SOCIAL JOURNALISM IN ROMANIAN TELEVISION PROGRAMS

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Abstract: *Because we live in a time when the press is characterized by an excessive tabloidization we might think that topics not related to the senzational shows no interest for journalists. But social campaigns initiated and carried out by televisions in Romania in recent years shows that the interest in the life of the individual and the community still exist at the level of news editorial staff. This research tries to show if these campaigns reach their target, if the actions of journalists are changing something in society, if social empowerment can be activated or reactivated with these campaigns. We cannot help beeing doubtful and wondering: does the initiators of these campaigns follow audience and awards for quality journalism or they take seriously their role of "Fourth Power in the State" and tries to attract attention of the authorities or even to change something?*

Keywords: *social journalism, social campaigns, tabloidization, social responsibility*

Introduction

Media studies showed a significant increase since the beginning of the 90's. Most deal with how journalism has evolved, but especially with the way these steps of evolution are perceived in relation to ethical norms or classical conventions of the profession. Although it may have been used many terms to describe the phenomenon, probably "tabloidization" will remain the most representative for that type of media evolution which is rather a concept of marketing strategy.

In their rush to increase their audience ratings television concept has become somehow synonymous with the show world. Everything shows us the little screen must be spectacular because otherwise viewers would get bored. And for an certain audience the producers have speculated to the maximum the emotional involvement of those who are monitoring the programs.

On the basis of the relationship demand is very clear that TV stations offer what the public asks: sensational. It is broadcasted only what is new, relevant or interesting, so that any new information will be assigned with spectacular tint. This is very obvious in the news case , noticeable change goes from the fact that a common news with the potential to have much audience has a scenario, speech and the musical fund which the reporter and the editor will fit perfectly to ensure a maximum emotional impact.

The story is not a simple one, and the title would be *Handling Emotion*. And the beginning it could kick off with a TV team located at an event. Cameraman knows already the impact to the public of a close-up of a happy person or a gros-plan of a tear on a sad child cheek. The reporter is always seen as public representative, that person who is there only to be reporting facts to viewers, the briefing of "secure source".For this reason, looking at the early days of television, when the reporter was for those at home only one voice, the one that puts his questions, now the journalist has become part of the story. We seen them transmitting live the news or recording the material in the

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field, walking shoulder to shoulder with the people affected by natural disasters, helping them, or transmitting information from an helicopter. For the viewers, their presence is a certainty of truthfulness of the news. When is aleready in the editorial office, the news is prepared to "go out on stage". Editors, producers and publishers give their best to makes it the "News of the Day". Unfortunately, many times not all the matters relevant to the public are dealt with, the truth is told in half or even simple rumors get to make the subject of a news story, just for the sake of audience. Professional ethics problem is delicate on the current journalism. One of the most interesting answers related to this topic was given by Tom Wicker, political editor at New York Times magazine greatly rewarded for his work: "No question about it. Journalistic ethics is, I think, a real matter, a real subject, one that at least used to be scanted by the journalism schools. I think they ought to put more emphasis on it; but than again, it is very difficult. I wouldn't want to sit down myself, for example, and try to write a code of ethics for reporters. It is very difficult… What you have to inculcate to journalists- the editors should, and the journalism schools really should- is a sense of responsibility toward generally sound human values. There are times when journalistic values override what normally be considered human values. There are other times when they don't."(Newton, R., 1993: 10)

Social Journalism : place and role in the Newsroom

In the 90's as well has appearead in the USA the so-called *civic journalism*, "that journalism illustrated by various experiences of journalists to encourage the participation of citizens in the local community. American analysts show that this promotion of the proximity relationship and dialog with the public also has a positive effect on the quality of democratic life".(Lazăr,M.,2008: 12)

Over the ocean, this branch of journalism is highly developed. In Romania, however, only for a few years, it has begun to take large proportions. Val Valcu makes in his book Social Journalism (one of the few specialized publications in our country) one of the most relevant descriptions of the place and role of Social domain in a newsroom.

The opinion polls asked for by the newsrooms do not place the Social domain in the first 10 entries favorite of the readers." Health or Education are situated better., without talking about Timeliness or Revealings. Publishers attitude tells us, however, that journalists are the ones who started to minimalize it. What we have better worth to be on the first page, it is said at the meetings of the summary. Latest fallings within timeliness what remains and it's neither Political, or Sport or Culture, go to Social. The backway selection has created pages that do not shine and not restrain public attention; therefore they are neighter required,nor rejected". (Valcu,V.,2007: 32)

If such is the case in the written press, in television social journalism started to acquire other proportions. Journalists understood that politics is no longer in the foreground to viewers, but the interests of individuals and of the Community. Moderators rely on public's empathy , on his emotional involvement. "Thus, the news industry, like other cultural industries, has been subject to a steady process of concentration and conglomeration- one that involves news being produced by fewer interests" (Curan,J., 2000: 23)

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Social campaigns in television

This is how social campaigns have occurred on tv, and they have been able to make very good audience. And at this moment it is suiteable the next question: why do the social campaigns carried by television stations have a greater impact on citizens than other TV genres? In addition to the effect of the proximity relationship or the feeling of identification with some situations I will like to quote Roger Silverstone:“television is a domestic mediun. It is watched at home. Ignored at home. Discussed at home. Watched in private and with members of family or friends” (Silverstone,R.,1994: 24)

Watching social campaigns in Roamania television stations I suppose we could classifying them according two criteria:

1. From the point of view of the relationship with the authorities:
- Campaign started to penalize the authorities
- Campaign started to warn the authorities
- Campaign started to help the authorities

2. From the point of view of the campaign purpose
- Campaigns started to help the public to acknowledge certain problems or dangers
- Campaigns started in order to assist certain disadvantaged social categories
- Campaigns started in order to change the legal framework

Both public television and private televisions, in collaboration with the institutions of the State or with non-governmental organizations have started or have been involved with various social campaigns, as an urge for responsibility on behalf of the public.

Since 2003 the National Television (TVR) has proposed to the advertising agencies in Romania to carry out and to disseminate a series of social campaigns to involve Romanian society. Campaigns have been carried out on the basis of each TV station targets, TVR 1 addressing to the community and TVR 2 to the individual.

“Defeat the Waters” in 2005 is probably the best-known social campaign that the public television has involved in. To help those affected by natural disasters TVR , together with the Romanian Orthodox Church, have started suport actions as well as information and mobilization actions of those who wish to help. The priests from all over the country have gatered food, water, blankets and clothes. Manner and monasteries have been offered donations to people who suffered because of the flood. TVR has brought changes in its programs to make room for special editions and for the support actions, by organising fundraising for those affected by the floods.

In February and March 2007 TVR has run the program "Global Parent", in partnership with UNICEF, that was a campaign to help the children with disabilities in Romania. The funds collected were used for social services for the reintegration and rehabilitation for children with disabilities, support for kindergartens for integration of children with disabilities, supporting and equipping a maternity, sustaining a project of therapy through art for children with disabilities, as well as activities/campaigns to increase public awareness on the non-discrimination subject of children with disabilities.

In 2007 TVR initiated the "The Violence on Stadiums" campaign. By this , the television station aimed to pull an alarm signal regarding the extended acts of huliganism on stadiums in Romania. It started since the unfortunate incident before a derby between Steaua and Dinamo team, at the entry of Ghencea Stadium TVR cameraman Robert Cristea was spat out, and beaten with the chain by eight huligans.

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The News Departament has produced a series of documentaries and interviews with public figures in sports, but also with representatives of football teams' galleries. They also made reviews of outstanding events of violence on stadiums, both in the country and abroad. By these actions they wanted a reduction of violence on stadiums, of the huliganism acts.

"Help Roamania" is a campaign initiated in 2013 by the editorial news staff of the Public Television in order to change the voluntary work law in Romania, to convince many Romanians to do voluntary work. The touching broadcasted stories have brought audience edition by edition and the most tracked story (the one of volunteers from Ioana House) brought in front of the television screens 810,000 viewers, so we are talking about an average rating of 4.3 percent and an average market share of 8 %. We could watch the reports about adoptive grandmothers for the assisted children in the Princess Margareta Foundation, about the young Romanian doctor established in the US, which offers scholarships for Romanian children, about volunteers who are cooking for the Christians who go to bow to relics, about the Bucharest Ambulance Service volunteers, about the Center for Missing and Sexually Exploited Children volunteers.

The campaign has been carried out in collaboration with the Volume Federation, and the central purpose was to manage that voluntary work of Romania to be carried out in a common framework with the European one.

The journalists of the Intact Press Group , mainly trough Antena1 TV channel, in cooperation with the Always Close Foundation , have organized over the years social campaigns and foundraising campaigns for various causes.

In the summer of 2005, when massive floods have affected Romania, the campaign "Always close to the fellow human being" have collected funds for the affected people , for the renovation of schools, medical center but also for the purchase of vans to carry children to schools in hard-to-reach areas.

In November 2007 Antena1 broadcasted a televised foundraising through which considerable funds have been collected for Budimex Children's Hospital.

In the summer of 2010, the campaign "Water flows, Romania remains" carried out to help victims of Moldova floods has managed to gather 850 000 euros and have attracted 80 sponsors who were involved by providing building materials worth 225 000 euros and food and care worth 75 000 euros.

In 2011 took place the biggest medical social campaign, "I want to help!". By all Intact platforms were presented cases of suffering children, requiring emergency treatment or operations abroad. People have been receptive and over 40 cases have been dealt with.

Social reports carried out for the show "For the first time with Carmen Avram" bring international prestige for the Antenal 3. "Along way home", the feature story that tells the acount of Petrica Caslaru (the boy who had grown up in the horror camp of the Siret river. He had courage to return to Romania after 16 years, to meet the man who saved his life in an orphanage and to look for his mother) is a double winner World gold medal at New York Festivals World's Best Television and Film 2014, the categories Biography/Profiles and current affairs and nominated at the 35th edition of Emmy Awards.

ProTV television channel had carried on, perhaps, the most powerful social campaigns. A short time after its launch in 1995, PRO TV had started the campaign "Give and win". They followed "Days much clean", "Pro NATO" or "We care".

One of the most impressive at both visually and emotionally level is "There is life after death".The campaign purpose has been to empower the people, to mobilize the people

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for donation of organs, in order to make as many transplants they could. “There is life after death” tripled the number of patients saved through transplants.

“We have life in the blood” is also a PRO TV news mark campaign started in 2009 in order to encourage people to donate bone marrow and to determine the authorities to set up a Nonrelated Donors Register. The success of this campaign has resulted in setting up the Nonrelated Donors Romanian Register. The reporter Paula Herlo argues, however, that this is only the first step: “Of course I will not stop here. For me, the campaign will be completed at the time when the Romanian Register employees will find a nonrelated compatible with a sick man, and the transplant will be made in our country”.

“Do you know what your children are doing?” is one of the most disturbing social campaigns carried out by Pro TV. It was conceived in order to trigger an alarm signal regarding the way in which the Romanian children are taken care of and educated, after the parents' exodus on working abroad, and which fail to keep a constant connection with their children, abandoned at home, in the care of relatives. The campaign brought to Pro TV news the Emmy for television, the first prize of this kind won by a TV station in Eastern Europe.

Pro TV is the first television station which launched the fight for the defense of animals rights. Through the campaign “Stop torturing animals” initiated in 2007 they had managed to change the law. The petition submitted to the Government, the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies by the stars of the group was signed by hundreds of thousands of Romanians. The Law 9/2008 - the new law for the protection of animals, provides for fines of up to 10,000 lei and imprisonment for those who torture animals.

Evaluation of social campaigns

In Val Valcu’s opinion there are two types of assessment of public policies and we might could apply them very well and on social campaigns: (Valcu, V.,2007: 274- 275)

According the evaluation time: a) prospective, in the formulating time of the campaign; b) on the way, to deployment or monitoring; c) retrospectively, at the end of campaign.

According the criteria: efficiency, yield; equity, fairness (interviews in depth, focus-groups, opinion pools); compliance; fitness with socio-political context; the expected impact and the unwanted impact (“double differences”method)

When evaluating the campaigns, Valcu says that journalists can use the sociologists questions, as it showed in Ann Bonar Blalock’s study “Evaluation Research and Performance Management Movement - from estrangement to "Useful Integration”, in order to find out if a campaign has been successful. (Valcu,V.,2007: 275)

For the process evaluation. The program is implemented as it wanted?; What structures, policies and practices are carried out in the implementation context?; How it affects implementation the campaign results?

For the results evaluation. Do the campaign beneficiaries feel the expected type of effects or other types, independent, for which the campaign is responsible?

For the net impact evaluation. Does the certain manner of campaign implementation produce a real difference between the independent effects and other influences?(By these studies they are trying to determine what results or effects can be attributed exclusively to the campaign, apart from other influences or events).

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For cost-benefit analysis. The net impact of the campaign justifies its own costs? (Even if the program has a net positive impact, it doesn't mean that it should be continued).

Conclusions

Social campaigns of TV stations are able to change things at the society level. Maybe not as much as initially proposed, or maybe sometimes surprisingly much. As shown, after social campaigns carried out in Romania, probably the most important effects of those campaigns, in addition to the solidarity of the people, it would be increasing the number of transplante carried out, the setting up the Nonrelated Donors Romanian Register and changing some laws. It is true that the news stories are designed for the sake of the concerned categories but it is also true that emotional side is very much speculated, achieving a very large audience for television broadcasters (this is shown through the awards obtained by television stations). But what is essential in this social campaigns? Reporters communicate to the public real facts, events which could become at any time the reality of the man who is in front of the screen at home and due to this feeling is created the cohesion between public, reporters and the social campaigns subjects. One of the important aspects of those campaigns would probably be that of cooperation between TV stations and the State institutions. But we can't help wondering why State institutions do not take these initiatives until the time the television stations are making public the problems with which the society is facing. At the sociological level it would be very beneficial to make an evaluation of those campaigns, both through interviews with journalists who seek such campaigns, and opinion polls on the target groups or even of the population level. I believe that the sociological evaluation of TV social campaigns could generate important results for initiating other campaigns, which could be initiated in the light of these results.

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