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Considerations on organizing and conducting a radio debate case study: a debate on media representation of children

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Abstract: Organizing and conducting a radio debate is a complex journalistic process which must be done carefully and responsibly. The conceptual procedure should be done by focusing on all the aspects involved in the topics that are taken into debate. The points of view of all the parts involved in the matter under discussion are to be taken into consideration. As an example, a radio debate about the media representation of children must start from presenting all the laws, rules, regulations, recommendations and provisions concerning the subject. Then there should be expounded both the right and the inadvisable approaches of media representation of underage persons, and also the methods that can be used in order to counteract a toxic tendency that can be identified in Romania and elsewhere. It is exactly how the radio debate analyzed here was designed and carried out.

Key words: radio, debate, media, representation, children

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The journalistic debate is a genre with a range of characteristics, standards and rigors very close to that of the wider spread genre that is the interview. The interview and the debate are two of the most powerful media instruments through which the voice of the people can be heard. Literally and figuratively. They represent "a tool for gaining professional status" for journalists, and they can operate as effective "means of self-representation". (Broersma, Marcel Jeroen, 2007) We can assert that a properly organized and conducted debate, especially a radio debate, is an efficient way to transmit directly to the public various opinions about a matter of general interest, the points of view of both the journalists and the interviewees. A tool used by the journalists and their interlocutors in order to realize a convincing (self-)representation, a suited opportunity to bring into the spotlight the relevant opinions on subjects or events of public concern.

A radio debate is basically a radio interview with more interlocutors. It requires at least one theme/subject/topic and, of course, at least one moderator. The necessary preparations for a debate are a complex process which should be carried out with extreme consideration to all the details regarding the topic and the guests. The subject(s) tackled must be of public interest and sometimes the topics can be controversial, that is why there is compulsory to have a responsible and exhaustive approach, presenting all the points of view regarding the subjects under discussion.

1 Case Study: A Debate on Media Representation of Children on Radio Campus Craiova

Radio Campus is the radio station of the University of Craiova, a studio where all the students from the specializations Journalism and Communication and Public Relations can develop their skills for making modern radio. The school radio station can be listened online at www.radiocampuscraiova.ro and is a reliable platform for the students interested in media communication, the youngsters who will soon become the journalists or the communicators we all will invest our confidence in, the future opinion makers of this country. That is why we must stress the importance of the school radios, and that is a fact acknowledged worldwide. As an example, all the media faculties in UK provide their students with the best opportunities to develop their communication skills and learn how to make proper radio products. A didactic medium which can be described also as a real school of self-confidence: "School Radio is now an everyday part education for hundreds of Primary and Secondary Schools, Further and Higher Education, Colleges and Universities across the UK. Radio provides an exciting and engaging medium for your students to develop their communication skills, build confidence and discuss the issues that are important to them". (Schoolradio.com, 2017) It is exactly what the University of Craiova offers to its students: a platform for learning

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how to speak one's mind, an agora in which everyone can express their points of view on matters of general interest.

A debate about the media representation of children is necessary because of the controversial approaches of a part of the audiovisual media in Romania and elsewhere. Such a debate must start from the acknowledgement of the fact that the representation of the world by media is to be done according to certain laws, rules and regulations. And, of course, in accordance with the common sense. It is a reality that must not be ignored by anyone who is involved in media communication, especially when they deal with events involving underage persons. In a survey made in 2008 by The Young Researcher Network and The National Children's Bureau, the questioned young individuals widely expressed their utter disagreement with the way in which part of the media services reflect the matters and events involving minors: "Our research indicates that the media has the ability to influence people's perceptions and their views of particular issues, and as our evidence has demonstrated, it can affect the lives of young people. What concerns us about the findings of this research, is the clearly negative impact that sensational, negative reporting is having on young people. Many who participated felt angry and resentful that the widely publicised negative behaviours of minority groups within the youth population are dominating the headlines, and affecting wider society's perception of all young people. What is also concerning is the amount of negative coverage that young people receive, particularly in the national media, and the use of this bad coverage by the media for commercial gain. Clearly this situation places pressures upon journalists to cover instances where young people behave badly, rather than when they make a positive contribution".(Clark, Ghosh et al.) A tendency which can still be found in the Romanian media today and which can be confuted in many ways, one of them being the setting up of a well organized and documented radio debate.

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2 Step One: A Preliminary Discussion



"De 6-n campus" ("On the Lookout in the Campus") is a radio programme which gives the opportunity for the students to moderate debates about various topics and that is why that was the show where the professors from Journalism and Communication decided to set up the debate on media representation of children on April 20, 2017. The first step was to gather a group of students from the two specializations, give them a period to do the necessary research on the chosen topic and discuss with them in the editorial office of the radio station about the way in which the actual debate will be carried out.

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During this preliminary phase there were discussed the regulations that refer to the way in which the human rights, especially the children's rights, must be respected by the media, and the deontological rigors that should be taken into consideration by the journalists covering news regarding underage individuals. On this occasion, the students were encouraged by their professors to speak their minds while on-air and to freely express their opinions on this serious matter to the listeners of Radio Campus. The students made clear that there are still in use flawed and toxic methods of making journalism in Romania and that the improvements must also be done from within the media system, not only as a response to the decisions of the official regulators such as CNA (Consiliul Naț ional al Audiovizualului - The National Audiovisual Council). Another aspect of the subject under discussion to be tackled in the debate itself was the degree of limitation of the freedom of speech and editorial autonomy that some regulations imply, and how the journalists must act when those restrictions tend to severely affect the proper ways of covering the news. The students were advised to try to find arguments for a reasonable method of harmonizing the media interests and the set of rules and regulations that are meant to prevent violating the fundamental human rights. And they promised to deliver a coherent point of view during the radio debate that was about to begin.

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3 Step Two: The Radio Debate



The radio debate on media representation of children started at 6 PM and lasted for an hour. The two professors from the University of Craiova moderated the debate and tried to increase from the very start the self-confidence of the students sitting in front of the microphone.



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They respected the plan agreed in the preliminary stage and tackled one after the other all the aspects contained by this extensive theme of discussion. First of all, the moderators reviewed the most important laws and declarations regarding the human rights, especially the rights of the children, from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to the UNICEF recommendations and the CNA provisions on media representation of children. Then the students were asked to reveal their opinions about the modalities used by the Romanian audiovisual media in order to reflect events involving children. They stated that, although recently they had spotted real improvements, media coverage was still biased, tending to prefer reflecting the negative acts of the underage persons. The students claimed that the actions and the sanctions from the state institutions are necessary, but not enough, the journalists being those who should realize by themselves that a change of paradigm was necessary and should be done from within. A change which they, when becoming proper journalists, would advocate and fight for without any reservations.

The students also stressed the fact that by respecting the rules, regulations, provisions, and the recommendations on the matter of media representations of children there should not raise concerns regarding the freedom of speech and editorial freedom, because they were only meant to prevent the violation of the fundamental rights, without altering the editorial content whatsoever.



The students made a coherent and convincing radiography of the media representation of children and emphasized the ways in which the prejudices and

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the harmful approaches can be diminished, if not even eradicated. They spoke clearly about the real mission of the press and the traps that must be bypassed in order to cover the news in a decent and fair way. The professors tried to make their guests recall good and bad examples of media representation and the response was more than satisfactory. The students present in the Radio Campus' broadcast booth gave suggestive examples of both proper attitude and misconduct from the journalists who had reflected events involving minors, stressing the need of developing a set of guidelines dedicated to those who covered stories in which children were depicted. We must remark the fact that such a guide of good practices was released two months later by UNICEF Romania and the Center for Independent Journalism (Centrul pentru Jurnalism Independent – CJI), and it has proved to be an useful tool for all the journalists in need of guidance over how to make media products without affecting the fundamental rights of the underage persons. (CJI, 2017)

The radio debate ended with a discussion about the perspectives of a reliable and responsible media communication, and all the participants expressed their hope that the biased approaches, mischievous tendencies and unfair depictions could come eventually to an end. All of them also declared that their radio debate was a success and it could prove itself helpful in the complex and demanding process of changing the mentalities of certain journalists in Romania.

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