it is practiced or the support on which the message is distributed.

The method

The proposed research has the following objectives:

1. Operationalization and definition of credible information and of credibility in the professional field of Romanian journalism;
2. Deconstruction of the myth of the correct information;
3. Identification of professional representations of the Romanian journalists;
4. Inventory of professional values advanced by the Romanian journalists in the discourse about their profession;
5. Confronting sets of professional values attached to the socio-professional category of journalists included in the sample;
6. Exploring the evolution of the discourse about their profession of the journalists in the last 20 years.

The investigation can be carried out using a cumulation of techniques specific to qualitative approaches, which we consider useful in order to reach the intended objectives. We develop the method of multiple cases study together with techniques adequate to this qualitative approach: semi-structured interview, observation and discourse analysis.

According to Robert K. Yin, the case study "defines a strategy of achieving a research that requires empirical investigations regarding a particular, contemporary phenomenon, within a real life context, and making use of multiple sources of information (interviews, questionnaires, testimonies, proofs, and documents)" (Robert K. Yin, 2009). The method of multiple cases study as being the most appropriate to explore the professional practices of credible information in evolution, in the last 20 years of Romanian journalism.

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Because we are primarily interested in the representational discourse, we are proposing the investigation of three phenomena: the discourse about the practices of information of those journalists active in their profession in 1989-1990, the discourse of the journalists who entered the profession in the nineties, and the discourse of the journalists who entered the profession after graduating profiled studies. Therefore, we focus the investigation will on these three socio-professional categories, each one representing a concrete case that will be subjected to thorough investigation and analysis. In order for the construct of the research to be valid, we will make use of a formal protocol.

The final report of the research will be the result of the corroboration of the results of the analysis of each separate case study. The sampling of the category of investigated journalists will be simple aleatory by evaluation techniques. Each category of journalists will be selected according to two criteria: access to profession and a minimum of 5 years of practicing the profession. The sample will include journalists who are representative for all kinds of media existent on the market at that moment. Attainment of each of the samples will be established after determining the professional context by analysis of market studies, media statistics, and other relevant documents.

The relevance of the research

Our research aims to analyze the most important component of the journalistic practices, that of informing: practices, techniques, the norm and the registered situation, self-legitimating discourses, and legitimating discourses.

Disseminated within the academic space and journalists society, the results of the research can have a contribution to re-launching in a more coherent and pragmatic perspective the debate about the norms, practices and values of the profession. An analysis of the discourse of the journalists about the myth of the correct information, about justice and truth, and freedom of expression constitute a necessary step in any society, even more in a society like ours, looking for its identity and landmarks.

In the nowadays context, all studies and works about the Romanian press were either theoretical syntheses or punctual case studies, most often starting from cultural stereotypes circulating within the Romanian public space. We could not identify major projects holding as main objective the evolution of the profession from 1989 until present.

Our endeavor could set a beginning for the research of the ensemble of professional practices of journalism, and a starting point for the initiation of a direction of research that should explore by consecrated methods from the sphere of sociology, anthropology, and communication sciences the professional field of the communicators in Romania.

Our present paper proposes a methodological inventory of all the practices and values that pointed out the last 20 years of the Romanian journalism`s evolution. The approach constitutes the basis of a larger research project that we initiated and intend to carry out for the next three years. The novelty of this project consists into the adoption for the first time of a cultural studies perspective applied to Romanian journalism, perspective which was detailed and methodologically set up in this paper.

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