THE ROMANIAN PUBLIC RADIO AND THE CHALLENGES OF MODERNITY

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Abstract: The last twenty years have been marked by an unprecedented technological revolution that has made the remote communication easier and cheaper. The Internet has proven to be the universal platform to bind the world together and provide almost all the information possible, at anytime and to anyone. The social networks are now facile ways not only to communicate with each other, no matter where we live on this Earth, but also to spread the news as fast and far as possible. This new media paradigm that includes social media and Web 2.0 has offered the chance for the traditional radio to expand its potential audience and to express in more than just the classic voice-only way. It is exactly what the public radio worldwide have done and the stations belonging to the Romanian Radio Broadcasting Corporation (Societatea Română de Radiodifuziune – SRR) have adapted themselves to this new convergent journalistic environment. Radio România Oltenia-Craiova is a perfect example in this respect, as demonstrated in our case study.
Key words: radio, new media, social media, convergence, Web 2.0

The changes of media paradigm triggered by the spectacular technological innovations we have witnessed in the past two decades dramatically affected the editorial strategies of the radio stations. The public radios, which are sometimes presumed to be not as immediately opened to changes as the private ones, have been forced to adjust as fast as possible the ways in which they design their programmes and adapt to the new convergent media environment. Although initially considered as a threat to the traditional voice-only radio, the Internet has proven to be nothing but an invaluable opportunity, a platform with which the radio stations, public ones included, can reach a significantly broader audience than before: "New technology has helped the radio industry evolve and increase in popularity. There's been a huge increase in the number of people downloading podcasts and streaming internet radio. Most radio stations archive past broadcasts on their official websites, for listeners to

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access on-demand. Studio webcams and social media have changed the audience relationship with radio by making listeners feel more connected to the presenters. This type of media convergence is also achieved through the use of blogs and forums on radio websites".[32]

Thus, this evolving media landscape has been a chance to increase the number of people that receive the information from the once classic public radio stations. The "cyber-attack" has concretized in a concentrated multi-layered development, providing radio products through websites, social media networks, podcasts and all the modern electronic devices to be found on a continuously changing technological market: "Information communication technology has helped in the technological development of mass communication. With the increased role of the Internet in delivering news and information, mass communication studies and media organizations tend to focus on the convergence of publishing, broadcasting and digital communication. The Internet was created to provide easy access to much needed information, education and entertainment online. It provides less expensive option to these sources, because people can easily download an entire musical album from a website and use at a much lower fee. Also, introduction of this new technology has not only enhanced mass communication but also challenges the traditional concept of mass communication where according to the old definition, the source of a mass communication message was defined as a large organization whose message is sent to a large heterogeneous scattered audience".[33]

According to Tiziano Bonini, radio reached its fourth phase of evolution. Taking into consideration the relation between medium and public, these are the four stages in the history of radio identified by the Italian lecturer in Media Studies at the Department of Social, Political, and Cognitive Sciences of the University of Siena:

First stage (1920–1945): An invisible medium for an invisible public
Second stage (1945–1994): An invisible medium for an audible public
Third stage (1994–2004): An invisible medium for a readable public
Fourth stage (2004–ongoing): A visible medium for a networked public[34]

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[32] https://www.bbc.co.uk/education/guides/z2s97hv/revision/2

[33] Mwaura, Joan, *The Impact of New Media on Radio Broadcast. Case Study of Capital FM (Kenya)*, Projektarbeit, 2011, 79 Seiten, **http://www.grin.com/de/e-book/187623/the-impact-of-new-media-on-radio-broadcast**

[34] Bonini, Tiziano, *The New Role of Radio and its Public in the Age of Social Network Sites*, First Monday - Peer-Reviewed Journal on the Internet, Volume 19, Number 6, 2014, http://firstmonday.org/article/view/4311/4093#author

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Bonini considers that the rise of Social Networking Sites (SNS) is the milestone of this fourth stage: "SNS exist since 1997 (Boyd and Ellison, 2007) but the social network that integrated better with radio has been Facebook (FB), created in 2004, followed by Twitter. The fans/friends/followers of a radio station's or presenter's FB or Twitter profile are a public which is very different from a traditional one: this is due to the specific characteristics of the medium and to a change in consumer culture brought about by the rise of the information economy. (…) The new public emerging from the hybridization of broadcast and ICT technologies is more productive (Arvidsson, 2011) and networked".[35] So radio is not anymore what it used to be, striving, as Paula Cordeiro writes, to become a more web-based and multimedia business: "This is currently framed by a set of three different, though interchangeable elements: coverage (spectrum distribution) branding and content, which relate each other to create the third; a business structure that, as Hesmondhalgh (2002) has argued, fits the cultural industries framework via broadcasters' professional complex system of production. Further, the intangibility of radio content places the radio broadcasting industry within the cultural industries system, which depends upon defining distinct audiences".[36]

Furthermore, Paula Cordeiro notices a change of paradigm with profound consequences not only to the mass communication, but to all the fields of human activity, a dramatic anthropological and cultural transformation: "Convergence results from dynamics in technology and synergies of media, computing and telecommunications, adding value to existing processes and creating new ones. These establish a digital culture in which every device and content is reconceptualised as digital".[37] Convergence leads to "a change in linear media communications, by supporting the one-to-many traditional model of communication, but also establishing one-to-one, many-to-one or many-to-many communications, enabling conversations between users", the concept referring to "a new strategy related to information management, its production and distribution".[38]

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[35] Ibidem

[36] Cordeiro, Paula, *Radio Becoming R@dio: Convergence, Interactivity and Broadcasting Trends in Perspective*, Participations – Journal of Audience & Reception Studies, Volume 9, Issue 2, 2012, p.494

[37] Cordeiro, Paula, *Radio Becoming R@dio: Convergence, Interactivity and Broadcasting Trends in Perspective*, Participations – Journal of Audience & Reception Studies, Volume 9, Issue 2, 2012, p.496

[38] Ibidem, p.498

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In other words, radio has found new modalities to reach the media consumers and must permanently develop the know-how necessary to improve the efficiency in order to fulfill its new goals. The everyday news battle has been translocated to a greater extent into the online environment. The sites and the social network pages are provisioned with content as fast as possible and there is a race against both time and the other players in the media market. A process of adaptation that has come naturally in the course of recent history, especially when taking into consideration the very reason to be of media itself, as Jennifer Alejandro observes: "These days, it is very hard to find a Web 2.0 technology (social media networks, blogs, microblogs, podcasts) that news companies have not embraced. If the essence of Web 2.0 is about sharing and organizing, the essence of journalism is about being the voice of the community, so isn't it the journalist's role to adapt and bring journalistic values to these social media environments to better serve the public interest?".[39]

The public radios in Romania and elsewhere have noticed the new horizons ahead and seized the opportunities from this profound change of media paradigm. They have actually taken the online environments by storm and managed to expand their audience. A dramatic transformation which initially took by surprise even most of the people from the radio phenomenon itself, as Anice Hassim remarks: "In this connected world, where will radio fit in? This single-dimensional, audio-only medium is, in fact, poised to receive the lion's share of benefit from online and mobile media. This is because modern radio is actually far removed from the audio-only construct that most people, both in and out the industry, consumers and advertisers alike, believe it to be".[40]

Case Study: Radio România Oltenia-Craiova

The Romanian public radio network consists of national, regional and local stations. Throughout the country there are eight regional studios, in Bucharest, Cluj, Constanța, Craiova, Iași, Reșița, Târgu Mureș and Timișoara. All these stations belonging to the Romanian Radio Broadcasting Corporation

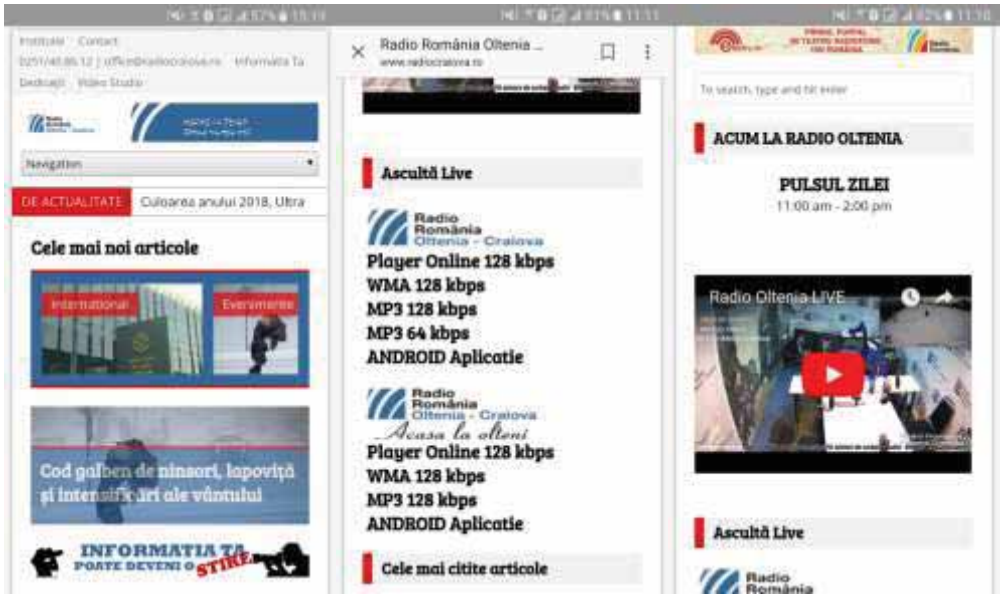
[39] Alejandro, Jennifer, *Journalism in the Age of Social Media*, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, The University of Oxford, Hilary and Trinity Terms, 2010, p.21, http://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/research/files/Journalism%2520in%2520the%2520Age%2520of%2520Social%2520Media.pdf

[40] Hassim, Anice, *Radio's New Relevance. The Real 21st Century*, The Frequency Advantage, 2009, http://immedia.co.za/wp-content/uploads/press-room/anice_hassim_the_real_21st_century.pdf

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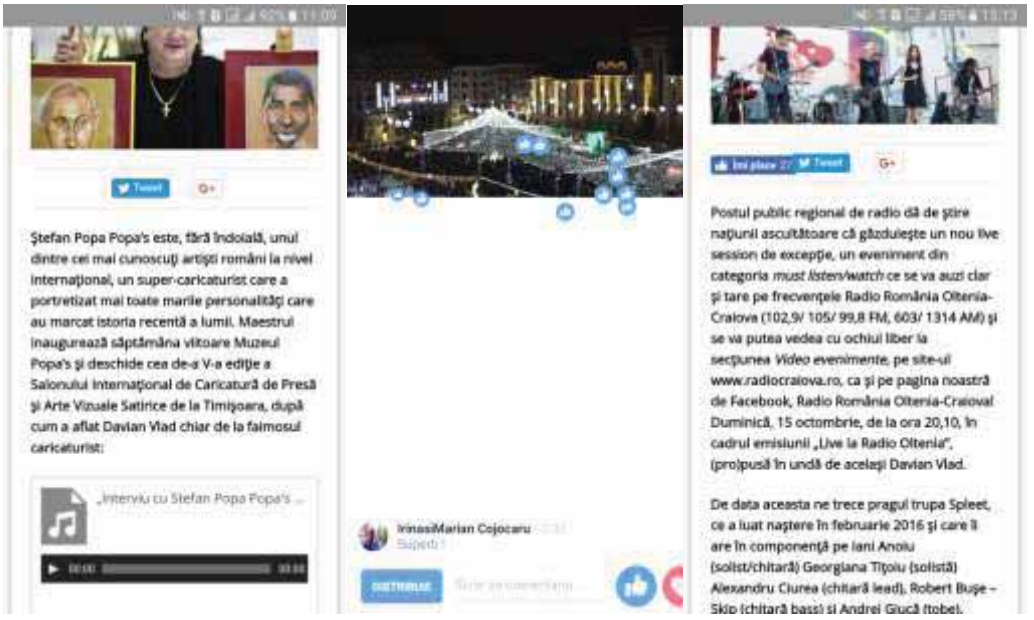
(Societatea Română de Radiodifuziune – SRR) have adjusted their media strategies and embraced the new means of reaching the public, expanding their target audience. By broadcasting online, their programmes are now received not only by the traditional listeners, but also by those who usually don't listen to radio in the classic manner. And the national, regional and local information is now a click away from anyone anywhere through their websites and their social media pages. The informational content consists nowadays of radio broadcasts, written texts, photographs and videos. Radio is now r@dio, as Paula Cordeiro suggestively put it.

Radio România Oltenia-Craiova terrestrially covers the five counties belonging to the historical region of Oltenia, plus the neighboring counties and those from the North-West part of Bulgaria and the North-East part of Serbia, regions where we can find large communities of Romanian ethnics. As all the other SRR stations, Radio Oltenia developed a structured system of widening its ways of making itself heard through all the platforms that are connected to the World Wide Web. The regional station is now extremely active online and its website, www.radiocraiova.ro, is the main platform used by Radio Oltenia to deliver relevant local, regional, national, and even international information in various formats: text, audio, video. The radio programmes can be listened to online, on site, but also on the Facebook page of the station (Radio Romania Oltenia-Craiova, https://www.facebook.com/radiocraiova/), as well as through the available applications for Android or iOS. And a web camera transmits live images from the studio around the clock.



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The most important radio products are now available on site right after or simultaneously with the radio transmission. The reports, the interviews, the feature reports, the radio documentaries and all the other specific products are to be found now online, in case one misses their initial airing or wants to take another listen. The website is also used to promote the radio programmes and for video live transmissions from events of general interest.



The most important shows are available in video format not only through the web cam installed in the studio, but also through the live transmissions on social networks, especially Facebook. The special guests who come in the studio at Radio Oltenia can now also be seen by the audience, a fact that can only enhance the interest of people in the editorial content of the regional station transmitting from the heart of Oltenia. Another major advantage is that when missing the original broadcast, the content is always recoverable by entering the site or the Facebook page of the station at any time. We must emphasize the fact that besides the main Facebook page of the regional radio, all of the main radio shows of the station and all the presenters have their own pages, a real Facebook network that augments the overall online visibility of the radio station.

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The Internet facilitates a multimedia approach for Radio România Oltenia-Craiova and the SRR regional station tries to constantly diversify its offer to the public by delivering various products. The website, the social network pages, and the radio transmissions are interconnected and supply content to each other, a permanent exchange of information that broadens both the potential audience and the means of journalistic expression. As an example, "Live la Radio Oltenia", the monthly live session of the regional public radio that gives the chance for local artists to present themselves to the public, is transmitted both on radio waves and online (website and Facebook), and the feedback received confirms the continuous audience growth of this radio show. The virtually unlimited possibilities offered by the online platforms have also given the opportunity for the station to explore different artistic forms of visual expression like making videos for songs of some of the bands that took part at the live sessions hosted by the regional public radio.



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Radio România Oltenia-Craiova also produced recently twelve video documentaries about Romanian songs that made history as part of the project entitled "Eu aleg România. Ascultă-ți muzica. 100 de melodii ale românilor" ("I Choose Romania. Listen to Your Music. 100 Songs of the Romanians") which are to be found on the official site of the project (http://eualegromania.ro), on the Youtube channel of the Radio România Regional network, and on the Facebook pages of all the regional public radio stations.



In conclusion, Radio România Oltenia-Craiova have managed to make a swift and smooth adaptation to the new convergent media environment and has proved that it can adjust its editorial strategies in order to be able to keep up with the ongoing changes of media paradigm.

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