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Media and Communication in the Digital World

Franck DEBOS*

Etude exploratoire des usages au niveau de la télévision mobile interactive: proposition d'une typologie des consommateurs

Résumé : A l'heure actuelle nous assistons à la mise en relation et en réseaux d'outils et de technologies qui jusqu'alors développaient de façon isolées. Dans ce contexte, il semble pertinent d'étudier les perspectives d'évolution de la télévision mobile interactive. La problématique centrale qui sous tend ce projet d'article se traduit par les interrogations suivantes: Peut-on identifier des communautés d'utilisateurs de ce nouveau dispositif télévisuel? Quels usages vont-ils développer? S'agit-il d'une simple corrélation de services complémentaires ou l'émergence d'une nouvelle forme de communication via le mobile?

Pour tenter de répondre à ces questions; nous présenterons tout d'abord, les caractéristiques principales du marché de la télévision mobile notamment interactive à partir d'une veille informationnelle afin de pouvoir esquisser les grandes lignes d'un cadre conceptuel de sa consommation. Nous utiliserons ensuite une méthodologie qualitative exploratoire par le biais d'une trentaine d'entretiens individuels semi-directifs assortis d'une présentation de cette forme de télévision mobile. Il s'agira donc, à partir de ces entretiens d'établir une typologie des différentes pratiques informationnelles ainsi qu'une classification des usages pour ce nouveau mode d'utilisation du portable.

Mots clés : Interactivité, Consommateurs, Téléphone Portable, Télévision Mobile, Typologie

Introduction

Lorsque l'on regarde l'évolution des médias, les consommateurs ont toujours voulu se divertir durant leurs déplacements par le biais d'objets crées à cet escient (radio portable, MP3, console portable, téléphone mobile, etc.). Or, à l'heure actuelle nous assistons à la mise en relation et en réseaux d'outils et de technologies qui jusqu'alors développaient de façon isolées. Ce phénomène est prégnant au niveau des médias avec le développement récent d'offres « quadruplay » associant Internet, téléphone fixe, téléphone mobile et télévision. Dans ce contexte avec 140 millions d'utilisateurs prévus en 2011 et un marché potentiel de 4,4 milliards de dollars, la télévision mobile devient un enjeu fort du divertissement nomade, même s'il reste à déterminer un business model performant aux plans des acteurs de ce secteur (opérateurs, diffuseurs et fournisseurs de contenus). Elle est à la fois un nouveau marché et une approche différente de la télévision en termes d'attentes et d'usages.

Mis en perspective avec le besoin d'interactivité, de reconnaissance et de proximité relationnelle du consommateur, il semble pertinent d'étudier les perspectives d'évolution de la télévision mobile interactive qui va associer Internet et la télévision au service de la téléphonie. L'utilisateur pourra non seulement choisir le moment et le lieu d'écoute ainsi que le programme à visionner mais il sera en mesure de donner son avis, d'interagir avec l'émission

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sélectionnée et mettre en place une démarche de recherche d'informations en rapport avec le programme choisi.

La problématique centrale qui sous tend ce projet d'article est de voir si les personnes en tant que citoyens et consommateurs ont des attentes réelles et fortes dans le domaine de la télévision mobile et plus spécifiquement lorsqu'elle permet une certaine interactivité, ou si au contraire elle sera considérée comme une simple fonction supplémentaire génératrice de marges pour les opérateurs téléphoniques et/ou fournisseurs d'accès.

D'autres interrogations sont associées à cette problématique : Peut-on identifier des communautés d'utilisateurs de cette nouvelle génération d'image véhiculée par le téléphone portable ? Est-il possible de dresser une typologie de ces consommateurs de télévision mobile interactive ? Quels usages vont-ils développer ? S'agit-il d'une simple corrélation de services complémentaires ou l'émergence d'une nouvelle forme de communication via le mobile ?

Pour tenter de répondre à ces questions, après avoir indiqué l'impact du Web 2.0 sur le consommateur et sa façon d'appréhender son environnement, nous présenterons les caractéristiques principales du marché de la télévision mobile à partir d'une recherche documentaire. Pour finir, nous tenterons d'esquisser un cadre conceptuel de la consommation de la télévision mobile interactive, même si son développement est récent, notamment en Europe. Il s'agira à partir d'une trentaine d'entretiens semi-directifs d'établir une première segmentation des consommateurs potentiels ainsi qu'une tentative de classification des usages pour ce nouveau mode d'utilisation du portable.

Le consommateur « 2.0 » ou une nouvelle vision d'appréhender le monde

Nous pouvons observer depuis la fin des années 1990 et l'émergence successive du consom'expert et du consom'acteur ou consommateur « 2.0 » une véritable restructuration du rapport de forces entre le citoyen et les acteurs de son environnement en faveur du premier (Maillet, 2008).

Le fort développement d'Internet avec le Web 2.0 propose au consommateur une nouvelle façon d'appréhender le monde. Au plan sociologique cela implique une évolution du prisme des réseaux sociaux dans lesquels s'insère l'individu avec le développement des communautés virtuelles s'ajoutant aux communautés humaines et remettant en question les concepts suivants :

– Le concept de lieu de vie lorsque l'on peut en de multiples endroits se connecter aux quatre coins du monde ou dans des univers virtuels (Jeux en lignes, Second life, Facebook) prenant une place aussi importante que le réel pour certains.

– La perception du temps quand l'on peut à tout moment appeler, écrire, acheter, discuter et se voir par écran interposé.

– La notion de groupe d'appartenance primaire ou secondaire par l'intégration à des dizaines de formes et de lieux de communautés virtuelles à géométrie variable et à responsabilités limitées. A ce niveau, nous entendons par la notion de groupes, des ensembles de personnes qui ont des caractéristiques similaires et qui obéissent à une dynamique spécifique dans leurs rapports sociaux. Ils possèdent leurs propres codes et exercent une pression de conformité auprès de leurs membres afin que soit respectées les croyances et les « lois » du groupe (Brée, 2004).

– Les transmissions de savoir, de savoir-faire et la création artistique lorsque les élèves, les clients et les « visiteurs virtuels » peuvent modifier et détourner le contenu de cours ou d'œuvres d'art.

– Les notions de lieux d'achat avec le commerce et la visite de magasins et galeries marchandes virtuelles.

– Le lieu du travail avec la décentralisation des décisions et des structures ainsi que le développement du télétravail.

Concomitamment, Internet entraîne aussi une évolution radicale des relations entre les consommateurs, les médias et les entreprises par la modification du processus de transaction, de ses comportements et de ses préférences. Cette nouvelle donne relationnelle peut être illustrée par les facteurs suivants:

– La création de communautés marchandes et non marchandes ou autres réseaux sociaux liées aux caractéristiques propres d'Internet à savoir : la connectivité, l'ubiquité, la fluidité, la rapidité et l'universalité (Greenfield, 2007).

– Une relative transparence de ce « cybermonde » renforcée par l'accès à une information plus large et plus disponible pour l'usager / consommateur sans toutefois négliger sur un plan opérationnel les difficultés de l'utilisateur peu expérimenté qui se retrouve dans les méandres du Web. Sur ce plan, le développement de « courtiers d'informations » ou de « métamédiaires » (Jallat & Haenlein, 2006) peuvent apporter un début de réponse.

– L'individu veut devenir un véritable « consom'acteur » ou consommateur « 2.0 » vis-à-vis de ses interlocuteurs humains ou institutionnels en s'intégrant toujours davantage dans la chaîne de valeurs de l'organisation. Il désire s'impliquer directement au sein de la politique commerciale de l'entreprise afin de devenir un partenaire à part entière pour cette dernière qu'il estime souvent obéissant à une logique marchande très forte et souhaite qu'elle adopte un comportement responsable. De plus on observe récemment que l'innovation partagée entre concepteur et utilisateur tend à de déplacer de plus en plus vers l'utilisateur final (Musso, Ponthou & Seulliet, 2007). L'illustration de l'intervention croissante des individus dans l'innovation technologique qui devient « ascendante » (Tillinac, 2006) est fournie par le Web 2.0 véritable espace public mondial de création et d'innovation sur Internet. En effet ; une part non négligeable de l'innovation provient des consommateurs eux mêmes et non des laboratoires et centres de R&D à l'instar des logiciels libres. Cette constatation coïncide avec le fait que la génération des « Digital Native » née dans les années 1970 et 1980 a grandi avec le phénomène numérique. Elle ne peut concevoir de vivre sans Internet, le téléphone portable ou le MP3. Dans ce contexte informationnel précis, le consommateur ou l'usager est également coproducteur puisque en utilisant cette information, il lui donne sa véritable valeur ajoutée.

Nous pouvons aux réflexions précédentes rajouter le fait que le développement d'Internet crée une interactivité électronique qui peut modifier le modèle de représentation du monde et pose la problématique du cadre d'interprétation de cette information. L'émetteur premier s'efface progressivement pour n'être identifié que comme le relais d'une information sans signataire, posant ainsi le problème de l'authentification de tout ce qui circule sur les réseaux.

Le développement d'Internet coïncide donc avec un besoin d'interactivité renaissant qui se manifeste fortement chez les individus et reflète un désir de considération, de participation à toutes les facettes de la vie sociale, culturelle, économique et politique de la société dans laquelle ils se situent. Dans ce contexte, il semble intéressant d'étudier le rôle que peut jouer le média télévisuel (qui reste le premier média mondial) sur un consommateur désirant être

de plus en plus contributeur et coproducteur et ce, par le biais du téléphone mobile qui peut très bien illustrer le passage du Web2.0 à un concept 2.0 élargi à d'autres acteurs et médias.

La télévision mobile un service emergent pour de nouveaux usages ?

La télévision mobile englobe l'intégralité des technologies permettant de regarder des programmes télévisuels sur un téléphone portable compatible. La diffusion de ces programmes peut s'effectuer sous deux modes : *l'unicast (*ou *streaming* associé à la 3G*)* et le *broasdcast.*

Dans le cas de l'*unicast,* le réseau adresse le programme à un terminal bien précis que l'utilisateur sera le seul à visionner et qui lui sera spécifique. Si cette technique permet une personnalisation de l'offre télévisuelle, elle risque d'alourdir fortement le réseau si plusieurs utilisateurs demandent simultanément un programme identique surtout si celui ci est long à visionner. A l'inverse le *broadcast* permet la diffusion d'un programme à un grand nombre de terminaux dans le même temps à l'instar de la télévision hertzienne (en France, la norme de diffusion s'intitule le DVB-H ou Digital Vidéo Broadcasting Handelds). Dans ce cas, un nombre illimité d'utilisateur peut visionner le programme tant que ces derniers se situent dans la zone de rayonnement de l'émetteur avec, toutefois, l'impossibilité de personnaliser le programme considéré qui sera identique à celui regardé à la télévision ; la mobilité en moins.

L'analyse des enjeux de la télévision mobile se rattache à l'étude des nouveaux services proposés par les médias qui est un domaine émergent en économie des médias. Nous pouvons la considérer comme faisant partie des dispositifs de la communication de masse qui permet de développer des services interactifs ainsi que la personnalisation du contenu des médias (Urban, 2007). La technologie 3G permet d'optimiser ce dispositif alors que dans le cas des technologies de *broadcasting* cela est moins évident, même si le réseau mobile peut être utilisé au plan rétroactif.

Si nous voulons évaluer la demande du marché pour le service de télévision mobile, nous devons identifier certains points cruciaux au sein de son environnement. Il faut avoir présent à l'esprit que même si ce service est nouveau, il n'est pas sans précédent. D'autres expérimentations sur le marché des médias (TV interactive sur poste traditionnel ou par Internet), permettent de mieux comprendre les questions principales à propos de la télévision mobile interactive. Il existe des tendances générales concernant les habitudes de consommation des médias qui peuvent également déterminer l'acceptation du marché des services de télévision mobile (Boulier, 1993).

La question principale est de savoir si les personnes peuvent être intéressées par cette forme de télévision. Sur ce point, il semblerait que la nature du terminal qui aurait pu être un frein est en fait largement plébiscitée par les consommateurs (Carlson, 2006)[1]. L'utilisation mondiale de la télévision associée au fort taux de pénétration des téléphones portables semble créer une combinaison gagnante puisque la quasi-totalité des personnes qui possèdent la télévision sur le mobile la consulte (97%) et près d'un sur deux déclarent la regarder presque tout les jours. Picard (2005) souligne la différence entre la téléphonie en tant qu'outil de communication interpersonnelle et le *broadcasting* conçu pour un mode de communication de masse.

La deuxième interrogation va concerner les usages. Sur ce plan, Goldhammer (2006) compare le téléphone portable à un couteau suisse qui du fait de ses multiples fonctions convergentes se révèle fort pratique à l'extérieur alors qu'à domicile, l'individu préférera pour les mêmes besoins utiliser des équipements spécialisés. Cette assertion est d'ailleurs à relativiser

car des études récentes montrent que la moitié du visionnage de film par le biais du téléphone portable se fait à domicile (70,8 % des utilisateurs visionnent la télévision mobile d'après l'étude de médiamétrie citée plus haut). Cet état de fait semble s'expliquer par la volonté de pouvoir regarder une émission télévisuelle sans partage pour éviter par exemple des tensions associées au choix d'un programme télévisuel en famille ou alors afin que les autres personnes du foyer ne soient pas au courant de ce que l'on visionne. Le téléphone portable permet aussi de contrôler ce que l'on regarde et une mobilité forte durant le visionnage.

La seconde catégorie d'utilisation de la télévision mobile la plus fréquente concerne les transports qu'ils soient individuels ou collectifs afin de tromper un certain ennui et de s'occuper durant la durée du trajet ou dans un embouteillage (notamment dans le cas des transports individuels)[2]. Un autre genre d'usage avéré est le visionnage au niveau des temps d'attente (transport en commun, rendez vous médical ou professionnels, attentes d'amis, etc.). L'utilisation du mobile est de courte durée (en moyenne de 5 minutes) pour occuper un temps mort grâce à l'accessibilité et au faible encombrement de la vidéo sur mobile (Södergaard, 2003).

Que ce soit à domicile ou dans un autre lieu, le visionnage de programmes télévisés sur le mobile peut être effectué dans le but de ne pas être vu par l'entourage. Fort logiquement, il n'existe que peu d'informations sur ce plan puisque dans ce contexte l'utilisateur ne souhaite pas parler de ce qu'il a visionné. Les principaux motifs avancés par les personnes interrogées sont liés à une peur de se dévaloriser vis-à-vis de leur entourage qui peut considérer le contenu regardé comme peu attractif, trop violent, trop « ringard », etc. Il peut aussi s'agir de ne pas attirer dans un lieu ou le risque de vol est important ou encore d'avoir ce comportement à un moment ou celui-ci n'est pas autorisé (salle de classe, réunion de travail, conférences ou encore bibliothèque). A ce niveau, diverses études montrent que 40% des utilisateurs de télévision mobile visionnent les programmes sur leur lieu de travail, ce qui peut impliquer qu'une partie de cette lecture peut s'effectuer de façon défendue, durant le travail et non une pose.

Au niveau des usages, il convient aussi d'aborder ceux associés à un contenu spécifique qui peut être considéré à deux niveaux : l'impossibilité d'accéder à un poste de télévision traditionnel pour regarder un programme important pour la personne concernée ou encore des contenus télévisuels et vidéos spécifiques au mobile conçus notamment dans le but de développer une interactivité avec l'auditeur, point qui sera abordé par la suite.

Il faut aussi intégrer les usages pour lesquels le côté personnel du visionnage est absent comme son utilisation au sein d'un lieu de regroupement social (amis, famille, collègues de travail, etc.) afin de leur présenter cette fonction sur le mobile à titre d'information ou tout simplement de façon ostentatoire.

Une autre question importante et celle du contenu et de son degré d'importance pour l'utilisateur. Cette question fait d'ailleurs débat puisque pendant longtemps la notion de contenu « roi » a dominé en économie des médias. Or, pour des auteurs comme Odlyzko (2001), la connectivité compte plus que le contenu ou encore que le contenu engendré par l'utilisateur est plus important que le contenu originel du programme (Compaine, 2006). A ce propos, les utilisateurs actuels et potentiels de la télévision mobile veulent donner la priorité à un contenu interactif et personnalisé (Tadayoni & Henten, 2006) notamment par le biais de la technologie 3G+.

Plusieurs enquêtes tendent à montrer que les consommateurs vont privilégier les programmes courts, ludiques et informatifs[3]. Très loin devant les autres, les utilisateurs de télévision mobile plébiscitent les programmes d'actualité (92,5%), suivis des clips musicaux (67,7%), de la météo (58,4%) et du sport (54%). Plus bas dans le classement, nous trouvons

les séries (38,5%) et à un niveau similaire les documentaires et les films (32,9%). La durée de vision journalière est supérieure à 5 minutes pour les deux tiers des utilisateurs dont un tiers va se situer à plus de dix minutes. Si le visionnage se réalise dans des conditions de réception optimale alors les trois quarts des téléspectateurs regarderont la télévision mobile plus de 10 minutes.

Il importe également en termes de questionnement, d'identifier les principales motivations ainsi que les freins cités le plus couramment. Les résultats d'études effectuées tant en France que dans d'autres pays ou la télévision mobile est considérée comme un produit de grande consommation à l'instar de la Corée du sud permettent d'identifier trois principales motivations[4] :

– Ne pas s'ennuyer (O'Hara *et al*., 2007).

Il s'agit de la plus évidente et première motivation. La télévision mobile peut être considérée comme un moyen de divertissement tout à fait adapté pour occuper un temps mort, de par sa facilité d'utilisation, sa convivialité et le choix des programmes.

– L'attrait de la nouveauté.

En tant que tout récent service de téléphonie mobile, celle va susciter un engouement, que ce soit par simple curiosité, par réel intérêt ou encore dans un but ostentatoire et de valorisation de l'individu auprès de groupes sociaux importants à ses yeux. Toutefois, à la différence de la première motivation, elle peut être de courte durée.

– Se tenir informé.

La dernière motivation principale est la possibilité par la télévision mobile est d'être au courant de l'actualité économique, politique, sociale, sportive, « people », etc. et ce d'un point de vue aussi bien local que mondial. Elle permet au « mobispectateur » d'être en constante phase avec ses centres d'intérêts.

Dans le même temps nous pouvons identifier des limites que l'ont peut catégoriser de la façon suivante:

– Des limites afférentes au terminal en tant que tel.

Il va s'agir de limites à la taille de l'écran (notamment pour les téléphones portables et dans une moindre mesure pour des I phones ou des Blackberry) qui peut s'avérer être un handicap lourd pour un confort d'utilisation (Chipchase, Yanqing & Jung, 2007). Dans un autre contexte, pour le système en DVB-H, des utilisateurs ont cité l'encombrement du à la taille de l'antenne à relier au portable pour des téléphone qui n'en sont pas équipés. La faible autonomie de la batterie pour un service gourmand en énergie comme la télévision mobile est aussi un inconvénient lourd pouvant expliquer l'importance du visionnage à domicile ou l'on peut avoir une prise à portée de main.

– Des limites imputables au réseau de télécommunication.

Le problème de couverture des réseaux des opérateurs qui empêchent d'accéder au service dans certains lieux (zones rurales, montagneuses, souterraines, etc.) et qui pour des raisons de rentabilité ne seront peut être jamais couvertes. L'utilisateur tend de plus à transposer sur la télévision mobile les fonctionnalités de la télévision fixe. De ce fait, il peut être déçu, voire irrité de la longueur de changement de chaînes qui est instantanée sur poste fixe. Il faudra aussi développer des programmes attractifs et larges au risque de démotiver assez rapidement l'utilisateur. Sur ce point, la création de contenus interactifs et personnalisés pourrait être une solution pertinente.

Toutefois, il faut sur ce point identifier avec précision le contenu et le niveau de qualité attendu par les utilisateurs de télévision mobile et le montant du budget qu'ils peuvent allouer

à ce type de service. Par ailleurs, il n'existe pas encore à l'heure actuelle un « Business Model » performant pour la télévision mobile (Kosciusko-Morizet, 2009). En effet, même au Japon et en Corée du sud ou la télévision mobile est déployé de façon importante, les acteurs de ce secteur ne sont pas satisfaits des résultats économiques et ne considèrent pas encore la télévision mobile comme une véritable réussite industrielle. Quelque soit le pays d'accueil de cette technologie, il existe un décalage préjudiciable entre la diversité des canaux de diffusion (Télévision, ordinateur fixe ou portable, téléphones mobiles, etc.) au niveau desquels les asiatiques ont beaucoup avancé et une certaine « pauvreté » concernant des contenus spécifiques pour la télévision sur mobile. Devant le coût de ce type de programme, il semble important d'encore mieux connaître les attentes des consommateurs sur ce point et de nouer des partenariats internationaux entre acteurs politiques, sociaux et économiques de ce secteur. Le « Business Model » le plus performant sera celui qui considère que les fondements du dynamisme et de la créativité de l'économie numérique seront le contenu et les usages et non le potentiel fonctionnel des équipements.

Alors que la moitié des utilisateurs de ce type de service seront asiatiques en 2011, les revenus les plus élevés proviendront de l'Europe et des Etats-Unis dans lesquels la télévision mobile est en général associée à un abonnement à la différence de l'Asie. Dans ce contexte, si l'on veut passer le stade des premiers adopteurs (Rogers, 1995) et diffuser à grande échelle la télévision mobile à moyen terme vers 2011, il faudra envisager la gratuité sur la plupart des canaux de communication télévisuels avec des revenus provenant essentiellement de recettes publicitaires à l'instar d'Internet.

De ce fait, plus qu'espérer faire des profits à court terme, les opérateurs doivent développer ce type de service dans un but de fidélisation de la clientèle et de différentiation concurrentielle. Dans l'attente d'une pérennisation du marché, notamment en France, il peut être intéressant d'associer ce service à des forfaits afin d'attirer des consommateurs potentiels et d'accroître le revenu moyen par utilisateur.

Pour clore cette partie, nous pouvons voir que le succès avéré de la télévision mobile nécessite encore des efforts en termes de créativité dans le contenu et de proximité relationnelle auxquels doivent participer l'ensemble des acteurs du secteur (Fabricants, opérateurs, fournisseurs, responsables politiques et consommateurs). Il paraît dès lors pertinent de s'intéresser à la possibilité de contenus interactifs au sein de la télévision mobile.

Télévision mobile interactive ou 2.0 et attentes des consommateurs

Contexte de l'étude

La télévision interactive implique simultanément l'accès à un programme télévisuel traditionnel et identique pour un grand nombre d'utilisateurs ainsi qu'à des informations spécifiques et « uniques » pour chaque utilisateur en fonction de ses motivations et requêtes. Au plan technologique, cela implique une hybridation entre *l'unicast* et le *broadcast* en utilisant le mode de diffusion *broadcast* pour les programmes télévisuels communs et l'*unicast* pour un contenu personnalisé et/ou adapté au consommateur considéré. Se pose donc le problème de la synchronisation des deux modes de diffusion alors que le passage d'un mode à l'autre doit être immédiat et non apparent pour l'utilisateur, ce qui implique un véritable challenge technologique.

Afin de tenter de discerner les grandes lignes des attentes des individus vis à vis de la télévision mobile interactive et les usages qui peuvent en découler, nous avons procédé à une trentaine entretiens semi-directifs. Ces entretiens se sont déroulés du 2 au 26 novembre 2009 sur un site universitaire et au sein d'une école de commerce. Les personnes étaient âgées de 18 à 60 ans. L'entretien durait trente minutes en moyenne et était effectué par deux enquêteurs. Comme pour tout entretien semi-directif, nous essayions d'être le plus neutre possible en n'intervenant simplement que pour relancer la conversation si besoin. Avant d'aborder le guide d'entretien, nous leur faisions une présentation du service à l'aide de documents. En préambule de l'entretien, nous présentions aux personnes interrogées, les principes de la télévision mobile interactive ainsi que la visualisation de démonstration de ce service provenant sites comme www.vimeo.com ou encore C mobile la chaîne d'ISTC Mobile en traduisant les dialogues en français.

Avant de présenter les principaux résultats, il convient de préciser un certain nombre de limites de notre étude qui peut s'identifier à une recherche exploratoire. Même si nous nous situons dans le cadre d'une étude qualitative et préparatoire, le faible nombre de personnes interrogées implique la nécessité d'une recherche de plus grande envergure en termes d'échantillon et de profils représentés au sein de cet échantillon. De plus, l'analyse des résultats doit être affinée. La difficulté en tant qu'enquêteur « amateur » de rester complètement neutre durant les échanges, quand bien même cela était notre priorité. Dans la mesure où la personne interrogée a été sélectionnée ; elle se sent valorisée par ce choix et aura naturellement tendance à aller dans le sens des enquêtés. Les entretiens ne s'appuyaient pas sur un service concret et faisaient appel à l'imagination des personnes interrogées. A ce propos, nous traitons d'une technologie en constante évolution qui sera plus aboutie au moment de la généralisation de ce service. De ce fait, il y a une probabilité non négligeable que leur comportement vis-à-vis de la télévision mobile interactive soit en décalage avec leurs déclarations sur ce point durant l'enquête. Dans cette optique, il serait intéressant par la suite d'effectuer des suivis ethnographiques sur certains individus à l'aide de lunettes caméra permettant des enregistrements vidéos (Relieu, 2002 ; Zouinar *et al*., 2004 ; Zouinar & Bationo, 2009).

Premiers résultats

Les entretiens réalisés montrent que le téléphone mobile est prioritairement un outil de communication (75,33% des cas d'utilisation) si l'on agrège les appels téléphoniques (37,33%), les SMS (29,5%) et MMS (8,5%) et ce quelque soit le profil du répondant. A contrario, certains usages du mobile sont plutôt présents au niveau des répondants les plus jeunes comme les jeux vidéo, la musique et Internet ainsi que dans une moindre mesure les photos et les vidéos. D'après les réponses obtenues et de façon assez prévisible par rapport à l'utilisation actuelle du mobile, nous pouvons identifier les trois thèmes les plus demandés qui sont : les questions d'actualité au sens large (60%) puis dans des proportions moindres, le sport et les jeux vidéo (23,33% et 16,67%). Dans les rubriques qui seraient les plus fréquemment utilisées par les internautes, l'actualité et le sport regroupent les principales utilisations d'information.

Lorsque l'on regarde les situations d'utilisation, nous pouvons observer que les contextes d'usages les plus cités sont, de façon comparable, le domicile, le lieu de travail, ainsi que les déplacements en transport en commun. Les déplacements pédestres ne sont pas cités ce qui paraît également cohérent par rapport au fait que l'individu est en mouvement qui plus est, dans un environnement pouvant être bruyant et pas toujours sur. Dans le même ordre d'idée,

les usages d'ordre privés sont majoritaires. Toutefois le téléphone portable au même titre qu'Internet tend à estomper les frontières à ce niveau entre vie privée et professionnelle et il faut donc relativiser cette assertion qui peut relever en partie du « politiquement correct ».

Les principales motivations liées à l'utilisation de la télévision mobile interactive sont :

– Un support complémentaire (30%) au niveau de la télévision et d'Internet ainsi que de la radio dans une moindre mesure lorsque l'accès à ces médias est impossible ou très difficile. Toutefois ; il importe de bien faire percevoir aux nouveaux «consommateurs », la valeur ajoutée de ce service afin qu'il ne soit pas considéré comme une simple excroissance de ces médias.

– L'importance d'une logique communautaire (26,67%) en tant que vecteur de lien social. La télévision mobile interactive peut être à l'origine de clans relativement volatils d'individus qui partagent le même intérêt pour certaines émissions, vidéos ou films illustrant leurs valeurs communes. Cette motivation est fortement citée chez les 15/19ans qui construisent leur personnalité à la fois en opposition et en intégration avec le groupe choisi (Gonord & Menrath, 2005).

– La mobilité (20%) dans la mesure où ce service permets de compléter d'autres fonctions dans le téléphone portable comme le visionnage de films lors d'un voyage ainsi que d'avoir accès à des usages qui existent dans un contexte de sédentarité. Ce résultat est à mettre en perspective avec l'étude bi annuelle Conso junior réalisée par Kantar Media (ex TNS Media Intelligence) auprès de 1700 personnes âgées de 11 à 19 ans (Jullien, 2010)[5].

– Tromper l'ennui, qui est une motivation saliente mais qui n'est pas la plus importante (13,33%). Afin de s'occuper et patienter, le téléphone portable va permettre de m'occuper l'esprit et de me réfugier dans un monde d'image que j'ai conçu.

– Nous sommes dans une société ou l'immobilisme n'est pas de mise. Ainsi, pour 10% des répondants, ce service permet d'optimiser et de rentabiliser les temps d'attentes ou les temps « morts » en ayant accès à des informations importantes, ce qui donne l'impression de gagner du temps et de maîtriser en partie ce dernier.

De façon complémentaire, les principaux freins cités par les personnes interrogées sont proches de ceux déjà identifiés au sein de recherches antérieures et cités précédemment. Nous trouvons donc :

– Le prix qui est le principal frein pour 40% des répondants, mais qui est cité par tous à un moment donné de l'entretien.

– Les contraintes techniques (Taille de l'écran, autonomie du mobile, couverture du réseau, facilité de manipulation) sont aussi citées par 36,67% des personnes interrogées comme frein principal.

– Un risque de repli sur soi et de renforcement des communications « Homme-Machine » au détriment de la communication interpersonnelle (23,33%). En effet, le développement des fonctions du téléphone portable associées à Internet peut réduire les échanges en société.

Toutefois, si le contenu proposé correspond aux valeurs, attentes et centre d'intérêts de l'individu, les freins précédents deviennent secondaires pour la plupart des répondants.

Dans le contexte de cette recherche, il nous semble important de présenter une prémisse de typologie des utilisateurs de téléphone portable par rapport à la possible utilisation de la télévision mobile interactive. Il est bien évident que les résultats obtenus doivent être considérés prudemment en rapport à la faible taille de l'échantillon. Néanmoins, ce début de classification peux permettre de dessiner des tendances en termes de comportement vis à vis de l'objet de notre recherche.

Les différents entretiens font apparaître de façon nette un lien entre une utilisation poussée du téléphone mobile (utilisation de toutes les fonctions médias, personnalisation de l'outil) avec un intérêt potentiel pour la télévision mobile interactive. A contrario, les répondants ayant une utilisation du téléphone portable minimale et/ou essentiellement centrée sur les fonctions premières (téléphone, SMS) semblent peu intéressés par cette fonctionnalité.

La notion d'implication vis à vis du téléphone portable semble donc essentielle pour l'adoption ou non de la télévision mobile interactive. Par implication, nous entendons « Un état non observable de motivation, d'excitation ou d'intérêt. Elle est créée par un objet ou une situation spécifique. Elle entraîne des comportements, certaines formes de recherche de produit, de traitement de l'information et de prise de décision » (Rothschild, 1984). Il est également important de déterminer les types et/ou niveau d'implication au sein des répondants afin de pouvoir déterminer les profils les plus potentiellement intéressés par l'objet de notre démarche (Valette Florence, 1989). Nous pouvons identifier trois catégories de personnes. Les « indifférents » (20% de la population interrogée) qui sont peu impliqués et ont une utilisation minimale du téléphone centrée sur des fonctions premières (appel téléphonique et SMS pour certains d'entre eux). Toutes les fonctions connexes du téléphone (agenda, alarme, jeux, visionnage de films, etc.) sont à leurs yeux de l'ordre du gadget et de ce fait la télévision mobile interactive ne les intéresse pas ou peu. Néanmoins, même si il est inutile, voire négatif pour l'entreprise concerné de communiquer directement auprès de ces individus, cet état de fait peut évoluer par le biais des groupes primaires fréquentés par ces derniers. La communication sera dans ce cas indirecte et se destinera aux autres groupes dont les membres pourront influencer certains indifférents et les faire évoluer vers d'autres segments.

Les « pragmatiques » (23,33% de la population étudiée) qui ont un comportement d'achat de type plutôt non compensatoire et se rapprochant du modèle conjonctif. En effet, ces derniers définissent des seuils d'acceptabilité minimaux pour un ensemble de critères importants en fonction des produits considérés. Nous sommes dans une logique évaluative d'achat réfléchi dans laquelle le répondant s'engage après validation de certains critères (Prix, accessibilité, convivialité, interactivité, etc.) et veut tester ce nouveau service avant son acceptation définitive. Le niveau d'implication est donc pondéré positivement ou négativement par la mise en perspective des avantages et inconvénients associés au service considéré ainsi que les risques et opportunités qui en découlent.

Les « impliqués » (56,67% de la population interrogée) qui sont intéressés par les fonctionnalités et l'utilité de ce service, les avancées technologiques qu'il peut représenter dans le cadre de la téléphonie portable et le fait qu'il renforce son attractivité. Maintenant, dans la mesure où ce segment de personnes interviewées correspond à plus de la moitié d'entre eux, nous avons voulu tenter de déterminer des sous-groupes en fonction de leur perception du principal avantage du service étudié. Cette démarche est à mettre en perspective avec le fait que la notion d'implication recouvre des réalités différentes (implication rationnelle, affective ou attachement, situationnelle, durable). Nous avons pu subdiviser ce groupe en quatre catégories (qui peuvent être en interaction) et qui sont définies en fonction du principal centre d'intérêt qu'ils associent à la télévision mobile interactive.

Les « pionniers » (16,67% des répondants) pour reprendre la terminologie du cycle de diffusion de l'innovation développée par Rogers, plutôt technophile, notamment concernant le numérique et qui aiment être les premiers à utiliser de nouvelles fonctions intégrées dans leur mobile. Ils sont donc sensibles à la multiplicité des fonctions proposées par le mobile et cherchent également à enrichir et détourner les fonctions existantes (Akrich, 1998 ; De Certeau, 2004) comme nous pouvons l'observer au niveau de l'Iphone par exemple.

Les « Hobbyistes » (en espérant que vous excuserez ce néologisme) qui correspondent à 16,67% de l'échantillon et qui considèrent la télévision mobile interactive comme un moyen de mieux vivre leur Hobby, voire leur passion en visionnant et en interagissant avec un contenu télévisuel correspondant à leurs centres d'intérêts.

Les « Réseauteurs » (13,33%) qui utilisent le téléphone portable essentiellement pour enrichir les réseaux sociaux réels ou virtuels auxquels ils appartiennent. Ils considèrent que ce service peut dynamiser leurs liens sociaux avec des membres de leurs réseaux.

Les « No Life » du mobile (10% des interviewés) qui ne peuvent se passer de leur téléphone portable avec lequel ils sont en constante relation. Dans ce contexte, plus celui-ci a de nouvelles fonctionnalités, plus leurs attentes seront satisfaites.

Quelles attentes et propositions de la part de l'utilisateur potentiel ? Dans le cadre de l'entretien, il était nécessaire comme pour toute démarche exploratoire de pouvoir identifier les principales suggestions des répondants par rapport à l'objet de notre recherche. Les propositions qui ont été émises se rattachent à l'environnement technologique concerné à savoir la télévision et Internet et sont également le reflet d'attentes en termes de proximité relationnelle. En effet, comme piste de développement possible nous trouvons :

– Le besoin d'une « offre personnalisée » (« one to one » ou à tout le moins « one to few », cf. Peppers, Rogers & Dorf, 1999) suggérée par 76,67% des interviewés, qui se traduit par une demande de programmes spécifiques en fonction des centres d'intérêts des répondants. Il peut s'agir de chaînes spécialisées et/ou d'émissions spécifiques provenant de plusieurs chaînes et correspondant à une attente forte pour l'utilisateur concerné. Ce dernier aurait ainsi à disposition un programme composé de films, documentaires, débats, concerts, etc. traitant de ses « hobby » et provenant de plusieurs chaînes de télévision ou d'Internet à l'instar de ce que propose un moteur de recherche.

– Des fonctionnalités « facilitatrices » et conviviales comme par exemple la vidéo à la demande (63,33% des répondants) qui serait étendue au mobile par la possibilité de louer et de visionner un film avec son téléphone portable. Dans le même ordre d'idée et ce afin de pallier un frein important qui est la taille de l'écran du mobile (qui peut être rédhibitoire pour le visionnage de films par exemple), certains répondants (26,67%) trouvent intéressant la possibilité de brancher le téléphone portable à un écran de télévision ou à un ordinateur.

– Des attentes en termes d'interactivité (60% des personnes interrogées) qui peux s'évaluer à deux niveaux. Dans un premier temps, il s'agit de pouvoir visionner des films interactifs, c'est-à-dire avec la possibilité de choisir entre plusieurs séquences et de construire le film en fonction de ses attentes ce qui rejoint les concepts de One to one ou One to Few. Pour les répondants, cette interactivité se traduit également par la possibilité de réserver des places pour un spectacle après avoir pris connaissance d'informations sur celui-ci via la télévision sur le mobile. Il est important aussi de prévoir des liens hypertexte permettant d'avoir accès à des informations ou d'autres contenus en lieu avec l'émission ou le film concerné.

Conclusion

Le concept de télévision mobile interactive semble convenir à l'ensemble des personnes interrogées qui considère ce service comme novateur à condition de proposer un contenu spécifique par rapport à la télévision « traditionnelle » et prévoir des interactions avec l'internet mobile. Ce concept doit également être clarifié car il se situe à la croisée de la télévision,

d'Internet sur un support mobile et de ce fait, il faut favoriser les interactions entre les trois éléments, d'autant plus qu'au niveau des jeunes classe d'âge, Internet est omniprésent.

De plus, nous avons affaire à des consommateurs de plus en plus experts sur ce plan. Ceci implique de proposer un assortiment large et profond de contenus télévisuels performants en termes d'image, de son, de couverture réseau à un prix attractif à l'instar des forfaits téléphoniques, multimédia et Internet. Il est évident que les résultats de cette étude doivent être menés à plus grande échelle et surtout en se focalisant sur les utilisateurs impliqués dans un premier temps. Il faut concomitamment étudier l'évolution de la perception et des usages de l'Internet mobile qui est un point clé de ce type de service.

L'ensemble de ses réflexions étant centrées sur l'utilisateur final, il faut aussi rapprocher cette démarche de l'impact « Coût/ Bénéfice » ainsi qu'en termes d'image pour les acteurs économiques du secteur, si ces derniers veulent diffuser ce service à grande échelle. De quelle façon ce service peut il être intégré dans l'offre globale des opérateurs téléphoniques ? Comment communiquer sur celui-ci ? Quelles vont être les contraintes et opportunités notamment juridiques dans le développement de la télévision mobile interactive ? Comment l'organiser au plan tarifaire ainsi qu'au niveau du plan marketing dans son ensemble ?

Même si cette recherche tend à montrer l'intérêt de ce service notamment par rapport à un besoin de proximité relationnelle, celui-ci ne pourra se développer que si une véritable relation « Gagnant/Gagnant » peut s'instaurer entre les prestataires de cette catégorie de service et le consommateur final.

Notes

[1] Voir notamment à ce niveau l'étude réalisée par Médiamétrie pour Bouygues Telecom sur l'expérimentation de la télévision sur mobile (Décembre 2005/Janvier 2006) ainsi que ceux présentés par Screendigest depuis 2007 comme « Quel avenir pour la télévision mobile ? » du 3 décembre 2007 et « Mobile TV weakens in West Europe » du 19 octobre 2009.

[2] D'après une étude réalisée par Orange au 1er trimestre 2006, 14% du temps de visionnage de la TV sur mobile s'effectue dans les transports avec une durée variant de 5 à 30 minutes. Pour l'échantillon de Médiamétrie (185 clients de Bouygues Telecom domicilié à Paris), nous avons : 45,3% des utilisateurs interrogés qui regardent des programmes de télévision mobile dans les transports collectifs et 23,6% en véhicule individuel. De plus 47,8% des enquêtés visionnent la télévision mobile en salle d'attente, 42,2% chez des amis, 32,9% dans bar ou un restaurant et 37,9% dans la rue pour « tuer » le temps.

[3] Nous pouvons citer à ce niveau une enquête présentée dans le n°1510 de la revue Stratégie du 22/08/2008, intitulé « La télévision mobile a la côte » et qui traite de l'intérêt des internautes pour la télévision mobile personnelle (TMP) qui est intégrée dans le projet gouvernemental de la télévision du futur. Plus récemment, nous pouvons aussi nous reporter à une étude du Baromètre des usages multimédia numériques sur la télévision mobile personnelle de septembre 2009 sous la direction de Vincent Grivet directeur de la division télévision mobile de TDF et qui tend à montrer la supériorité du DVB-H sur la technologie 3G+. L'étude a été menée auprès de trente panelistes représentatifs de la population française ainsi que plus de 900 mesures objectives TMP et 3G+ (Evaluation objective de la qualité de service vue du client et Benchmark multi-usages réalisé par des experts de la mesure en statique externe et interne et en déplacement).

[4] Voir notamment à ce niveau le rapport de mission de l'ARCEP en Corée du Sud en Mai 2009 (www.arcep.fr) ou encore les études et informations provenant de l'atelier BNP PARIBAS qui est l'organisme de veille technologique de cette institution bancaire et qui a été crée en 1978 (www.atelier.fr).

[5] Pour l'édition 2010, il s'agissait de traiter plus spécifiquement le thème « Street is my media ». Le principal enseignement à en tirer correspond à la forte interaction entre la communication extérieure (affichage, communication via les CHR, manifestations organisées par les magasins, etc.) et l'utilisation des TIC via le

téléphone ou l'ordinateur portable. Ils utilisent de ce fait ces outils nomades avec des attentes et des comportements sédentaires par rapport à ces moyens de communication.

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Virtual Communities – A New Sense of Social Intersection**

Abstract: This paper investigates some answers that were given to the question: does the presence of New Media produce changes in the way people choose to get involved in communities? In this respect, the concept of virtual community is studied not only from a cognitive standpoint – as an elastic theoretical construct, with multiple characteristics and a vocabulary of its own –, but from an affective standpoint as well, as an emotional-symbolic construct. Thus, online community involvement can shape our daily lives and become a source of existential meanings. The academic antagonism between the pessimistic perspective and the optimistic one leaves behind a few uninvestigated possibilities. Adopting Benedict Anderson's idea that all communities have an intrinsic imaginary dimension (they have to exist in people's minds in order to be effective) and that what differentiates them is the *style* in which they are imagined, we believe that the theorization of distributed communities can offer fruitful suggestions in our search for a new sense of social intersection.

Keywords: Virtual Community[1], Community Involvement, Symbolic Construct, Cognitive Construct, Potlatch

"Most of the major innovations of the past hundred years
have made it progressively easier to avoid contact."
(Johnson)

The community as a protean concept

Community is a flexible, protean concept that does not have a unique or a fixed definition and that characterizes not only the language of sociology, but also the language used by both the media and the average person on a daily basis. Usually, this terminological diversity is not particularly encouraging, because the profile of a term and its uses make it difficult to question and classify it, all the more when it is generally being taken for granted. Therefore, the context seems to be the decisive factor in the case of such terms, which, however vague, are still treated as guiding principles. Moreover, their occurrence in various areas or interest illustrates their usefulness.

There has not yet been established a unique and global definition for the term, one of the reasons being its variety of meanings: therefore, one can distinguish among local community, professional community, community of interests, community of practice, epistemic community,

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community studies, etc. In this respect, one should mention the effort undertaken by Hillery, who made an inventory of 94 meanings of the term taken from different fields of research (Hillery, 1955). Therefore, the researchers of the social phenomenon emphasize the fact that we are not dealing here with a classical notion, endowed with definite characteristics, but rather with a notion that requires constant reinterpretation and revalorization. This process of reinvestment needs to also overcome a series of problems that the concept gives rise to – in 1955, Hillery pointed out, for instance, the problems concerning the definition, the method (the participatory observation being absolutely necessary) or its theorization (the impossibility to develop satisfactory theoretical models, capable of illustrating the great majority of participatory actions, institutionalization and community organization). In 2010, Monique Hirschhorn mentioned four "diseases" that have been impairing the concept and that seem to have deprived it of its appropriateness as far as its ability for analysing contemporary social facts was concerned: polysemy, ideologisation, naturalisation and obsolescence (Hirschhorn, 2010).

Since there are so many overt problems, is this concept worth keeping and using in the future, or should we stop using it? This question makes us think about the broader problem concerning the vocabulary; in Rorty's own terms, we might say that the fact of referring to a particular research tradition and to its vocabulary provides, most of the time, two solutions: one could either continue using the same terms, reinterpreted or not, or remove them from the discourse specific to that particular subject. In a similar vein, Hirschhorn says: "Isn't it more convenient to finally admit that our so-called 'technical' vocabulary is in fact vague, indefinite, and that this has not occurred by accident, but as a result of the way in which we construct and use our concepts?" (Hirschhorn, 2010, p. 12), arguing that the effort to "enounce" "weak" concepts seems pointless and even naïve – getting rid of this type of concepts is impossible, as it is impossible to agree upon their use in this manner. As far as the term community is concerned, its relevance relies mainly on its *content*, and even though one should not forget that this is indeed one of the most important concepts, one should however treat it in the manner suggested by Nisbet: we need to "accept once and for all that the concept of community has no value as a scientific concept (Busino) and that it is still one of the greatest leading principles of sociology" (Hirschhorn, 2010, p. 13). Again, one can also notice the tension existing between "community", as illustrated from an empirical perspective, and "community" seen as an ideal, as a norm. In order to serve the purposes of the present article, we shall adopt Nisbet's idea (community will be treated as "leading principle", as "projector", as "questioning source"), so as to avoid the "exasperation" hovering around the term of community: consequently, we are more interested in that density of the social relationship expressed by the community, as well as in the manner in which the virtual community is imagined and used.

From a historical point of view, one can distinguish among four types of community: classical, modern, dialectical and postmodern (Sainsaulieu, 2010). Another typology of communities takes into account the historical period when the relationship between community and the media was central (Jankowski, 2002). Consequently, the first wave of community and media studies resulted in a series of researches related to the role of the newspapers in the process of integrating individuals within various communities, or to the role of the press community in the development of an identity within the immigrant groups. The second wave, known as the Electronic Community Media, started to take shape after the introduction of the other important technologies that followed the invention of the printing press, chiefly the mobile radio and the cable TV, while the third wave – the Era of the Internet – brought to light

new types of social associations: the online communities, together with the new type of culture specific to them (the cyberculture). Having started from a community network (see, for instance, ARPANET), the Internet developed right from the beginning, the question now being whether this community spirit represented or not a mere "utopia which characterised the beginning of the Era of the Internet" (Galibert, 2007, p. 63).

The idea of virtual community as an elastic and symbolic construct

Within a context replete with the numerous difficulties (related to the process of formulating a definition, a method or a theory, but also to the possibility of referring to other competing terms such as "social group", etc.) that the term "community" implies, a new question arises: "Is there any interest in the term community?" Studies undertaken as a result of the development of the new technologies seem to seriously question again this topic, to the point where we are now able to notice a revival of this issue in the light of the researches having the New Media as their starting point. Therefore, the term "community" serves as a core construct for a variety of online groups, characterised most of the times by extremely heterogeneous purposes (providing information, networking, dissemination of knowledge, emotional support, etc.). In this respect, it is useful to perceive the virtual community as *an elastic construct*, embedded with a multitude of characteristics and meanings (many of them contradictory) and whose instantiation will each time take a new form, which will probably be reinterpreted within a given framework. Furthermore, seen as a construct it seems even more suitable for the online communities, due to its unique general characteristics; although we are, each of us, part of a particular community (such as the community of mothers, for instance), and we acknowledge *ab initio* some of the particularities of our community, some or all its members, and the main discussion topics, almost every time we join an online community we need to make a representation of that social formation, to "draw" a personalised sketch of it, which is in fact to build a hypothesis about that particular community consisting of ever-changing members and ever-changing rules. The resulting construct is not only a cognitive one (virtual communities are not merely a present principle of social organisation or a simple idea that we use), but an affective and symbolic construct as well. Seen from this perspective, online communities can be considered a *complex*, loose construct, constantly moving and changing. The action of joining a virtual group is replete with a series of connotations similar to those occurring when one becomes involved in an offline group, although in the case of the electronic affiliation some characteristics seem to be suppressed (nowadays people mention the easiness with which one can make contacts, the lowering of the emotional threshold created by anonymity, the possibility to choose any identity and to post various avatars, the levelling of social statuses or even the simulation of networking and the lack of authenticity, etc.). The metaphor of connectivity (Kolb, 2008) is nevertheless extremely present, and can give rise to a series of strong feelings that could push the community members take some kind of action. The rethinking of the social phenomena in relational terms can offer valuable data aimed at providing a more adequate understanding of the social dynamics within the context of the new technologies.

To a similar extent, the theorising of the virtual communities without taking into consideration the express or intrinsic symbolism that they may carry can deprive them of an important and revealing dimension. The symbolic part which is at the core of these communities is

not specific exclusively to the classical, objective communities; in some cases, this symbolism associated with a virtual community is the very key to its understanding. Although the essential role of the geographical area in building communities is sometimes diminished or even denied, this does not prevent us from rethinking the space within a group, and the online community, by means of the symbols it uses, can reinterpret in a flexible manner the physical and cultural borders that differentiate it from other entities. Thus, a common vocabulary and a series of presuppositions or common beliefs shared by the majority of the community's members become strong connections that contribute to the strengthening of the group's cohesion. It is a well-known fact that all online groups have their own "ways of speaking", their personalised ways of rendering their values and social structures into a particular language and of assigning them a specific use. Therefore, communities use keywords, abbreviations, codes, communication routines, and even a specific jargon whose knowledge and use show a person's membership of a group and create some of its essential norms. The experiments that used the practice of asking stupid questions as a way of distinguishing insiders from outsiders (the manner in which the answers were formulated and their content being revealing) were, in this respect, paradigmatic. Other analyses provide rich descriptions of the manner in which the members of a community make jokes – another strategy for observing the ways in which members develop relationships and unique forms of interaction. All these aspects create a feeling of belonging that can be extremely comforting and appealing, enhancing the wish to participate and become member of a group. At the same time, all of these particular ways of interacting become normative, describing a "normal" way of being of a community, a feeling of familiarity and comfort that can be almost incomprehensible for outsiders. In spite of the more general theorisations according to which normativity does not have an online applicability, this still exists, but its norms are local, contextual, and flexible, and are created rather by the group than by the environment. Also, despite the fact that people believed for a long time that the Internet was a space meant to level statuses, some studies and experiments showed that with time solid communities, which are also older, develop unequal patterns of membership (but which can, of course, be adapted by each user). A simple taxonomy of users (such as the one mentioned by Baym, who talks about heavy users, light users, and a series of users, also referred to as lurkers, who only read the messages, the postings and the files shared by others but hardly ever make a contribution of their own) contains the idea of hierarchy, not to mention the implicit hierarchy that comes from possessing the knowledge specific to a field or topic (ranging from the state of the expert to that of the ignorant). In any case, this hierarchy is "softer" than the one present in the offline life, and it is also less oppressive, most of the times being sensed to a very small extent by the group members, mainly because the mechanism of interactivity – understood as "the degree to which two or more communication parties act on each other in an interrelated manner" (Koolstra, Bos, 2009, p. 379) – and the remarkable supporting character of virtual communities diminish the "strong" meaning of hierarchies.

From another standpoint, the symbolism of virtual communities can be perceived by adapting the theory of potlatch to their characteristics (an adaptation of the social exchange theory to the Internet is also provided by Kollock, 1999), but it can also provide a possible explanation regarding interaction and commitment within online communities. Therefore, the "gifts" consisting of information, knowledge in general, but also advice or moral support substantially modify the costs and benefits of social action. The theory of the gift and the countergift, also referred to as the gift exchange theory (Marcel Mauss), can overlap with this

generosity that can be found in most online communities, one of the explanations being the one according to which members contribute towards the development of the group's resources thinking that in the future they too will need informational and affective reciprocity, as well as counselling. In a similar way, the theory of *potlatch* refers to the fact that gifts are always exaggerated mainly with the purpose of humiliating and challenging, thus forcing the other party to return a greater gift: "Most of the time, this gift means that a leader solemnly offers his rival considerable goods in order to humiliate him, to defy him and to make him feel as if he owed something to the former. The beneficiary (the receiver) has to wipe away the humiliation and accept the challenge; he has to fulfil the *obligation* that he took on by accepting the gift: he is forced to pay interest" (Bataille, 1994, p. 67). If the idea of "humiliation" present in this initial form of the theory is debatable in what the online level is concerned (although it can remain a personal psychological component of the person who posts a piece of information), one can notice that, basically, it can resonate with the characteristics of the virtual communities and with their members' profile. Reframing the idea of community as a symbolic construct might provide new ways for investigating the social link found at the core of virtual communities, its foundation and the question of commitment.

The community as an affective construct. Is the need for commitment still alive?

Online communities carry out not only information exchanges, but also considerable emotional exchanges (see the well-known Mandel – Nana case of "electronic romanticism", a "saga" of the Well community, but also people's thoughtful response to Mandel's imminent death) (Hafner, 2001). In spite of some gloomy predictions according to which people will never be able to build substantial interpersonal online relationships, they are however managing to do it quite successfully. As Manuel Castells used to say, extended interaction can lead to affective support and reciprocity, in spite of the fact that the relationships which are at the core of virtual communities are considered "weak ties". There are studies that show that the discussion groups present on the Internet have extended the area of their potential partners beyond those found in their physical proximity. The opportunities to get involved in an online relationship increase due to the fact that users acknowledge the reduced social risk, an acknowledgement that makes them more willing to engage in conversations with other people (Baym, 2002). Thus, the social penetration theory finds a series of limitations concerning its application to the development of new online relationships, where the main focus is no longer attractiveness or other peripheral items, but rather common interests. The public self layer (height, weight, gender, and other public information) is now less important in the process of acknowledging the value of the other, whereas the private self layer is more rapidly reached as far as discussions are concerned (beliefs, faith, prejudices, and general relationship information, values, emotions). J. Walther developed his own social information processing, which highlighted the idea that, irrespective of the environment, people want to reduce uncertainty and increase affinity (Baym, 2002, p. 69). In this respect, the users of computer mediated communication (CMC) adapt their communication behaviour to serve pro-social purposes, and with time, relationships started online can become more appealing that offline relationships, a situation that Walther calls "hyperpersonal interaction". Due to the fact that within hyperpersonal communication the attractiveness of partners is overestimated

in relation to offline partners, the computer mediated communication can become more desirable, from a social standpoint, than face-to-face communication (although, as some researches emphasised, the differences between face-to-face and computer mediated communication are only in degree, not in substance). Other aspects that support this idea are the absence of visual aspects, the freedom to idealise, to choose which aspects to reveal next, the importance given to the ability to write messages, etc. The textual side of CMC emphasises a positive aspect, the fact of resorting to messages strengthening the belief according to which the people with whom we communicate online are more introspective and have a more developed self-consciousness than the people with whom we communicate offline. The study that Walther carried out on several groups made of people who were not connected in any way showed that the possibility of some future interactions increased the probability of showing affection and trust. It is also interesting to follow the path people generally take in their passage from online to offline – the vast majority of the subjects taking part in the experiment carried out by Parks and Floyd (1996) experienced the classical stages of disintermediation, following, in a reverse order, the history of the innovations in the field – e-mail, telephone, face-to-face interaction (see also Baym, Zhang, Yan Bing & Lin, 2004). 98% of the people who met online talked on the phone afterwards and one third met face-to-face, a situation that made some researchers state that CMC can be considered at least one of the ways in which partners interact. These data seem to cancel the accusation that CMC is impersonal; personally, we are more tempted to agree with Nancy Baym and believe that "far from being impersonal, CMC is often playful and creative. People use it as a means to assert their own identities and to explore new means of self-presentation. [...] Social groups form that offer a sense of belonging, information, empathy and social status, among other rewards." (Baym, 2001, p. 71)

Another important aspect of the Internet as far as interpersonal relationships are concerned consists of its capacity to maintain already existing relationships, not only create new ones. In this respect, Baym reminds us of the study carried out by Stafford et al., who compared the extent to which people used the telephone and the e-mail, respectively, to maintain distance relationships – the e-mail was more frequently used in order to maintain important, significant relationships. Also, at the level of online communities, a constant topic of research is the tendency of these communities to be interpersonally supportive, even if they were not initially built around such a purpose. Even if they are heterogeneous, flexible and seem to be lacking an ethical commitment, online communities provide emotional support and counselling, demonstrating, in very many cases, a very strong ability to mobilise people. "Empathic communication" seems to be one of the factors contributing towards the strengthening of the links within virtual communities, which determines most of the times an efficient social contact (marginalised or disadvantaged categories were able to find within these hybrid social forms an opportunity to express themselves and get support – as the researches on physically disabled people have shown; by means of the Internet, these people were able to extend their interpersonal relationships and their degree of sociability). Some pioneers of online communities have taken as a starting point in their approaches the "romantic" ideas of extending a particular type of communication and networking that could be found in the past only in some privileged places of one's offline life, where social relationships seemed to thrive. Thus, Matthew McClure, the first director of Well, stated: "At the beginning, I thought Well could become the electronic equivalent of the French parlours of the Age of Enlightenment" (Flichy, 2001, p. 93). Pioneering electronic communities (Community Memory, CommuniTree, Well, etc.) formed a network of

social links based on geographical proximity, institutional membership, and the degree of inter-knowledge (Flichy, 2001). In time, these fundamental characteristics changed, but the wish to be a member of various online groups remained constant. Researchers such as Wellman, Haase, Witte or Hampton make use of the phrase "community commitment" to indicate how important it is to have a strong attitude towards community, a motivated and responsible meaning of membership, which can mobilise social capital much more effectively, although their researches showed that the use of the Internet was associated with a decrease in the commitment to the corresponding communities (Wellman, Haase, Witte & Hampton, 2001). The core of this conclusion seems to be the flexibility of being part of a community, the great number of online communities that a subject can join, and consequently, the increasing number of weak ties and the heterogeneity of relationships, which determine a decrease in the number of members who will be directly connected to each other. Obviously, this positioning has an opposite effect, many researches showing that the new technologies increase not only the degree of commitment to online communities, but also the degree of commitment to organic, offline communities. Community commitment is an emerging process, and the way in which users interpret and use the existent data, the contexts, and the relationships is most of the times unpredictable, to the point where the result is a personalised set of social, informational and relational meanings. Also, considering the Internet an integral part of our lives, or viewing it as distinct and "detached" from them determines our different ways of receiving and theorising it. The perspective detached from the technological determinism that sees the Internet as an environment (a distinct one) among others seems a more efficient one. Also, even if the offline context is different in many ways from the online context, a lot of traits of the former can be found when we analyse online interactions.

The pessimistic perspective

The involvement in electronic communities encounters a series of internal problems, but also some criticisms formulated throughout the time by a series of researchers. Without providing an exhaustive presentation of these criticisms, we shall however attempt to briefly outline only some of the most representative approaches, with the purpose of illustrating the confusing variety of opinions and the protean identity that characterise this recent phenomenon.

Internal, general problems

Internet *access* is not universal or equal for everyone, and not even free; consequently, the possibility to adhere to and take part in the online social life is not uniform. In some countries, the totalitarian regimes drastically restricted the Internet access, stipulating a series of harsh punishments going as far as prison time for those "adventurers" who would dare surf the Internet, gather information, or even worse, create their own blogs or electronic groups. In North Korea for instance, only 4% of the people have the right to use the Internet (the websites and networks being monitored by the government); Cuba has the smallest number of Internet users in Latin America; Iran, China, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Vietnam are examples of countries where censorship is extremely present at this level too. The websites, blogs, and forums focusing on political topics are, in this respect, the most highly monitored (see for instance the WikiLeaks case). As far as the benefit of the "low costs" is concerned, this

is not the case for Turkmenistan, for example, where the access to online information is a luxury for the general population, the costs beings very high.

Also, there are many other difficulties that citizens have to face when *using* these new technologies, which require being equipped with a solid set of tools (for searching, sorting out information, checking, etc.). In this respect, the degree of motivation needs to be a substantial one, and is most of the times a prerequisite beforehand, many authors claiming that the new technologies stimulate new interests or consolidate the existent ones in the case of those individuals who are already interested in networking and social commitment, and not in the case of the individuals who are not interested *ab initio*. On the one hand, participation and involvement can be further enhanced by the multiple opportunities created by the New Media, but the interest in such activities has to be strong and active. On the other hand, there are no guarantees that the access to a new environment will automatically create more socially engaged and supportive individuals. Moreover, there is also the reverse of this initially positive characteristic, namely the informational and relational over-saturation, which can easily determine the loss of all interest, a state of affective and social neutrality, or even the wish to stop participating.

Another important aspect is the *discourse quality.* If we consider the case of the Internet, many approaches depicted it as a place where reigns the "cacophony of voices", a new technological Babel, which becomes an obstacle to any reasonable, well sustained, and serious discussion. The quantity of relevant messages in the case of online debates (forums, chat rooms) is still limited, the balanced character of the position-takings being reduced, and the top of the list being occupied by messages that express extreme perspectives. Also, statistics have shown that the great majority of messages are in fact posted by a small number of participants in the discussion, to the point where the discourse is dominated by a limited group. The fragmented character of the information or the topics initiating questions, apparently in a random manner, do not help very much to create a pertinent overall image or to monitor the kind of arguments provided in a particular situation. Furthermore, the online discourse seems to rely more on the principle of "common sense" and does not exceed its borders, its foundation and measure being the daily experience. Regarding the application of the electronic communication to the network organizations, Nohria and Eccles (1992) concluded that the latter "need face-to-face communication for handling situations of uncertainty and ambiguity" (as quoted in Pruijt, 2002, p. 110). Therefore, the final test for the online speech is still to be found inside the offline speech, since data checking or solving ambiguous situations seem to be related to the traditional communication patterns.

Community related issues

The problems concerning the attempt to provide a definition of virtual communities are manifold (for example, is there an exact similarity between the phrases "virtual community" and "online community"? Can any online group form a community? What is nowadays the relationship between the private and the public?), and so are their relations to offline or organic communities. For Lori Kendall, for instance, "the term virtual community has been applied to groups formed through a variety of online forums, including email listservs, bulletin-board services (BBSs), USENET newsgroups, MUDs and MOOs (Multi-User Dungeons and MUDs Object-Oriented), and other forms of online chat" (Kendall, 2002, p. 468). Thus, one of the most controversial problems remains the relationship between virtual communities

and non-virtual communities, and the researchers in the field, although they have been sometimes taking sides, found a way to get to the fundamental question: "Are the virtual communities, in fact, communities with an established identity, or are they just pseudo-communities?"

The pessimistic approach to the theorising of communities considers them unable to develop any of the essential characteristics necessary for them to be labelled as communities – members do not become involved in long-term, sound, and restrictive relationships as far as the moral commitment is concerned, while the flexibility and the possibility to remain anonymous or embrace various personalities make the communication between members artificial and devoid of authenticity. Within this context, another question may arise: are online communities real communities? Barry Wellman points out to the fact that when we speak using opposite terms about the virtual and physical communities we do not make any sense, because they are different social entities, each with their own rules, and most of the times the term "community" is altered by an idyllic view, those traditional communities characterized by a culture of support and membership being difficult to come by nowadays. Wellman replaces the communities with "conviviality networks", claiming that both collective and personal communities function online and offline. Castells prefers to give a dual answer ("yes and no") to this question: they are still communities, but "not physical communities, and they do not obey the communication and interaction models that are typical for those. Nevertheless, they are not 'unreal', but they function at another level of reality. They are interpersonal social networks, based, most of the time, on ties that are weak, diversified and specialized, and yet capable to induce reciprocity and support thanks to a prolonged interaction" (Castells, 2001, p. 453). Even though cyber-relationships and the importance of social interactions inside a network are still difficult to measure, despite the persistent efforts to refine the research methodology, many researchers have noticed their effects inside an organization (the increase of employee participation to conversations and decisions) or the possibilities they open up for the marginalized people (Hill Collins, 2010). Thus, the common practices inside the communities are not aimed solely at improving communication and the management of identity, but also at triggering learning mechanisms, at ensuring the quick dissemination of information bound to reduce the learning costs (for instance, the forums that become actual dynamic databases, on different themes, from health issues to hobbies), at encouraging knowledge exchange, cooperation and mutual help.

Another "apple of discord" occurred once people started comparing the online communities with the offline ones and embraced the perspective according to which online communities could be viewed as pseudo-communities, alternative communities, and a supplement to offline communities. For Fernback, for instance, the concept of community evolves concomitantly with the concept of society; nevertheless, online communities are more unstable than the offline ones, as they are a mere dilute form of community (if not a postmodern simulacrum). For Fernback, it is a fact that "users of online technology have created meaningful constructs of social interaction in the online arena [...] [But] for now, the deepest significance of community remains in the everyday, non-mediated, physical interactions we have with one another" (2007, p. 63). What happens online is relevant social interaction, but for Fernback and others the use of the word "community" seems *abusive*. At best, what we have is a *diluted* form of community, in which only a few characteristics of the "old", traditional community are present. The consequences of leaving a virtual community (with some relevant exceptions, though, if we think about corporate communication) are not as meaningful as the consequences of leaving one's physical community. Something important happens on the network,

but then again, it may turn out to be *individualism*. Also, the possibility for virtual communities to contribute towards the revival of the public sphere (one of the most important stakes of virtual communities) is reduced, the latter being already too fragmented and too individualised (Fernback & Thompson, 1995). Furthermore, Van Dijk believes that virtual communities are too heterogeneous and too partial "to create a strong sense of membership and belonging" (Van Dijk, 1998, p. 59), so they should be viewed as a mere *supplement* to offline communities. We believe that this category could also include some successful virtual communities such as the Blacksburg Electronic Village project (www.bev.net), La Plaza Telecommunity (www.laplaza.org), Austin, Texas (www.ci.austin.tx.us/telecom/intelcom.html), which, by overlapping with the geographical space of the offline communities from the cities in question, have managed to make communication and problem solving more efficient by means of the online-offline co-working. There is empirical evidence (Wellman et al., 2001, p. 450) that supports an interesting idea: "The effects of the Internet on social contact are supplementary, unlike the predictions of either the utopians or dystopians".

Another standpoint views online communities as an *alternative* to classical communities – an individual can now choose the type of community that he/she wants to join, without thinking about the constraints imposed by the classical communities (the family or the Church), while other standpoints emphasise the belief that virtual communities can replace classical communities (an extreme perspective). Irrespective of the outlook we decide to embrace, we must admit that "actual network ties leap over physically linked areas, so that the overall social geography corresponds much less to physical geography" (Rice, 2002, p.113). Therefore, a wider concept of social interaction becomes imperative.

Issues related to online community involvement

Fernback thinks that it is both scientifically profitable and empirically consistent to make a shift from the study of communities to the study of *commitment* (how it is formed, how it is manifested in the case of online and offline relationships, etc.). This shift would enable us to learn more about the changes that occur in the social landscape and the meaningful constructs in human interactions. Virtual communities have their place, but "if scholars continue to paint Internet studies with the broad brush of community, they dilute the potential of the research to understand how communities are constituted, how they operate, how they are integrated into offline social life, or what they provide" (Fernback, 2007, p. 66). Nevertheless, Fernback does not assign to online communities the characteristic of social responsibility, thus reducing their relevance and viewing them as possibilities to get together in a way that is much too convenient to become as complex as physical communities: "The community metaphor placed on virtual social relations is inadequate and inappropriate. The metaphor is one of fellowship, respect and tolerance, but those qualities describe only a fraction of our cultural understood ideas about community. […] The 'community as communicative process' metaphor is alive and well in cyberspace. But that metaphor is one of convenient togetherness without real responsibility" (Fernback, 2007, pp. 62-63). In this context, virtual communities are too personal and devoid of constraints to create a substantial social density of interactions.

Another problem concerning online relationships is related to the classification of primary and secondary relationships (Schement). While the former are characteristic of offline relationships and imply knowing the other individuals in multiple dimensions, secondary relationships point to the fact that the people who are involved in a relationship know only

one or very few dimensions of the people they relate to. Secondary relationships are, in some authors' opinion, emblematic of online groups, the accusation that online life implies a lack of sufficient interpersonal knowledge becoming thus obvious. Also, online ties are weak, easy to get out of, ephemeral, and do not possess the long-lastingness and the guarantee that many of the relationships manifested within a classical community do. For Jensen, for instance, online interaction is seen as a "parasocial interaction", an illusion of face-to-face communication. The user's participation can be real or simulated, many researchers warning people that the choice to participate in various online discussions, many of which do not have an impact outside the network, might imply the risk of diminishing the individuals' need to be together in real life, to be supportive and to reach a civic and political consensus. The feeling of participation can be so strong as to actually replace a real activism, many theoreticians concluding that substantial participation in online communities significantly reduces one's interest in integrating within a physical community and is susceptible of producing isolation and depression (Kraut).

The "pessimists" focus strongly on the alienating effects of the Internet, one of the main themes being the endangerment of the traditional communities (families, to give the most important example). Some researchers such as Shapiro and Leone highlighted the idea that more time spent online means less time to spend within relevant physical communities (family, neighbours, friends, etc.). Also, the probability of a significant increase of individualism, the risk of not understanding general norms and the search for easy and superficial relationships, which do not require effort and major adjustments, are also outlined.

The optimistic perspective

The optimistic camp is, of course, made up of theoreticians who support the beneficial effects of CMC and virtual communities, which are idealised by some of them and strongly defended by others against the pessimists' criticisms. Thus, in their opinion the general characteristics of the new technologies, such as the interactivity, the lack of intermediation, the co-presence of vertical and horizontal communication, the convenient costs, the speed of communication, the absence of borders, the digitalisation, the hypertextuality, the dispersion, the virtuality, the anonymity, the network character, the temporal compression, the production of a de-referentialised space of communication, etc. (Lajoie, Guichard, 2002; Manovich, 2001) have positive connotations and support the progress made in the field of communication and in giving a new meaning to social intersections. Briefly, the online interaction and the involvement in virtual communities are now theorised without any accusations of ephemerity, artificiality, impersonality, "non-social" nature, corruption of the traditional ways of socialising or exacerbated individualism. Moreover, we now acknowledge the value of the "social creativity" that CMC provides and the mapping of a new "social economy" (Lévy).

One theoretician who was considered euphoric about the meaning and the role of virtual communities is Howard Rheingold, who, by talking about his personal experiences in the cyberspace, contributed towards increasing the interest in this field. Rheingold is optimistic about the contribution that online communities can make towards enriching social life and increasing the interest and participation in the civic and political life. For this theoretician, the fact of using the Internet creates a new vocabulary, a new form of communication, and increases interactivity (some models of interactivity are analysed in Mcmillan, 2002; Koolstra

& Bos, 2009; Schultz, T., 2000, etc.), proving valuable support as far as the citizen activism is concerned. As far as online relationships and interactivity are concerned, Rheingold says that "people in virtual communities use words on screens to exchange pleasantries and argue, engage in intellectual discourse, conduct commerce, exchange knowledge, share emotional support, make plans, brainstorm, gossip, feud, fall in love, find friends and lose them, play games, flirt, create a little high art and a lot of idle talk. People in virtual communities do just about everything people do in real life, but we leave our bodies behind. You can't kiss anybody and nobody can punch you in the nose, but a lot can happen within those boundaries" (Rheingold, 1993, p. 3). Rheingold was often criticised not only for his overabundant optimism, but also for the lack of nuances that characterises his theoretical outlook, although he raises several interrogations and proves to be doubtful about the future of some directions in social life.

The optimists and utopians alike eulogise the opportunities offered by CMC and those that appeared once the first online communities were created. The ability to share information and to communicate more quickly or more efficiently, as well as the opportunity to combine person-to-person interactions with role-to-role interactions are only some of the multiple possibilities that have received positive connotations. The change in the nature of social bonds (Cerulo) as well as the possibility to create "personal communities" (Wellman) or additional or alternative communities, but also the potential of virtual communities to strengthen and revive the social bond, the social capital (Pruijt, 2002; Wellman et al., 2001; Lee & Lee, 2010, etc.) and human solidarity are other benefits that the great majority of optimists underline. From its onset (Putnam, Bourdieu, Coleman, Wacquant, etc.) to the more recent theorisations, the stake of enlarging the social capital is highly debated. Within the camp of the optimists, or better to say, of the moderates, one can mention Pruijt, who believes that the social capital is the spirit of the Internet, since "the Internet can support and enhance the communities that to some extent depend on face-to-face interaction" (Pruijt, 2002, p. 109), as well as Junghee Lee and Hyunjoo Lee, who believe that the Internet does not erode the social capital, the study they carried out showing that the people involved in online communities possess a higher degree of sociability and a higher level of the generalised norms than those who are not members of such communities (Lee & Lee, 2010). However, as these authors highlight, in spite of an increased ability to communicate, to interact with each other, and to show one's solidarity, which characterise the individuals who use the Internet, the quality of community as a whole cannot be grasped and fulfilled in the absence of face-to-face communication, characteristic of traditional communities. Consequently, beyond the pessimist – optimist dualism, another category of researchers, whom I would rather call "moderates", developed. Using statistical data or their experiments to backup their assertions, these researchers prefer not to exclude the two types of communication and interaction, but, on the contrary, to combine them, considering them complementary in creating a holistic meaning.

Instead of conclusions, some new opportunities

In accordance with Wellman et al., we need to always take into consideration the fact that there are no single Internet effects; there are many types of activities that we can do online (chat, do shopping or research, read, surf the web, play games, etc.), activities that can be divided into at least two categories: social and asocial (the latter, as well as surfing the Internet

or reading the news online can prevent the users from being present in the community and can reduce their degree of involvement in family life or in political and organisational activities). Therefore, the discussions about the "impact" of the Internet (the vocabulary associated with the impact or effect analyses being most of the times labelled as naïve) should be more nuanced and more contextualised, hence the difficulty of the task of those researchers who carry out studies based on the methodology applied to the Internet. Also, we believe that another important aspect is the rendering of the manner in which these activities carried out on the Internet are included into the complexity of everyday life (in this respect, one can mention the relevance of Tapscott's studies on "N-Gen" or Net Generation and on the manner in which this generation uses the Internet compared to the other means of communication). The integrative perspective on the Internet is more productive and significantly eliminates several exaggerated standpoints, encouraging a clearer analysis susceptible of rendering not only the quantity, but also the quality of the online social interaction.

Also, taking into consideration the typology developed by Jordan (the individual level, the community level, and the collective imagination level), there is enough room for research concerning the third category applied to the New Media, as well as the way in which the shift from the community level to the collective imagination level is carried out (this can shape the online community construct and the members' expectations). Experimenting with interactivity within online communities and developing that personalised set of social meanings, which may contain identities, relationships, attitudes, particular forms of expressing one's position in relation to the other members, are most of the times carried out by the users in unpredictable ways. Nevertheless, the overlaps between them may give rise to a feeling of belonging and may create significant affective and communicational bonds (a situation that reminds us of the interrogation from which originated other theoretical debates: "How virtual is the virtual community?"[2], and of the fact that the degree of possibility subordinate to the notion of virtuality is often rendered into act).

Going to a certain extent beyond the level of describing and understanding the mechanisms within the electronic communities, we believe that the manner in which we view the structure of the community is extremely important. At this level, by embracing Benedict Anderson's idea from *Imagined Communities,* the relevant criterion is no longer the authenticity, but the *style* in which communities are imagined. In this respect, by adopting the interpretations given by Gochenour (2006), who, in his turn, embraces the community patterns that can be found in the essay written for the RAND Corporation and entitled "On Distributed Communications" (1964), one can notice how the "distributed community" (the community as net) uses the Internet as an infrastructure that it builds, creating that social density that enlarges the degree of concreteness (Flusser). Baran devises three diagrams that characterise three different communication structures: centralised, decentralised and distributed (grid). The first two are vulnerable due mainly to the number of central nodes whose destruction induces the destruction of the entire communication chain, whereas the third structure allows communication to continue by means of another nodal subject in case some other have been eliminated. Moreover, the nodes forming a distributed community carry out an active function, working together effectively; this "movement toward action" is Gochenour's main point of concern, not only online, but also offline. Gochenour thinks that nowadays we witness a shift from decentralised to distributed networks; furthermore, the distributed communities can be considered "real" communities, a situation that emphasises yet again the importance of the way/style in which we imagine the community: "Put plainly, if we can accept this diagram as a model of the community, and if we can also accept that community is constituted through the rela-

tions that one subject undertakes with another, then there is no difference between distributed communities and 'real' communities. In Baran's diagram, it is a simple matter to imagine the links being established through a multitude of means" (Gochenour, 2006, p. 37). This statement brings forth new inquiries: why do we need to make our virtual communities look like real ones? If that seems necessary, than how can we lose the "place" metaphor?

At the junction between possibility and act, imaginary and action, metaphor and reality, virtual communities continue to reveal their potential, discreetly giving rise to further questions of the type: what kind of communities will we create next and how will other means of communication follow the advent of the Internet?

Note

[1] Although the terms "virtual community" and "online community" are not identical, the vast majority of researchers use them interchangeably, the same as we have done in the present article.

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Microbolgging Meets Politics. The Influence of Communication in 140 Characters on Romanian Presidential Elections in 2009

Abstract: The new media have changed the political scene dramatically. Thus, in the case of certain states such as the USA, Iran or Moldova, microblogging – especially through the platform Twitter – proved an efficient communication tool. Sharing is emerging as a way of distributing the news—tweets from the streets of Iran and from the rubble of Haiti have been retweeted hundreds of times in a new, virtual form of word of mouth. But what was the case of Romania, considering that, at the end of 2009, presidential elections were held here? The aim of the paper is to explore whether communication in 140 characters has had an influence on the Romanian presidential elections in 2009. The paper was facilitated by the online project *Elections in 140 characters* developed on the microblogging platform Cirip.eu, by creating at the start of the campaign a group dedicated to the presidential elections. Messages on this topic were sent in this group, and were also imported both from Twitter and from blogs, all of them reflecting the interaction/debate on the elections, between Romanian Internet users. However, the authors believe that if microblogging is used effectively it has the potential to do more than facilitate interaction between users (or users and candidates).

Keywords: microblogging, politics, Romania, elections, Twitter

Introduction

With the advent of new media and social media, mainstream media have lost their monopoly over the coverage of political news and debates. The magnitude of technological change over the past 10 years has been astonishing; the next 10 will surely be more so. New social media are already changing the way organizations attract supporters. The American Red Cross raised a record of more than 8 million dollars for Haitian relief efforts via Twitter, which has become the top source of discussion about the quake, followed by online video and blogs. The potential mobile universe of grass-roots text messagers is now over 136 million – an emerging market and communications network for nonprofits, small businesses, and political campaigns. The media today are more diffuse and chaotic than ever.

Thus, the Internet has become an important medium for various forms of political communication and participation in recent years. Despite arguments claiming that computer and Internet usage leads young people to social isolation, many researchers suggest that the online world provides young people with a new social realm. There is broad agreement that new technologies such as blogs, social networks and microblogging platforms gave citizens an unimagined ability to filter and personalize the information to which they are exposed, while

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at the same time dramatically increasing the amount and range of information which is available to them, and hence the possibility of perceptual overload and the need for selective exposure (Iyengar, 2001).

However, there are only a relatively small number of studies showing in detail what people actually do when they are online (Pew Internet, 2009). According to the Digital Future Report 2009, the most popular Internet activities are playing online video games, listening to online radio, reading the online editions of newspapers, and watching online television and online movies. Statistics provided by Trafic.ro (2008) (the most important Romanian provider of Internet statistics) indicate that the situation is the same for Romania, Internet users here being interested less in politics and more in information about entertainment. Statistics made by various research institutes in Romania show constantly that politics is not a top subject of online discussions for Romanian netizens (Gutu, 2007). Entertainment, sports and shopping are favorite topics of online discussions and searches, politics not making even the top ten. Nevertheless, the interest for political information seems to grow during election times or important political events, for instance the NATO summit, European elections, and presidential elections, as we shall see later.

In some states, microblogging – especially through Twitter – proved to be an efficient political communication tool. It has all started from the huge success of the American president Barack Obama online campaign in 2008, which was immediately replicated in other countries. In the UK and Germany, for example, microblogging was used also during electoral campaigns both by staffs/candidates and by citizens (Anderson, 2009; Jungherr, 2010; Tumasjan, Sprenger, Sandner & Welpe, 2010). On the other hand, in countries like Iran and Moldova it was employed by ordinary people as a means to voice their opinions against the political regime (Burns & Eltham, 2009). For instance, the so-called Twitter Revolution from Moldova in April 2009, marked by the tag #pman (short for The Great National Assembly Plaza) was one of the most popular topics on Twitter. The political analysts Evgeny Morozov (2010) and Alina Mungiu-Pippidi (2009) have written extensively about this event. Microblogging was also used during the European Parliament elections in 2009. Thus, the website *europatweets.eu* aimed to connect the public with politics. Under the slogan *What is Europe doing?* it tried to promote a better and more transparent communication between voters and candidates/members of the European Parliament. Another site, *TweetElect09.eu* (http://tweetelect.com/), gathered all the messages posted about the European Elections on the microblogging service Twitter using the tag #eu09, thus enabling people to have an overall picture about the candidates and their campaign moves.

In Romania too, the global trend of employing microblogging, along other social media channels as a communication tool in electoral campaigns, has caught on. From candidates to the presidential seat, who created accounts with the obvious intention of convincing people to vote for them, as Popescu (2009) notices, to politicians, parties, campaign staff, to NGOs and netizens, a true explosion of Romanian microblogging accounts took place in the last years. Since the previous elections in 2004, the number of Internet users has increased with one of the highest growth rates, now almost one third of Romanians having access to the Internet (Internet Usage, 2009); notably, a larger number of such persons are registered in urban areas. Consequently, the online presence of politicians has extended most major parties and candidates having a website that includes links to their blog, Facebook, Youtube and Flickr accounts. Yet, as far as specific Web 2.0 applications, such as microblogging, are concerned, can we consider online presence in 140 characters a major factor of change in electoral campaigns, as the one that were organized at the end of 2009?

Those presidential elections took place in a different political, economic and social context from the one five years ago, because it was organized:

– after Romania joined the EU;

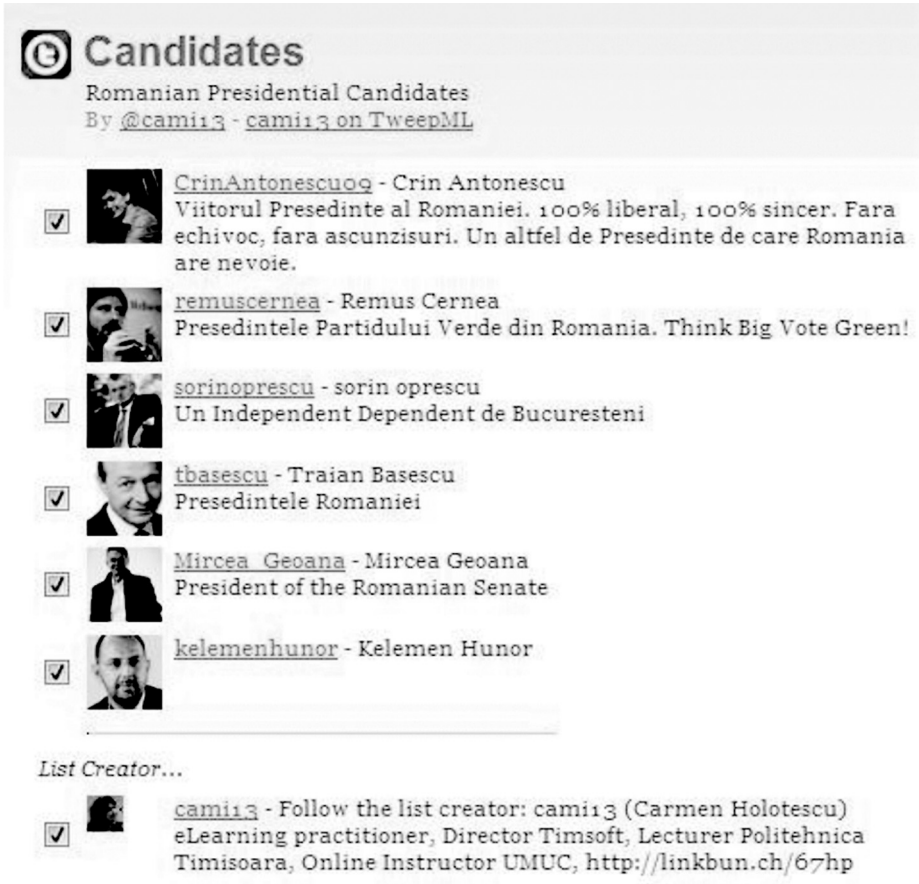
– after a 5-year presidential term;

– without coinciding with elections for parliament (held in 2008);

– within the context of a mature social media, taking place online both on dedicated sites and on blogs/microblogs (and other social networks such as Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, etc.).

For Romanian online politics, microblogging proved to be an "open space, with no clear boundaries" that was beneficial to the political environment (Dumitru, 2009, 2). Half of the Romanian presidential candidates (6 out of a total of 12) had microblogging accounts during the electoral campaign (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Microblogging accounts of the presidential candidates.



Source: http://tweepml.org/Candidati.

The use of this technology has changed the power balance in the relation between the Internet and the public opinion, with users having a more active attitude in transmitting information and becoming aware that they can make their voices heard (see also O'Connory, Balasubramanyany, Routledge & Smithy, 2010).

Data Presentation

Microblogging is considered one of the most important Web 2.0 technologies of the year 2009. It allows users to publish online brief text updates in 140-200 characters (sometimes images and video too). The posts can be accessed online, by mobile phone, by e-mail, via instant messaging clients, and by third party applications. Usually, the authors of microblogs export their posts as a widget on blogs or sites. Through platforms as Twitter, Identi.ca, Tumblr, Plurk, Edmodo, Cirip, etc, microblogging has mashed up communication and personal publishing to create a compelling new form of real-time publishing. Twitter is the most popular microblogging system, with 190 million users (May 2010) and a large variety of uses.

In the spring of 2008, was launched Cirip.eu, a microblogging platform especially designed for education and business. In addition to the facilities of other microblogging platforms, Cirip.eu provided the following:

– embedding multimedia objects in the notes: images, video clips, audio and (live) video files, live-streaming, presentations, cognitive visualizations like diagrams or mind maps, etc);

– creating public or private user groups. Groups have an announcements section (Group News), where moderators can post notes and materials for the group activities;

– sending and receiving messages via the web, mobile version, SMS, IM (Yahoo and Jabber), e-mail, Firefox/Chrome extensions, API, desktop and other 3rd party applications; notes can also be imported from Twitter, RSS;

– monitoring RSS feeds for sites, blogs, or activities on other social networks or search feeds;

– tagging the content;

– creating and conducting polls and quizzes (which can be answered online or by SMS);

– visualizing statistics and representations of the users/groups interaction networks.

The interface is in Romanian, English and German, facilitating an international collaboration, around 10% of the 15,000 users being foreigners. The Cirip.eu platform featured *Top 100 Tools for Learning 2009*, published by Jane Hart, from the Centre for Learning & Performing Technologies in Great Britain (Hart, 2009). Because the research field in itself is new in Romania, investigating such a topic could only be done through an explorative type of research, meant to provide a first image of the phenomenon. Consequently, the aim of our research is to make a preliminary evaluation of a new social reality, without attempting to draw any political marketing communication strategies, since that is outside our field of expertise. Thus, this initial analysis can lay the foundation for the elaboration of ulterior and more thorough research, which is also reflected in the research hypothesis: could communication through microblogging have an influence on the Romanian presidential election campaign? In other words, why did Romanian politicians turn to microblogging? Perhaps because the technology with the biggest growth rate in social media is a form of expression which does not require great technical knowledge about the way in which information is published? Or perhaps interacting with one's electorate is essential in politics and microblogging offers an easy way of achieving such goal?

The research was facilitated by the online project *Elections in 140* characters developed on the microblogging platform Cirip.eu, by creating at the start of the campaign a public group dedicated to the presidential elections. Hence, on 22 October 2009, the Presidential group became active and it was open until the end of the elections, in mid December (*Prezidentiale* in Romanian – http://cirip.ro/grup/prezidentiale). The group was organized by the au-

thors and had users of Cirip interested in the presidential electoral campaign as members. The aims of the group were:

– to constitute a framework for communication and debates;

– to be a source of real-time information;

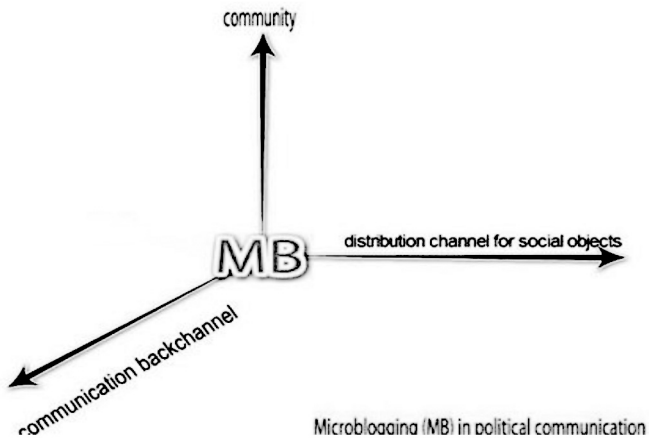
– to offer access to all the group content, visualisations, and statistics in order be informed during the campain, but also for future reflections and research.

Besides the multimedia notes sent by the members, the group also gathered tweets referring to the campain imported using the Twitter search API, and blogs posts which mentioned the elections, found by the Twingly search engine API. In this way the group messages reflect the interaction/debate on the elections between Romanians on Twitter, Cirip and blogs. The content of the group and its information flow were enlarged with feeds/search feeds on elections monitored by the group members using the platform corresponding facility. The group contained more than 41,000 messages: around 88% were imported from Twitter, 2% were sent by Cirip users, and 10% are posts from blogs. We should note that the messages in this group represent an important part of the messages in 140 characters exchanged about the campaign on Twitter, Cirip and blogs. The real number of messages could be higher, the difference is given by the fact that Cirip users could send some notes on campaign outside the group, on public timeline; also the search terms used to import messages from Twitter and blogs could impose some limits on locating them. Because the messages imported from Twitter were written by more than 5,000 Twitterers and there were 30,000 accounts during elections, it follows that a sixth of Romanian Twitterers have participated in debates in 140 characters. A much lower percentage of Cirip users have participated, as the platform is mainly used for education and marketing.

Data analysis

Starting from Jungherr's recommendations (2010), the results from the group *Prezidentiale* regarding the use of microblogging in political communication were presented on three coordinates: community, communication and convesartion (see Figure 2).

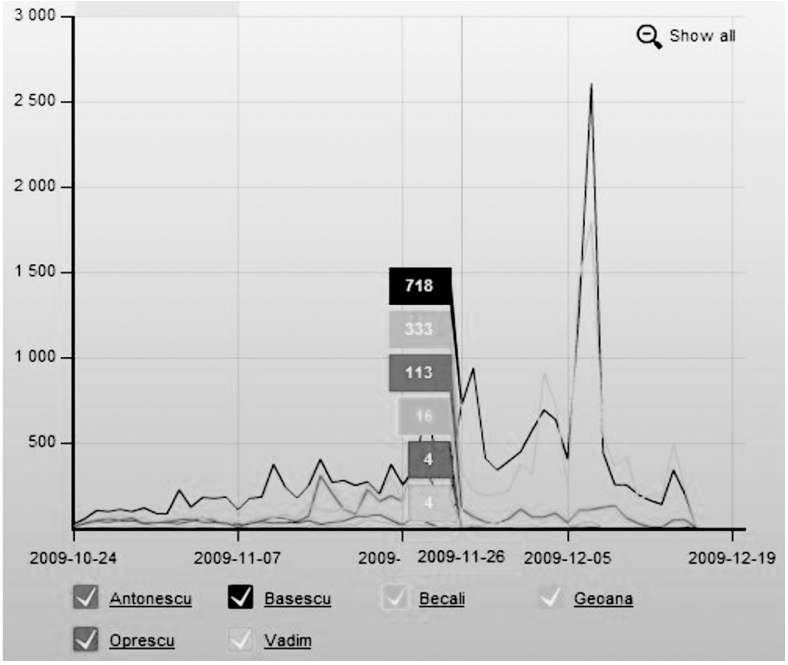
Figure 2. The 3C of political communication on microblogging.



Source: Jungherr, 2010.

a. **Microblogging as community building**. The motivation of voters can be enhanced by the sense that they were part of a historical moment, that radical change might be under way and that they could contribute to that widely hyped change as members of a large community who shared an ideal. When discussing microblogging as community building, it is obvious that within the *Prezidentiale* group was established an online community, with intricate lines of discussion and influence from candidates to regular users and vice versa. The microblogging/microcontent elements helped users to connect and socialize naturally. Therefore, potential voters made their voices and opinions heard by politicians and their electoral staffs. The process demonstrated the validity of Kohen's statement: "microblogging can break down barriers between people who are generally perceived to be far away from us in some way" (Kohen, 2010). The statistics provided by Cirip indicate several important quantitative aspects, such as the number of messages in which users mentioned the candidates (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Number of messages mentioning different candidates.



Source: http://www.cirip.ro/cirip/chart1.

To what extent did the candidates themselves and their campaign staffs provide up-to-date information, facilitated dialogue or answered the messages addressed by other users? Looking at the Twitter accounts of the candidates (Table 1), some common characteristics can be noticed:

– the accounts were opened at the moment the campaign started, or not long before;

– messages were written in first person (except @sorinoprescu – in the third person) and contain announcements, events, links to other resources, but rarely interactions with other users;

– follow a small number of users, except @Mircea_Geoana and @remuscernea;

– stayed active after the elections too, except @hunorkelemen.

Except @remuscernea, the candidates did not participate effectively in the debates in 140 characters, because the number of messages is reduced, and only a few are addressed directly to other users; they do not try to interact or to pick up, comment an analyze problems raised by users, in order to gain new or more votes. But it is a good point that almost all continued to be active after the end of the campaign.

Table 1. Twitter accounts of candidates during the campaign.

Account	Number of messages	Following	Followers	Messages addressed by other users	Messages addressed to other users	Links in messages	Date of opening	Account still active
CrinAntonescu09	46	81	1065	351	2	20	27.08.09	Yes
remuscernea	430	1642	1420	168	102	318	03.09.09	Yes
sorinoprescu	88	1314	748	185	0	10	05.10.09	Yes
tbasescu	38	14	2873	1801	7	7	08.10.09	Yes
Mircea_Geoana	195	798	1089	879	11	65	27.10.09	Yes
hunorkelemen	81	84	189	6	2	32	30.09.09	No

b. **Microblogging as communication channel**. The targeted, swift and timely circulation of information was a crucial asset of a campaign. Debates from traditional mass-media, such as TV and radio shows, printed press articles, documentaries, round tables, or even meetings with the electorate were all either disseminated (retransmitted on Twitter/Cirip-RT/RC), or discussed with arguments in favor or against on microblogging platforms. A special mention deserves the messages sent on Twitter by the two participants during the second round voting day, December 6, 2009. Traian Băsescu sent three messages, while Mircea Geoană sent 19, the last five being reproduced in Figure 4. After the polls were closed in the country, but the Romanians abroad were still voting, Băsescu sent a message and Geoană two, the messages being sent back (RT/RC) by their supporters. The archive of the Presidential group shows that Băsescu's message were resent more than 50 times, and Geoană's only 10 times. So the echos on the microblogging platforms and the mobilizing of the Romanians abroad for the two candidates were directly proportional. However, it is difficult to establish a direct causal relationship between them.

The tagcloud, automatically built by Cirip and displayed in a dedicated zone of the *Prezidentiale* group, shows that comments about the candidates and vote preferences prevail. Tagclouds were built according to the following criteria: terms, users, and links, which gave every member of the Cirip community the possibility to find out what were the most discussed or mentioned topics, users and resources during the campaign.

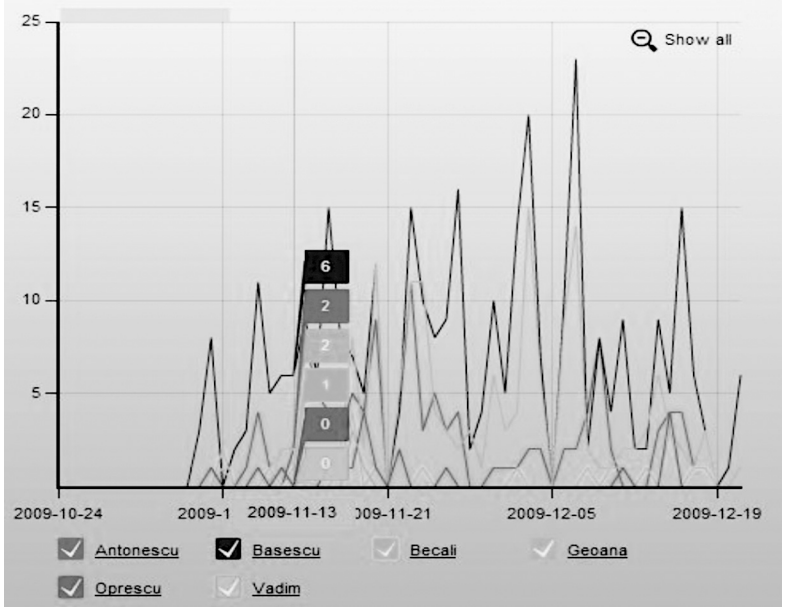
Figure 4. Tagcloud on a sample of 200 messages randomly chosen from the group.



Source: http://www.cirip.ro.

These configurations are also useful for post-campaign analyses. They were also compared with the data in which information about candidates was reflected in mainstream media (TV channels and news portals) (Figure 5). As far as political activism is concerned, campaign staffs should learn how to use the microblogging technology correctly, in order to grasp what types of activities politicians could/should carry out on such a platform and, more importantly, how these will be evaluated. This dissemination arsenal was important, especially in teh second round of the voting process. First, it allowed some level of control over the perception and the framing of the campaign. This was particularly effective when messages needed to be sent swiftly regarding an emerging issue, controversy or smear before it reached the media. Voters thus received first-hand, unfiltered and untampered information, its framing controlled by the campaign team, before any significant fact or controversy started flooding the public space with its customary share of distortion, errors, rumours and attempts at reinterpretation and destabilisation.

Figure 5. The evolution of messages on the most important mainstream media.



Source: http://www.cirip.ro/cirip/chart2.

c. **Microblogging as distribution channel for social objects**. In 2005, Jyri Engestrom, the co-developer of the Jaiku microblogging platform, launched a theory stating that, in most cases, people base their relations on certain objects, which he named „social objects". These can be both physical, such as „location", and semi-physical, such as „attention" or even conceptual, such as „on-line presence". Engestrom claims that people do not interact with each other, but rather by way of certain objects imposing a common value. According to this theory, which seems extremely flexible when approaching microblogging as social networks, objects become the centre of any social relation and the nucleus/fundamental notions of a (strong) social network. Networks can thus be formed around these objects, connecting people with objects, objects with people, objects with objects and, perhaps, people with people. In microblogging, the social object is clear: the online presence, i.e. what you want to do online. The livestream can be supplied online or in various ways, from using SMS, a desktop or mobile client, to more automatic entries by adding an RSS feed to the microblogging service used.

Cirip allowed the creation of a personal profile/portfolio including ideas, projects, research, information resources, multimedia objects created individually or collaboratively. From this perspective we can say that Cirip is a profile-centric network, according to classification of Stutzman (2009) and analysis of Conole-Culver (2009). Because Cirip.eu integrates a wide range of Web2.0 applications and social networks organized around resources, it is a social network constituted around multimedia objects, thus also an object-centric network.

Table 2. Type of messages.

Messages: 41,533 Cirip users: 55 Twitter users: 5,242	Links in messages: 21,942 Multimedia objects in messages: Audio: 51 Images: 344 Video: 641 Live Video: 42 Presentations: 62 Files: 54 Polls: 5

Source: http://www.cirip.ro/cirip.

By extension, public or private groups can be considered social objects. In the group can be identified campaign posters/caricatures/collages in image format, audio/video clips of electoral remixes, various presentations or documents, as well as links to articles that had been posted by other users, all of which are multimedia objects (Table 2). Because we are dealing with a *Push and Pull* type of content, the interaction created around these objects was the most relevant aspect.

Conclusions

Lessons learnt from recent political campaigns tend to encourage political actors to engage in digital campaigning of some kind. Yet, the mere correlation between the well-thought-out use of up-to-date technologies and electoral success does not tell us much about how the increased use of new media may induce a systemic shift in such crucial areas as political engagement, political opinion formation and election behaviour. It remains to be seen whether

in the next years we shall be able to convince people to participate in the democratic process, to be more active in the political field by using microblogs (and not just blogs or other social networks such as Facebook for instance), and to improve their civic attitude towards the electoral process.

It is noteworthy that after the end of the second ballot the candidates/staffs reduced the information flow. The same does not hold true for the voters, who continued to write and exchange information and ideas about the past electoral process. Our study indicates that microblogging's role in this campaign was limited, most probably its immediate role being strictly to mobilize people to go out and cast their vote. Although the intention was to replicate the American pattern at national level, it did not quite materialize to the same extent. Yet, did communication on microblogs influence the citizens' opinions and did it turn them into active participants in the campaign and in debates? The short answer is: probably not. However, it succeeded to prompt political actors, as well as citizens, to relate to the three components described above. Therefore, the group can be considered a time capsule that stores messages in 140 characters sent by candidates, campaign staffs, and most importantly, by netizens. This time capsule can be used for future researchc as an analysis of the involvement of staffs and candidates in the political marketing communication strategy on social media channels. It can also be used as a statistic image of the campaign, reflecting the number, age, geographical distribution of participants, as well the percentages of fans/supporters of different candidates and for usage of mobile tools in communication, etc.

In this context, there are a lot of debates about the success of websites or blogs of the Romanian politicians, which is usually measured in the number of posts and their views. It is impossible to establish with certitude nowadays how many of the young Romanians who access and post on a blog go to the polls on election day. Going from the computer to the ballot box may take very long, especially for youth. New media require rethinking the political and electoral strategies. It is clear that at this moment there are strategic concerns for understanding and "conquesting" the online space and for attracting the users. The parties which will understand the new social realities and appropriately adapt their messages will have the greatest chances to succeed. Because the new media provide the means for real and presumably eagerly awaited interactivity, political parties and candidates would at last gather people's opinions and options, and they would engage in a real and constructive dialogue. These balanced exchanges would improve the understanding of public opinion by the political sphere, while gratifying the public with (a sense of) participation and reconciling them with politics and democracy. The irreducible top-down dynamics of political leadership must learn how to cohabit with an ever stronger plethora of bottom-up initiatives – to tame them and embrace them, with all their versatility and instability, or bear the consequences.

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Varia

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The Power of the European Commission as an Information Source in Building the Media Agenda

Abstract: This article investigates the role of the European Commission as an information source by analysing to what extent the EC manages to influence the media agenda of the Brussels correspondents. The content analysis of three journals made us conclude that the EC does not dictate journalists what to write about but, more often than not, it does dictate them what to write. In other terms, the Commission is not successful in 'pushing' its own news topics in the media agenda, but it is rather successful in remaining the dominant source, therefore, in 'pushing' its own statements in the media, be it on the topics advanced by journalists themselves.

Keywords: European Commission, source, media agenda

Introduction

The interaction between journalists and their political information sources, more than often described as a battle for power, has always been a fascinating subject of research. And even more so if we want to catch a glimpse at the interaction between the European Commission and the Brussels press corps, the largest PR institution in the world (Kopper, quoted by Ionescu, 2007) and the largest press corps in the world (with 951 accredited journalists from 72 countries, according to the latest official figures).

While fascinating, the subject is also relevant for studying what are the risks and opportunities of such a close love-hate relationship between media and their sources and to what extent do journalists, in their daily work routine, expose themselves to the influence of political pressure. It is, in the end, a question of how much the press achieves in maintaining its independent watchdog position in the surveillance of the political scene. The question receives even more salience in a European-wide context, where Brussels correspondents are the main actors responsible for building a European Public Sphere and often have to play the role of "brokers between European issues and national public spheres" (Lecheler, 2006, p. 21). Where the public is even more dependent on the media portrayals of the EU affairs, as media is the only source of contact with the European institutions.

In light of these questions, the aim of the present article is to investigate to what extent is the European Commission successful in shaping journalists' agenda and articulating its position in the media. And we do so by delving into the agenda building and sociology of news production theories, into the historically constructed relationship between the Commission and the Brussels press corps, and the analysis of how the EC is used as an information source.

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Theoretical framework
Agenda building and the power of information sources

The agenda setting theory, as advanced for the first time by McCombs and Shaw (1972) has gained intensive attention in the communication research field mainly for shedding light on the influence of the media agenda on the public agenda or, more simply put, in Cohen's famous words, on how media "is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about" (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 177). During the last four decades, the initial focus of research has been extensively expanded to include not only the media and public agenda, but also the policy agenda, in not just a unidirectional model, with media influencing both public opinion and political class, but also a bidirectional one. Progressively, for some researchers the interest has shifted from "Who sets the public agenda?" to "Who sets the media agenda?", research question which draws its roots from the news sociology field, studying what factors influence the daily production of the news agenda (McCombs, 1993, p. 60). As important as it is to study *if* media influences public opinion (which has been the focus of agenda setting and media effects research), equally significant is to see *how* media influences public opinion, which naturally takes us back to the source, to the news production process. Despite the initial "conceptual muddle", with *agenda setting* being used to describe both the effects and the creation process (Berkowitz, 1992, p. 84), researchers have eventually agreed that media agendas are not usually *set*, but *built* in relation to the ongoing negotiation between journalists and their sources of information (Denham, 2010), therefore coining the term *(media) agenda building*.

In this light, the question "Who sets the media agenda?" has to be translated into "How does the news agenda take shape?" followed by "What is the ability of policy makers to influence news decisions?" says Berkowitz (Berkowitz, 1992, p. 81), pointing out the importance of sources in the agenda building process to the extent that he even considers news sources, and especially policy makers, by supplying information and stories to the media, to overpower journalists in their influence over the news agenda (Berkovitz, 1992). And he does not stand alone in this conviction. Also Sigal believes that news is what sources *say* it happened more than what really happened (as quoted in Turk, 1985). And Gans epitomizes the relationship between journalists and sources by using the dance metaphor, observing that it is mostly sources that are leading (Gans, 2004), or the metaphor of a tug of war, with sources attempting to control the news in their advantage, and journalists attempting to control the sources in order to obtain the information they are seeking for (Gans, 2004).

In light of this co-dependant relationship between journalists and their sources, we cannot help but wonder what role do officials as information sources play in shaping the media agenda. And one of the most significant contributions in this field has been Bennett's *indexing theory*, which states that media indexes voices and viewpoints in the news according to the already established power statuses of sources, which basically translates into a news monopoly granted to public officials as the dominant source of information (Bennett, 1990). While Bennett admits that virtually one possible explanation could be the fact that the press is acting democratically by favouring the viewpoints of public officials as representatives of the people (Bennett, 1990), he himself actually fears that, in reality media are dominated by institutional voices rather than legitimate public opinion, and it is because of this that "democracy becomes whatever the government ends up doing" (Bennett, 1990, p. 125). While the indexing theory offers resourceful insights into the division of political elite/ public sources

based on the abstract concept of power, it fails to trigger sound explanations for why journalism has become so dependent on sources in general, and on public official sources in particular. We would rather look into more up-to-date and in depth developments in the political (media) scene and journalistic practices for that.

For instance, under what he calls "the social organization of newswork", Schudson asserts that journalism, on a daily basis, has become the interaction of reporters and public officials, a relation that can best be described as "the interaction of the representatives of news bureaucracies and government bureaucracies", with the latter having the vantage position (Schudson, 2002, p. 255). The same idea makes Fishman state that "the world is bureaucratically organized for journalists" (quoted in Schudson, 2002, p. 255). And this bureaucratic character of the news gathering process is not solely based on the ubiquitous availability of officials as news sources, but on routines organised especially for the journalists by the official sources, on the ritualised patterns that become intrinsic part of the journalistic practices. Routine channels (such as press releases, press conferences, etc.) have become the prevalent channels for receiving information from official sources, and because they are staged and choreographed by the officials themselves, they are the ones setting the rules and exerting a greater control over the information (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). But routines can also be seen as a defensive mechanism for journalists (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). In light of Tuchman's concept of *objectivity* as a defensive strategic ritual, we are inclined to believe that objectivity is less of a journalistic principle, and more of a requirement to be true to the facts (Tuchman, 1972); as journalists, faced with deadline pressures, do not always have time to verify the facts, they rely on statements of official sources, in this way defending themselves against critics. Niven and Glenn (2004) categorise this tactic of '*apparent objectivity'* as one of the two tactics that help reporters in their pursuit of minimising the costs; the second tactic is *efficiency* which, again, can be said that it is successfully satisfied by the bureaucratic interaction between journalists and official sources – as they provide a stable and reliable source of authoritative information, as an alternative to the classical time-consuming 'digging for information'. Also from an efficiency perspective, we can point to Gandy's *'information subsidy'* notion (quoted in Curtin, 1999, p. 54), which is described to be an information obtained at little or no cost or effort for journalists, provided by sources who have an interest in appearing in the news.

However, this co-dependent relationship between journalists and official sources should not be explained solely on basis of the benefits they bring to the journalistic practices. To a certain extent, officials are difficult to avoid as they become more and more aggressive in trying to impose their own agenda. As Blumler and Kavanagh argue (2010), the third age of political communication is marked by intense *profesionalisation* of political advocacy, with politicians employing significant resources in order to get the media to report on their agenda, which does contribute to the tension between the two parties. To the extent that we can call the professional communication team of officials – PR practitioners (as they do serve the same role), we can understand Curtin's concern that if journalists start to perceive practitioners "as cohorts in news production rather than obstructionists", the practitioners will eventually be the ones building the media agenda (Curtin, 1999, p. 54). And this is not an isolated concern. In light of the strong dependence of journalists on official sources, there is significant disquietude with regards to the media's role in remaining an autonomous democratic institution, free from political pressure. It is often said that officials, their spokespeople and media advisers become "parajournalists" (Schudson, 2003) and "surrogate observers" (Roscho quoted in Ekstrom, Johansson, & Larsson, 2010) while journalists are changing more and

more their role of a watchdog into a "public relations lapdog" (Franklin, Lewis, & Williams, 2010, p. 203) and the press becomes "straitjacketed or handcuffed by its own routines" (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p. 132). While some of the voices are unwavering in predicting that "the fourth estate risks being overwhelmed by the fifth estate of public relations" (Baistow as quoted in Franklin et al., 2010, p. 211), in our case, political public relations or political communication, the present study aims to *critically* investigate to what extent is the media agenda shaped by the European Commission as an information source.

Methodology

Methods and research questions

As our main question, to what extent the European Commission achieves in shaping the media agenda, is indeed entrenched in the general context of the relationship between political sources and journalists, it also reflects a particular situation, embedded in the historically built relationship between the European institution and the Brussels press corps, and in the Commission's approach to communication. Therefore, the first part of our research is based on document analysis (the European Commission communication plans and white papers from the last years, the website of DG Communication, the Director General responsible for the relations with the media, and the virtual press room section of the website). In our aim to put in context the evolution of this relationship, we also employ literature review as part of our research, in order to reveal the tensions, the conflicts and the lessons learned that lead to the current dynamics between the EC and the press.

In the second part of the research we try to answer our question by delving into the usual approach when studying agenda building, content analysis. In line with Turk's operationalisations, we want to investigate the connection between media agenda, which is operationally defined as "the editorial content" of a publication, and agency agenda, in this case the European Commission agenda, defined as "the content of information subsidies" provided to the press (Turk, 1985, p. 13). But we want to go beyond what has been called by researchers "the *topical* emphasis" of the agenda-setting studies in light of understanding the agenda metaphor as only a list of prioritized topics and issues (Reese, 1994), by also investigating the nature of sources used by the media. As we have shown in the previous paragraphs, sources play a major role in shaping journalists' agenda. Therefore we advance two research questions:

RQ1: To what extent the news topics in the media are selected from the news topics advanced by the European Commission?

RQ2: What are the most prominent sources used by Brussels correspondents in their articles?

Sample and period of study

We investigate the two research questions in relation to three different publications, not necessarily because we wanted to conduct a comparative analysis, as there is no previous evidence to highlight a trend of different practices between EU correspondents from different media, but rather to cover a broader area of the EU media and to control for any differences that might prove significant following the analysis. This is the reason why we chose a national journal, an international journal and an EU focused, Brussels based journal, considering that

this differentiation of types of journals might cover for particularities that could result from the attention given to the EU affairs (in terms of editorial content, and consequently, human and power resources). For language consistency, we chose only English publications: the national publication – *Irish Times*, the international journal – *Financial Times*, and the EU focused journal, *European Voice*. Also, all three reflect different levels of 'power' and influence in the Brussels media circle: *Irish Times*, with only one Brussels correspondent, could be seen as the least privileged of them, followed by *European Voice* which, being Brussels based, enjoys the advantage of geographical proximity, and by far *Financial Times* is the most 'powerful' publication in Brussels, as it is often reported by other journalists and officials themselves.

Our media sample included the first 10 news articles written by EU correspondents for each of the three online publications in a period of study of 11 days, from October 7, 2010 to October 17, 2010. Our 'information subsidy' sample, or what we call, for the purpose of this paper, the EC agenda, consisted of all the news, including memos and speeches, advanced by the European Commission during its Midday briefing and published on the website in the Midday express section in a period of study from October 6, 2010 to October 17, 2010. In choosing the period of study, we took into account the average time that EU correspondents have to research before writing an article, from a couple of hours to one day for the majority of the reporters (Journalists @ Your Service Report, 2008). Therefore it seemed logical that, if they were to write about subjects inspired by the Midday briefing, the majority of journalists would do so the same day or the next day at the latest.

Measures and data analysis

In terms of measures, for RQ1 we coded each item from the Midday briefing with a topic number in accordance to its most important key-words that would differentiate one specific topic from another, and afterwards we would check to what extent the news topics on the media agenda correspond to the topics on the EC's agenda for the entire period of study. For RQ2, we coded each article in relation to the sources identified (according to the categories in *Table 1*) and eventually calculated the *weighted average* for each source. This is to point out that just by counting how many times a source category has been referred to across 10 articles does not meet our objective, which is to measure how much prominence weight) has been attributed to that particular source. And we associate a source's weight in relation to the diversity of the other sources cited in an article.

Table 1. Source categories.

S1	EC official	Commissioners, EC spokesmen, statements from the Commission, EC civil servants
S2	EU official (other than EC)	Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), EP spokesmen, officials from the Council of Europe
S3	National official	National ministers, national diplomats
S4	Lobby	Representatives of corporations, banks etc
S5	Expert	Think tanks, academic institutions and research centres
S6	Civil Society	NGOs and other CSOs, public opinion
S7	Other media	Other media publications
S8	Other	Any other category of sources not included in the above

Findings

European Commission and the Brussels correspondents – a historically constructed relationship

The relationship between journalists and the Commission transcends the already complex relationship between reporters and their political sources in their contentious dance for the lead, especially if we consider the history behind it. And it is in a historical context that we have to picture this relationship to better understand it.

As we see it, there are two different eras of communication (or non-communication) policies of the EC reflected in its approach to the media – before and after the fall of the Santer Commission in 1999. The 1999 crisis started with a journalist from the *Lanterne* who came into possession of evidence of corruption linked to high officials, and it was the EC's incapacity to manage the situation and communicate effectively with the media that lead to the first Commission to ever resign *en masse*, many say (Georgakakis, 2004). Like a cold shower, the event marked the end of an era dominated by the non-communication policy of the European institution, an era when "all political problems were simply denied" (Georgakakis, 2004, p. 133) and journalists were "little more than a relay of information for the European Commission" (Georgakakis, 2004, p. 125).

It was then that the Commission realised the impact of communication and started questioning its previous approach, and it was then that journalists themselves, empowered, started questioning their 'relay' status. The 1999 political crisis played a major role in the professionalisation of the communication between the European institution and the press. The communication revolution started with the Prodi Commission the same year, which put significant effort into revamping the relationship with the media, continued with the first Barroso Commission in 2004, who appointed the first Commissioner for Communication and Institutional Relations, Margot Wallström, and continues nowadays with Commissioner Viviane Redding in her efforts to personalise the communication of the EC.

A closer look at the communication plans developed in the last years reveals a rollercoaster ride through ambitious objectives inspired by various political failures, such as the need to cover the 'democratic deficit' (linked to the 'communication deficit') and increase citizens' interest in EU issues. Under the general commitment for more dialogue and transparency, the 2005 *Action Plan* built a threefold new approach based on listening, communicating and going local, translated into specific actions with direct impact on the interaction with the press: better use of communication tools, recruitment of communication specialists, training Commissioners to enhance their role as communicators, professionalisation of the staff. Also, the Spokesperson's Service role becomes more clear – it "*sets the news agenda* for EU correspondents in Brussels and beyond", it "will react to media queries", and "provide more systematic rebuttal of false claims" (European Commission, 2005, p. 9). The 2006 *White Paper* strengthens the need to close the gap between the EC and European citizens, putting forward a completely new approach and move away from a one-way communication strategy to a dialogue based approach, in which working with the media and the new technologies seems essential. Providing journalists with key information in different formats, video, sound and images, through the Europe by Satellite service (EbS) is seen as an enhancement of the collaboration with the media (European Commission, 2006). And finally, the 2007 *Communicating Europe in Partnership Paper*, as its name says, stresses even more the idea of a partnership

with the other European institutions, with the national governments and also with the media in creating a European Public Sphere and increasing the visibility of the EU actions. In developing a partnership with the media, the Spokesperson's Service role remains the cornerstone of the EC's communication strategy of delivering news to the media in an open and transparent way (European Commission, 2007). With 100 staff in total, amongst which 1 spokesperson for each commissioner and 27 portfolio press teams for each member state, the Spokesperson's Service is responsible for managing the Commission's routine channels with the media (the Midday briefing, technical briefings, press conferences, press trips and workshops for journalists), and making information available, in text, audio and visual formats, on the website, through Europe by Satellite service and various publications. As much as it tries to proactively meet the reporters' needs and wants, the Spokesperson's Service is also in charge for the reactive approach – responding to journalists inquiries and rebutting false allegation when they appear in the press.

Considering all these efforts to attract media in their political playground, how successful is the Commission we might ask? Baisnée (2004) argues that the Commission has always been favoured by journalists as an information source (and consequently managed to shape both the media agenda, and the interpretation of the events) precisely because of the extensive amount of information provided and the diversity of sources competing for media's attention. But he also adds to this equation, in what we perceive as a rather romantic vision, the historically constructed relationship between the press and the Commission, as Brussels correspondents have been, during the entire time, supporting the EU project side by side to the civil servants they were writing about, acquiring the same respect as them; they have been advocates of the European idea right from the beginning, in a time when they were very few reporters dedicated to EU issues. However, as Baisnée talks about the changes in the professionalisation of the EC-journalists interaction suggesting the Commission is not the natural source any more, but has become a "source like any other; one that cannot dominate EU news as it used to" (Baisnée, 2004, p. 154), we ask ourselves if that is really true. And if it were, could we really attribute the cause to what has been pinned down to the professionalisation of the communication practices?

As the Commission is trying to control the news management in Brussels and guide the flow of information through the pipelines of its complex machinery, as part of its so-called transparency policy, journalists grumble: there is now too much information, they feel "inundated by hundreds and thousands of information particles that they feel unable to coordinate, analyse and effectively select" (Adequate Information Management in Europe, 2007, p. 8), information which is usually labelled as too technical and complex, difficult to translate into appealing terms for the audience (Lecheler, 2006) and which fails to comply with the journalistic news values (Bijsmans & Altides, 2007). And maybe the most important and expected threat – the spin the spokespeople put on the information provided – "All to often the European Commission confuses information, which should be objective, with propaganda" (Harding, quoted in Raeymaeckers et al., 2007, p. 112). In this picture, it seems understandable why, as an EU correspondent says, it is both very easy and very difficult to be a journalist in Brussels – easy because of the enormous amount of official information; difficult if you want to cover your stories with something different than the usual on-the-record information (quoted in Ionescu, 2007, p. 105). To obtain off-the-record information becomes even more problematical if you are not working for an elite medium, as it seems "that a sort of Cinderella attitude prevails in Brussels, where the medium for which a journalist works determines

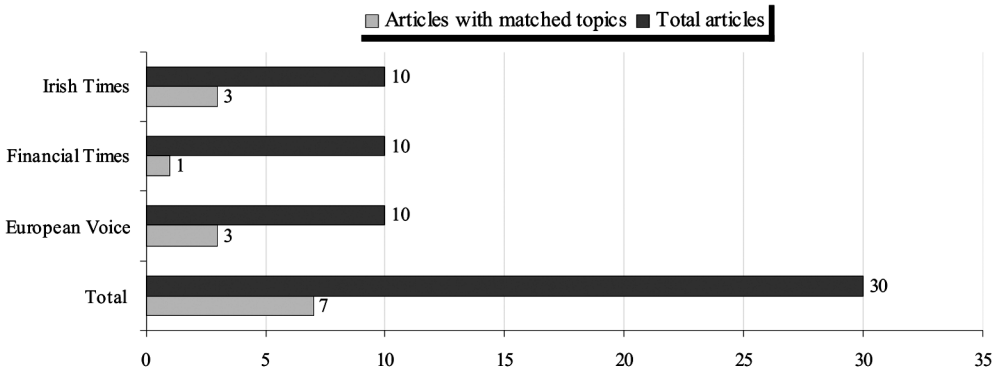
who will get the prettiest dress to go to the ball", with Financial Times being the most privileged of all (Raeymaeckers, Cosijn & Deprez, 2007, p. 117).

In what has been called "the symbol of the control of the Commission over EU news" the Midday briefing is the routine channel that enables the Commission to 'feed' journalists with official news (Baisnée, 2004, p. 142). It remains the most ritualistic instrument through which the European Commission tries to build the media agenda. Every weekday at 12.00 o'clock the Berlaymont press room hosts the one hour routine encounter between the EC spokesmen, sometimes even Commissioners, and the Brussels correspondents, in an effort to advance the most important news of the day and to respond to journalists' questions. Press releases, memos, speeches and other materials are also distributed in hard copy, and afterwards made available online, together with the live transmission of the briefing. But while the Midday briefing remains the central routine element of the journalists' workflow, the centrepiece of their day, it is often said that it acts, first of all, as a social event, an opportunity to network, with its main value relying not in the official information provided, but in the off-the-record information that reporters scoop either from spokespeople or their peers (Lecheler, 2006). And as the Commission seems to "boast" itself for being the only European institution to organise a daily encounter with the press (Journalists @ Your Service, 2008), even if they have no real news to advance some days, we tend to question whether this ritualistic event really manages to build the media agenda, as Baisnée and others seem to believe. The results of our investigation are described in the next section.

Building the media agenda? Results and discussion

Our first research question tested if the Midday briefing indeed functions as a "barometer of topics" of interest for the journalists (Raeymaeckers et al., 2007, p. 111), as it is often claimed, by investigating to what extent the topics in the media correspond to the topics advanced by the European Commission in its daily encounter with the press. To what extent is the Commission successful in building the *media topics agenda*?

Chart 1. Topic correspondence to the EC agenda.



As indicated by our findings in *Chart 1*, there is little correspondence between the topics journalists write about and the topics advanced by the Commission. Only 7 out of the total number of 30 articles examined are based on news topics proposed by the EC during the Midday briefing. Comparing the results across the three different types of media analysed, our

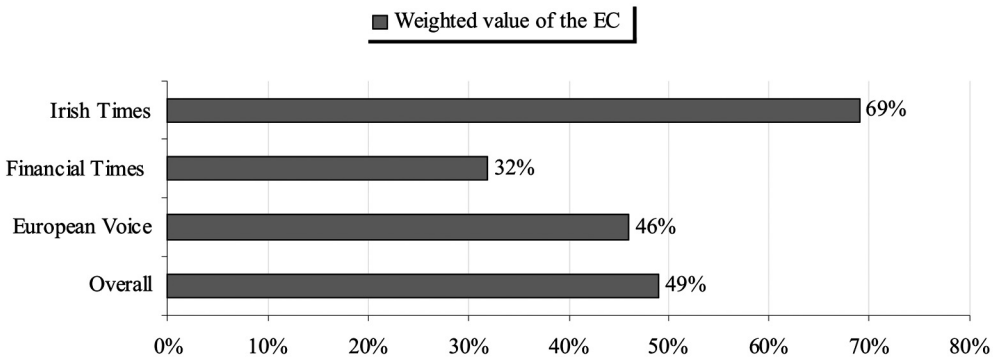
findings show equal figures for the national and the Brussels based publication, only 3 out of 10, and even a smaller number for the *Financial Times*, only one article out of 10. It is therefore safe to reason that, despite its professionalised communication practices and its proactive approach to 'push' its own stories in the media, the European Commission is not the one building the topic agenda. Looking also at the numbers of topics advanced by the Commission on a daily basis (for the period investigated, the daily average is between 13 and 14 topics a day) the Commission's success rate is rather low.

One sound explanation relies in the very nature of the interaction between political sources and journalists and the tensions that characterise this relation, especially in Blumler and Kavanagh's third age of political communication. Journalists are not particularly fond of having their professional autonomy and independence undermined and their profession reduced to writing about what the Commission dictates. The adversarial nature of their relation has never been more salient than in the third age of professionalisation – the more intense the efforts of the Commission to set the media agenda, the more journalists will retaliate and write about different issues. It can be viewed, in the end, as a statement of independence from political pressure.

But beyond this power game metaphor, journalists also select their news topics to meet certain news values. As it is often claimed by EU correspondents, the information provided by the Commission lacks newsworthiness in terms of geographical and political proximity (for national correspondents), novelty, conflicts and controversies, exclusivity, etc. It is easy to understand why the Commission, despite its communication transparency commitments, will not proactively announce news items to reflect conflicts, as this would damage its image. And it is also reasonable to expect journalists, always in search for exclusive stories, not to value too much the official information available to everybody else.

Our second research question tested what is the most prominent source employed by journalists in their articles. The results (as illustrated in *Chart 2*) indicate that the most prominent source is indeed the European Commission, with an overall weighted value of 49%, followed by national officials with 17%, and other EU officials with 14% (as shown in *Chart 4* in the *Appendix*).

Chart 2. The weighted value of the EC as an information source.



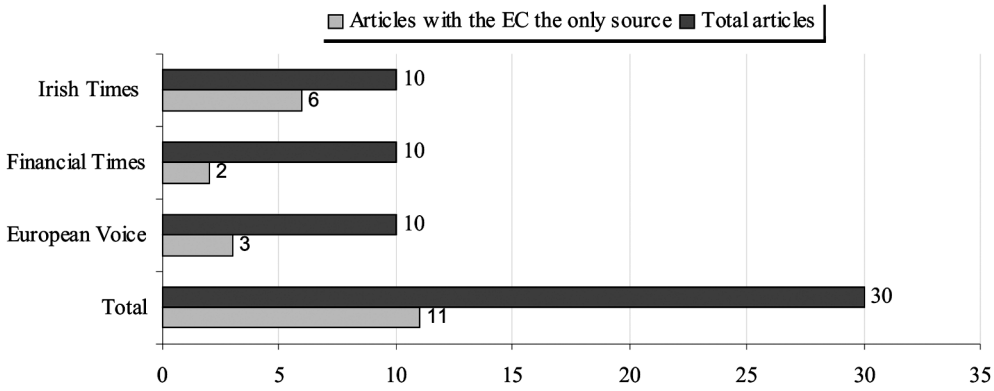
The prominence of the European Commission as an information source should not be surprising considering that it is the most powerful European institution (therefore the appeal of

the authoritative source, according to the indexing theory), and it is the only one providing journalists with a routine daily encounter and a number of other opportunities for meeting with the officials or their spokesmen (the appeal of availability, information subsidies and cost-efficiency).

However, looking at the results across the different media analysed, we cannot ignore the variation. The EC weighted value as an information source reaches a significant 69% for the national journal, decreases to 46% for the Brussels based publication and to only 32% for the *Financial Times*. It seems that indeed the medium reporters write for does count for their relation with the sources, therefore we can explain the variation in terms of resources and power of the medium. *Financial Times* is well known for its privileged status in Brussels, to the extent that it is sometimes called "the official journal of the European Commission" (European correspondent quoted in Lecheler, 2006: 58), a privileged status that comes with greater access to sources (thus not only the Commission based sources and, most importantly, not only the official ones) and, consequently, with more original stories (thus, only one out of 10 articles is inspired by information provided through official routine channels).

Furthermore, as our research question investigated whether the European Commission is the most prominent source (and not necessarily the most cited source), one way to illustrate the position of the EC in comparison to the diversity of the other sources was to code how many articles employ the European Commission as the *only* source.

Chart 3. European Commission – the only source.



As shown in *Chart 3*, 11 out of 30 articles present only the Commission's position in the matter of discussion, being that one that the EC has chosen to advance on the news agenda or one independently selected by the reporter. And again, the variation across the three mediums reinforces the trend illustrated by the previous results – the publication with the higher power status tends to counterbalance the Commission's position as an information source with other sources. As our results indicate, the EC's position is the only one documented in 6 out of 10 articles of the *Irish Times*, 3 out of 10 articles in the *European Voice*, and only 2 articles in the *Financial Times*.

Chart 4. Overall weighted value of news sources.

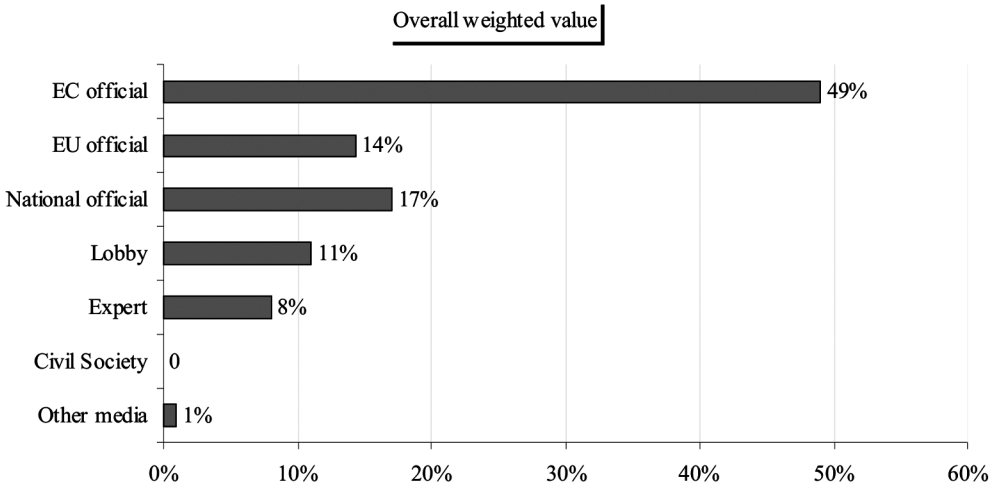


Chart 5. Irish Times Sources.

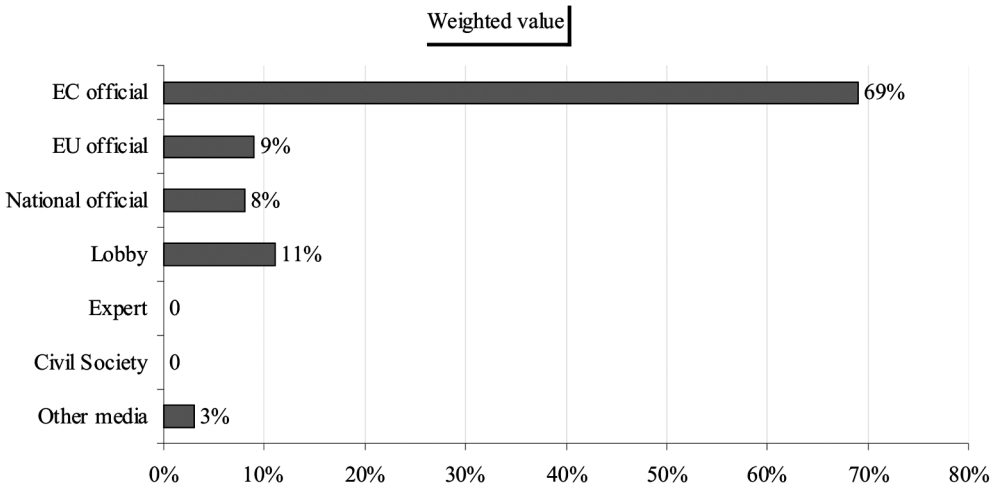


Chart 6. Financial Times Sources.

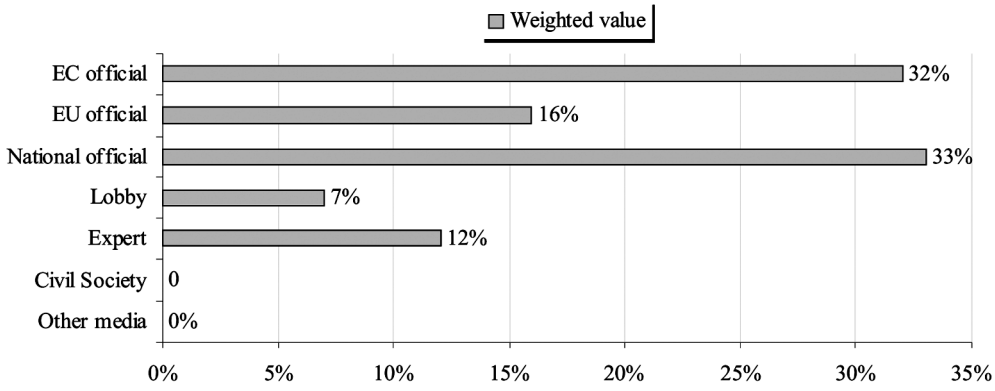
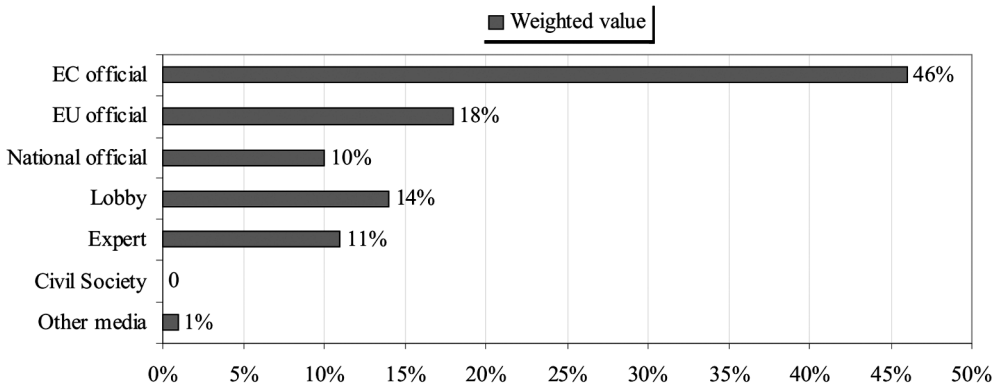


Chart 7. European Voice Sources.



Overall, the EC remains the most prominent source, to the extent that many times it is the only source consulted. From this perspective, the Commission plays a rather significant role in building the media agenda in the detriment of the other players on the stage (*Chart 4*). As illustrated by *Charts 5, 6* and *7* the battle for the second and third positions is being held between the other EU officials, national officials, experts and lobby organisations, depending on the medium. It is only in the *Financial Times* that we see a balanced content in terms of sources, with EC officials accounting for 32% and national officials for 33% of the sources. But in the other two publications and in the overall picture the situation is rather polarised – the European Commission is by far the most powerful source.

Conclusion

In investigating the success of the European Commission in setting the media agenda, our research demonstrated that the EC does not dictate journalists *what* to write *about* but, more often than not, it does dictate them *what* to write. In other terms, the Commission is not

successful in 'pushing' its own news topics in the media agenda, but it is rather successful in remaining the dominant source, therefore, in 'pushing' its own statements in the media. Whether these statements are furthermore criticised or questioned by journalists in their articles has not been the purpose of this paper, but it could become the object of investigation for future research. Therefore, as a suggestion for future research in this field, the question of agenda setting, as viewed from the perspective of the relation between journalists and their political sources, could be linked to the question of framing: do journalists frame the statements of official sources differently than officials themselves?

Nevertheless, just by giving the EC so much power as an information source and not countering its stance with other sources (being representatives of the other European institutions, national officials, experts, lobby associations or civil society organisations), the media tends to portray the EC agenda in the detriment of the other players. This confirms Bennett's indexing theory: indeed, media proves to index the voices of the most powerful sources in the detriment of the less authoritative ones – the European Commission, as the most powerful institution in Brussels, remains the dominant source of information. Even so, our research does not also confirm Bennett's (and others') concerns – that by giving prominence to institutional voices, media ends up becoming their 'lapdog' as, in the end, journalists are the ones choosing what issues to cover.

Therefore, once again, the dual nature of the relationship between journalists and official sources is confirmed. The adversarial nature is illustrated by the Commission's efforts to impose its own news agenda through its communication routine, on the one side, and the journalists' refusal to having their agenda narrowed down to what the Commission wants to advance, on the other. But it is also a partnership relation, as the Commission remains journalists' preferred source of information. And it is a position built and maintained across the years, on account of its long-standing relationship with the EU correspondents – not only that it is the most authoritative source of information in Brussels, but the EC is also committed to professionalising its communication channels to foster media's needs and to provide journalists with ritualistic information subsidies. But as our research indicated, depending mainly on these information subsidies (because of lack of power and resources) does make publications more vulnerable to having their agenda controlled by the Commission. As *Irish Times* has only one correspondent in Brussels, it is understandable why his daily routine is more revolved around and more dependant on the Commission's free information channels than the *Financial Times*, with correspondents who, due to their privileged status, enjoy access to unofficial sources.

To conclude, despite the general fear of journalists becoming the scribes of their official sources in this third age of professionalisation, our study demonstrates that it is not yet the case of Brussels correspondents. Although by favouring the European Commission as an information source journalists tend to give them, maybe even more than they realise, the handgrips to the power of agenda building, all in all the dynamics between journalists and the EC still reflect the never-ending negotiation process.

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Oana ȘTEFĂNIȚĂ*

The Spiral of Silence as a Media Effect in the 2009 Romanian Presidential Campaign

Abstract: Media effects within a concrete event such as the presidential campaign reveal the importance of media influence or of published polls during the campaign, which can contribute to the appearance of a spiral of silence to some candidates' detriment. All these elements lead to changing the voting intentions and the willingness of publicly sustaining candidates. The article proves that the more people come in contact with media coverage of the electoral campaign, the more they tend to be guided by media promoted view, and the more voters get to know the estimated winners, the more they adjust public attitudes and opinions regarding candidates. Furthermore, if people become aware of the fact that their choices are unpopular, they tend to pass them over in silence or to dissimulate their real options. The appearance of the spiral of silence phenomenon can determine essential changes both in electorate's behaviour and within the evolution of the campaign.

Keywords: media influence, opinion polls, spiral of silence, electoral campaign.

Introduction

The 2009 presidential campaign has been an impetus for questioning the role of media and their interference in voting decisions. Mass media can influence election results by giving credit to some information detrimental to other news, by launching a new opinion trend and by certifying an ascending or dominant public opinion trend. Media expand their ability to influence by creating a certain image of candidates, by choosing the candidates who deserve attention, by publishing only some opinion polls and by determining the occurrence of the spiral of silence phenomenon. These are just some of the mechanisms that media have at their disposal. Instead of remaining an instance that gathers and spreads information, media are an active factor in shaping an image of the world, in creating events, representations, beliefs, preferences, opinions and trends. In the political area, media have the power to decide what is made public and how is perceived. There is a constant race towards gaining the status of a reliable source in revealing reality. Out of this game between the media system and politics, the winner is the one that knows how to play better with people's perceptions and attracts the public opinion to promote their views.

Voters can no longer have access to undistorted information, cannot take individual decisions regarding a voting option since they are constantly constrained to estimate the public opinion climate or the media position. They evaluate the distribution of opinions in order to confidently express thoughts without fear of being isolated. Freedom of decision and freedom of expressing a decision are canceled by the tendency of conformation to the mainstream. In these circumstances, the element that has the power to impose a dominant trend,

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to give voice to a majority or a minority, suppresses people's freedom of speech without fear of isolation. Therefore, we should question media approach during electoral campaigns and the effects on people's decisions or on their public statements.

Context

The 2009 presidential campaign was a controversial event accompanied by attacks regarding the media system so as to attract attention to the lack of responsibility of journalists and presenters who left their own political preferences and subjectivity intervening in the process of fairly informing citizens. This mix of media bias, noisy minority, fear of being in contradiction with the estimated mainstream, influence of opinion polls, results in having undecided voters who do not know if media, by supporting some candidates, speak for the majority or if opinion polls are correctly estimating the majority option.

The main candidates enrolled in the campaign were Traian Băsescu, Mircea Geoană, Crin Antonescu, Sorin Oprescu, Remus Cernea, Corneliu Vadim Tudor, Kelemen Hunor and George Becali. The campaign was a special one due to some highly publicized and controversial events that have remained in the minds of voters such as the agreements with the IMF, the fall of the government, the fight for proposing a new Prime Minister and Băsescu's double campaign for both the elections and the referendum, which rose protests and complaints.

Media involvement in the campaign generated many reactions, including sanctions from the National Audiovisual Council. Reactions regarding media attitude occurred even in the press with references to the electoral manipulation, ethical deviations or moderators' bias. Lack of debates, which were replaced by shows of political analysis that promoted pro or con attitudes towards candidates, drew attention on some channels that pretended to be opinion leaders and promoters of certain recommended paths. Scandal type subjects replaced any correct information about the platforms of candidates or ruling measures and finally, yet importantly, candidates were not given the same opportunity, media focusing only on those who were among the firsts in the polls (http://www.capital.ro/articol/mass-media-in-campanie-manipulare-electorala-si-abateri- deontologice-128848.html, accesed on 28 May 2010).

Considering the disparities between media attitude and polls results, voters may be hesitant whether is it safer to sustain candidates appreciated by media or candidates who claim, based on figures given by certain polling institutes, to have the majority. Contradicting factors in estimating the climate of opinion generate indecision regarding safe options that can be publicly expressed without consequences in our social life. In this context, the question "Who do I vote for?" becomes "Who can I say I vote for, without fear of being isolated?", drawing attention to a growing phenomenon: the spiral of silence. Voters feel disoriented when it comes to this duel between politics and media and therefore, expressing their real opinions becomes a risky option.

The spiral of silence – a decisive media effect within the electoral campaign

Media effects are gathered under diffrent paradigms such as the strong effects paradigm – based on the assumption of a major influence of media messages, of immediate effects,

uniform and unfiltered by other factors; the limited effects paradigm – media influence is conditioned and limited by psychological, social and cultural factors that interfere in selecting and interpreting messages; and weak effects paradigm – receivers are seen as active entities and decisive factors in selecting, interpreting and using information (Coman, 1999, pp. 109-113).

The spiral of silence model subsumes to the strong effects paradigm, although we no longer speak about direct and immediate effects, but diffuse effects formed in time and related to the complience with the general opinion. The spiral of silence process has been defined by the German researcher Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann who studied on one hand, how public opinion can be influenced by various factors and, on the other hand, how public opinion can shape perceptions and reactions of members of society. The model includes "four defining elements of public space: 1. mass media, 2. interpersonal communication and social interaction, 3. individual expression of opinion, 4. individuals' perceptions about the climate of opinion in their environment" (Drăgan, 2007, p. 517). All these elements are interconnected and based on a fear of isolation input. Fear is a consequence of our social nature, of our need to be appreciated by others and to confirm our decisions or actions.

Fear of isolation is the force that drives the spiral of silence. As Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann states, to go after the group is the happier position, but if you fail, because under no circumstances you cannot share the unanimous beliefs, you have a second option of keeping silence over your opinions. (Noelle-Neumann, 2004, p. 27). Thus, individuals who choose silence fall into this spiral process and by their option, they determine others to enter the mechanism as well.

This process is based on four main premises and on a fifth one that connects the previous states: "1. society makes use of the threat of isolation regarding deviant individuals; 2. individuals continually experience a fear of isolation; 3. due to this fear of isolation, individuals are constantly assessing the climate of opinion; 4. the assessment affects their public behaviour, by speaking out or hiding an opinion" (Noelle-Neumann, 2004, p. 258). Being afraid of rejection or social exclusion, individuals constantly seek the accepted opinions in their environment, observing what is valued and what is condemned or what seem to be the future trends that will gain approval. They do this through a quasi-statistical sense, which allows them to identify the prevailing public opinion. If they are in agreement with the majority, they take part in discussions, they confidently state their views in public, but if the identified general opinion is contradictory to their beliefs, they become hesitant in publicly expressing themselves, they choose to remain silent and not to expose to judgments or exclusion (Noelle-Neumann, 2004, pp. 257-258). Public expression does not consist only in the speech act, but also in wearing badges, having stickers on cars, reading a certain newspaper, sharing promotional materials or vandalizing them, or attending public supportive meetings. These acts are expression means and their absence is equal to remaining silent (Noelle-Neumann, 2004, p. 213). However, there are people who are not affected by fear of isolation, who are less sensitive to the majority opinion, constituting "the hardcore". This hardcore is the exception to the rule, the minority who faces the threat of isolation and remains consistent regardless of social consequences (Noelle-Neumann, 2004, p. 215).

Mass media are the main tool that helps individuals in scanning the opinion environment, in determining the dominant opinions. Therefore, people perceive opinions presented in the media as majority's position, which receive public support and so they adapt their behaviour accordingly. Media have the power to deliver value and strength to an opinion and create either a silent minority, or a silent majority. In the second case, media provide support to views

shared by a numerical minority. A minority that feels sustained by media, becomes more active, feels encouraged to express publicly and determines the numerical majority to drop in silence, this being caused by the uncertainty of their unsupported beliefs (Coman, 1999, p. 116). In this case, the climate of opinion is wrongly perceived as having a dominant majority because in fact, it is a minority in numerical terms.

The phenomenon is called "pluralistic ignorance" or "cumulative ignorance" through which people are wrong about others' views, this being also a media effect. People publicly conform to an opinion because they believe that others actually support the view in real terms (McQuail & Windahl, 2004, p. 97). Besides the cumulative ignorance effect, sometimes we have the „looking glass effect",which reveals that people think most others will have opinions similar to their own, a feeling given by the false evaluation of the opinion climate (Spencer & Croucher, 2008, p. 141).

Even though the spiral of silence theory has its credit for contributing to researches regarding individual' s behaviour, media content that contributes to standardization, media effects or social integration process (Cuilenburg, Scholten & Noomen, 1998, p. 224), it also received certain critiques. These are related to the speculative character of the theory, to the fact that clues about the distribution of opinions can also come from other sources than from the perception of a national opinion climate. Such a source is represented by reference groups which could cover the gap between individual fear of isolation and mass society overall, and thus playing a more important role in determining the majority opinion. Also, people are often more sensitive to the views of their friends than to a general and abstract mass' views (Scheufele & Shanahan, 2001, p. 306). Moreover, a spiral effect cannot be uniform and it differs depending on several variables. For example, Dominic Lasorsa conducted a research to determine what other variables affect the sincerity of publicly expressing political choices, in addition to the fear of isolation. The results showed that honesty is affected by demographic details, by the attention paid to political messages from the media, by the certainty regarding some points of view, but not by the relevance of the problem to oneself or by media usage in general (Severin & Tankard, 2004, p. 286). In addition, factors related to personal characteristics, shyness or desire to avoid conflicts might interfere in the process.

Regarding the media influence, people adjust their opinions less after exposure to messages that are based on concrete data, facts, figures and more after exposure to information including examples, stories, testimonials and episodic framing. It has been shown that the use of information including examples significantly affects the perception of future opinions and of majority trend opinion, and so it can be considered that this type of information influences the availability of public expression (Perry & Gonzenbach, 2000, p. 270). However, during the electoral campaigns, this type of information cannot always prevail over polls, which provide a clearer picture of the distribution of public opinion.

If public expression of voting options is conditioned and influenced by so many factors, politicians have no choice but to focus their campaign strategies on keeping voting intentions of citizens, independently of their public supporting behaviour. This may be extremely difficult since after verbalizing some opinions for some time, they might appropriate those views, or after immersing in silence, they might give up adopting a voting behaviour. The spiral of silence becomes an enemy of those politicians whose supporters choose the silent behaviour and an ally of politicians who have public opinion on their side, or the so-called spiral of speech.

Spiral of silence theory is in essence a theory that shows the impact of public opinion, of social control over individuals and the role of media in shaping, promoting, legitimizing and

giving a majority status to an opinion. In this way, individuals are almost forced to adjust their own behaviour and public expression from fear of being isolated or rejected.

The spiral of silence occurs in both minorities and majorities, in the case of voters who change their decision to be consistent with group members or reference groups, or to be in agreement with the media, as well as in the case of politicians who adopt popular views to be appreciated and supported, fearing of isolation at their turn. Most often, the phenomenon is analyzed within electoral campaigns because it can provide explanations for electoral absenteeism, estimation errors, of reversed ranking within polls. In addition, the importance of the spiral of silence is given by the fact that its appearance at the expense of some candidates can make them loosing the elections.

During campaigns, the spiral of silence phenomenon might be decisive in determining the final classification, so candidates are trying through multiple strategies to enhance the appearance that they are supported by many people, using as arguments large supportive electoral assemblies or survey results. Their strategy pursues to reinforce this appearance of having majority's support, because the decision to publicly express political opinions is most of the times settled by the belief that a majority supports those opinions or at least that they will become dominant in the near future. Entering the spiral of silence process makes voters reluctant in supporting unappreciated candidates, they contribute through their silence at expanding the spiral and in the end, this fact causes the loss of elections by those candidates. Media are a major factor in determining the appearance of a spiral of silence in some candidate's detriment by influencing the public opinion and by creating the appearance of majority around certain opinions.

Mass media and the public opinion – an interdependent relationship?

Mass media exerted and continue to exert a particular fascination on researchers, especially in the effects area. Symbol of freedom of expression, mean of propaganda and manipulation, technology for mass distribution of information, mirror of reality or excessive filter and partisanship, however perceived as, mass media are somehow wrapped in a veil of ambiguity.

The most common discussions around media regard objectivity standards since media are not offering us access to any reality, but to a fractioned and modeled reality. Even the news programs with claims of objectivity, broadcast almost only shocking and intriguing events, enriched with partisan formulations, selected by criteria designed to increase audiences. Distorting information is inevitable under the pressure of factors such as constraints created by the need to deliver continuously and under time pressure something new, the availability of sources to provide information, the need to provide news, which the public should find attractive and understandable, the need to have a raised audience for receiving advertising (Bârgăoanu, 2006, pp. 140-141).

Media give us access to an interpretation of reality and also to a false reality that we perceive as being real. We can include here pseudo-events, events that are artificially created in order to be found and further broadcasted. Politicians use them as ways of playing their public roles. These pseudo-events are intended to enhance awareness and increase their image capital and thus they compete in scenarios such as walking among crowds at celebrations, participating in social or fashionable events (Drăgan, 2008, pp. 92-93). In the end, receptors perceive only multiple interpretations and constructions of reality that give us a vague glimpse

of some of the events that really happen. If we consider the political area, selection and distortion of facts may have significant influence over the electorate.

There is asserted to be a strong correlation between mass media and the public opinion, the latter being formed, legitimized and spread through media. Public opinion is not a homogeneous concept, and thus there are difficulties in defining it. Public opinion can be understood as "that dominant feeling in a certain social community accompanied, more or less clear, at subjects, by the impression that the feeling is a common one. Public opinion is a referee, a conscience, a court, free, without doubt, of legal power, but feared" (*apud* Bondrea, 1996, p. 25). Lippmann speaks about public opinions and Public Opinion. Public opinions should be images in our heads, images of ourselves, of others, pictures about needs or goals, correlations, while those images adopted by groups of people or by individuals acting on behalf of groups constitute the Public Opinion with capital letters (Lippmann, 2009, p. 50). Gabriel Tarde intuits that if a view is accompanied by the feeling that it has many adherents makes it easy to adopt and its ability to influence is increased, the public opinion being in fact an "ephemeral association", more or less logical, of judgments that deal with important issues at a specific time. The author also mentions that although we speak of opinion, in fact there is always a clash of two views, one of them being more widespread and adopted by a greater number of people, because its supporters are more active, more "noisy", this distinction being forerunner for the spiral of silence theory (Tarde, 2007, pp. 66-67). In whatever form, an opinion is the result of social interaction and is determined by socio-cultural structures in which individuals are placed.

Media can determine the appearance of an opinion, transform it into a public opinion, consolidate or change it in time. Between the public opinion and mass media, there is a relationship of interdependence. Public opinion influences media in their work, in choosing topics, feeds them with suggestions, attitudes, adopted positions towards certain events, while media contribute to the transformation of individual opinions in public opinions and published opinions at same time. Mass media can sustain an opinion trend, can oppose to a trend, can give voice to a minority opinion and transform it into a dominant opinion by spreading and supporting it.

Media influence on public opinion can increase or decrease in intensity depending on the stage in which the public opinion is. Regarding this aspect, Ferdinand Tönnies distinguishes three public opinion stages: solid, liquid and gaseous. In the gaseous state, public opinion is characterized as volatile, hasty, superficial, uncritical, gullible, full of prejudices, under the impression of the day, driven by factors related to morality and emotions (Dobrescu, Bârgăoanu & Corbu, 2007, pp. 59-62). In other words, in a gaseous state, public opinion becomes easy to influence by exposure to new information or new trends to follow. Vincet Price stresses the vulnerability of public opinion to media influence, which is given by a series of weaknesses such as lack of jurisdiction, lack of resources, the tyranny of the majority, vulnerability to persuasion and elites' domination (*apud* Dobrescu & Bârgăoanu, 2003, pp. 24-25).

Media impact is determined by a wide range of complex issues related to the way in which a subject is covered or framed, the way media impregnate messages with individual and biased concepts and to the way they create the appearance of majority around views. Overall, mass media influence public opinion by controlling information.

Public opinion polls – strategic component of influencing representations

During campaigns, media can assign a majority status to opinions by presenting facts in accordance to their statements and by using polls to sustain their position. Surveys have become an essential component of political transactions on television in a stage where politicians' value is given by their media performance. Political phenomena are presented in the media in a drama type perspective by focusing on rivalry among candidates, on conflicts, on personal life details, on popularity share, at the expense of relevant arguments and public deliberation (Mouchon *in* Paillart, 2002, pp. 186, 190). Through surveys, media can induce representations about dominant views, about voting intentions, which affect political games and campaign strategies.

By presenting electoral polls within political campaigns and adding biased comments or messages, media can generate effects on voting actions or in publicly expressing voting options. The most important type of effects are the "underdog" effect – of regrouping around the candidate to loose, or the "bandwagon" effect – of regrouping around the estimated winner (trend based on conformation or rallying, based on the impression that everyone supports a certain view or candidate, which becomes stronger than direct argumentation). Polls determine as well the "last minute swing" effect, which can overturn the final classifications (Chelcea, 2006, p. 117).

Voters correlate survey results with the identification of a dominant public opinion, which leads to changes in public support of candidates, to influences on final options, to dissimulations or to the appearance of the spiral of silence phenomenon at the expense of some candidates. The electorate has rigid areas and malleable areas, as well as critical segments such as those made of fragile or potential voters, core voters, which are already decided for a candidate and are convinced in their decision, and distant voters, which are more likely to vote for the opposite group (Gerstle, 2002, p. 56). Depending on the category they belong to, voters can be easier or harder to influence. Beside this classification, Roland Cayrol identified in his studies the persons who would be most easy to influence: women, very young voters or very old people, rural voters and people who are less interested in politics. They also may occur in the voting mechanism, elements as religious beliefs, socio-demographic characteristics, perception of election stakes, educational level, employment status and the importance accorded to groups (*apud* Rieffel, 2008, pp. 33-34). In accordance to their profile, voters can be decisively influenced by polls results.

However, polls are integrated within the political field, often serving political interests with questions poorly made, inadequate constructed samples and counterfeited questionnaires. Surveys impose to political actors which can no longer simply assert that public opinion is on their side, but they have to invest a specific energy to make people say through surveys, what they want them to say (Champagne *in* Paillart, 2002, pp. 19, 32). In Romania, it was often emphasized the issue of partisanship in the case of certain media due to subordination to politicians or to party affiliations. Competition occurs in this way among media groups for controlling what the public perceives from actual events and political stakes.

In conclusion, mass media influence us through their operating method, through imposing criteria for selecting and presenting information, by bias interfering, by inducing representations, shaping our vision of the world, using polls with misleading purposes and by interfering in the process of assessing the majority opinion. All these actions influence the appearance and the evolution of a spiral of silence process, which at its turn, determines the unfolding of political campaigns.

Methodology

The research aims to identify the degree of validity of some aspects related to media influence on voters, the influence of polls and the existence of a spiral of silence in the presidential campaign. Basic hypotheses of this approach are:

1. The more people get in contact with media coverage of the electoral campaign, the more likely they are to be guided by issues, trends and values promoted in the media.

2. The more the electorate finds out the estimations developed through surveys, the more changes will occur in their attitude towards candidates.

3. The more the voters notify that their choices are not popular, the more likely they are to pass them over in silence or to dissimulate them.

In addition, there have been used within the research a series of sub-hypotheses designed to support the validation of main assumptions:

1. As media consumption increases, the intentions to vote for Traian Băsescu decrease.

2. As media consumption decreases, the number of winner estimations for Traian Băsescu increases.

3. As the importance accorded to media or friends' opinions increases, the changes determined by the lack of consonance with these opinions increases as well.

4. If preferred candidates are poorly ranked in the polls, then voters turn their attention towards other candidates with better results or decide not to vote at all.

5. If a candidate has the first place in the polls, then he attracts more voters than if he was ranked second.

6. If the voting intention is for publicly appreciated candidates, then it increases the availability to support them in public.

7. If voters perceive a positive media attitude towards some candidates, then they tend to vote more for those candidates.

These assumptions are based on the premise that young people are easily influenced because of their lack of political experience or expertise in the field. For this reason, they are open to information and political messages to learn more and to decide whom to pay their vote. Their decision is based primarily on the attitudes identified in the media about candidates, but reported as well to group preferences, to opinion polls results, since they feel the need to confirm the accuracy of their deliberation. Moreover, their conformation tendency in order to be appreciated within their groups or to feel in agreement with media is higher than in the case of experienced persons who rely in taking a decision on evaluating the activity of political parties and on the measures promoted in candidates' programs. Youngsters base their decision more on candidates' image, which is built and promoted by the media system, a system considered more competent in promoting trends than a majority public opinion.

In order to analyze the above-mentioned premises, I used a quantitative research method based on a survey applied to a sample of 164 persons, aged between 19 and 28 years. The sample consists of 57.9% women and 42.1% men. The questionnaire was collectively administered during the first round of pre-elections, between 7th and 20th of November 2009. The application method was self-administered, responses registration being conducted by people part of the investigated sample, thus eliminating a number of factors that might have influenced responses by the investigator's presence.

The survey aims to verify the research hypotheses, with questions designed to identify voting intentions, winner estimations, media attitude towards candidates, willingness for publicly

supporting candidates, the influence of opinion polls and the changes resulting from the lack of consonance with media views or with friends' views.

Results

Media consumption and the induced changes

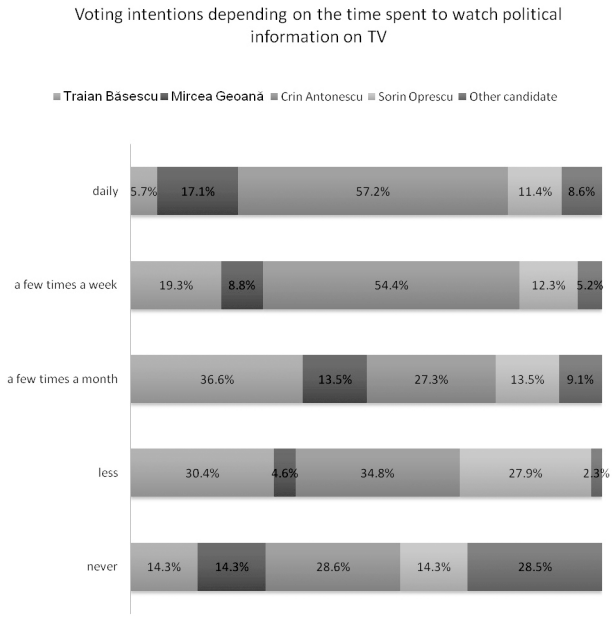
Although media may have lost credibility during the presidential campaign, the importance of messages they constantly sent remained the same, whether its promoters realized or not the effects of some statements. The first round results showed that although media were significantly involved in promoting certain candidates, in fact they represented an active minority voice, which influenced a silent majority regarding the level of expression and public support for candidates, but failed to equally convince them in the voting behaviour. Another assumption would be that the active minority did not exert with the same energy their voting right, being discouraged by previous unfavorable polls estimations. It may be more comfortable to be on the same side with the winner, and so the rallying effect could have significantly contributed to elections results.

In terms of voting intention 45.1% of respondents want to vote for Antonescu, 21.3% for Băsescu, 16.5% for Oprescu, 10.4% for Geoană and 6.7% for other candidates enrolled in the campaign. The results were different from the national ones since the sample is limited and consists only of young people. However, estimations of the winners show significantly different results: 46.3% of respondents estimated that Băsescu would win elections, 28.7% believe that Geoană would emerge to be the winner, 20.7% Antonescu and 4.3% Oprescu.

The campaign is a political event that attracts even the attention of those who are not interested in politics in general. Media consumption is high as respondents get information about politics and political events mainly from television, followed by the internet. The influence of media messages, enhanced by the increased consumption of information, may determine changes in message selection, in attitudes about candidates, preferences, in shaping the voting decision or in estimating the winner. By associating the amount of time spent watching television broadcasts with the intention of voting, it can be seen that media influence and the attempt to appreciate some politicians over the others, did not remain without effects.

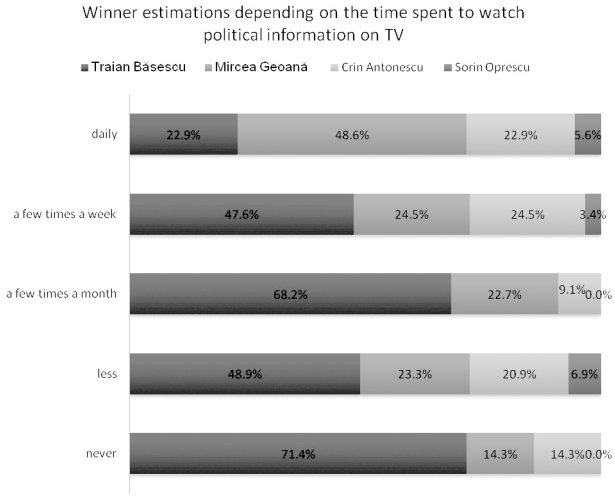
Thus, daily TV viewers want to vote primarily for Crin Antonescu, and then for Mircea Geoană. The campaign against Băsescu apparently worked among youngsters who watched TV political programs daily, as voting intentions for Băsescu were the lowest. However, the intention to vote for Băsescu increases inversely proportional to the time spent watching political messages on television. Among those who never watch political or news broadcasts on television, Remus Cernea and Crin Antonescu are on top voting preferences, in this case intervening the group's influence as well.

Figure 1. Voting intentions depending on the time spent to watch political information on TV.



Regarding the estimation of the winner correlated with time allocated to watch political programs on television, Geoană was named winner of the presidential campaign by the daily television viewers – 48.6% (media succeeding in inducing this idea), while Băsescu and Antonescu were tied with 22.9%. As time spent on television decreases, the view that Geoană is going to win looses considerable ground, media influence being lower and thus, estimations for Băsescu are increasing.

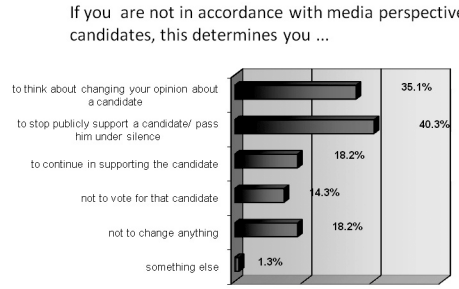
Figure 2. Winner estimations depending on the time spent to watch political information on TV.



Similar results are registered in the case of radio listeners and in the case of those who get information mainly from newspapers and internet sites. The estimations remain close to those offered by polls during the campaign, keeping the standings – Băsescu, Geoană, Antonescu. Being aware of their role and power, mass media have clearly interfered in this campaign, supporting a cause. Perhaps media should sometimes assume the role of audience orientation towards certain directions, but they should respect the fact that every man is entitled to receive accurate information without induced ideas to follow. Not being taken into account by media, some politicians may end up being considered unworthy of attention. Consequently, people will also turn their attention to politicians who seem to have more chances and who are more publicized.

Sharing the same opinions with media, prooves to be very important for youngsters since they are willing to consider changing their views on a candidate at a rate of 35.1% in order to be in agreement with media perspectives on candidates. 40.3% are willing to stop publicly supporting a candidate and to pass him under silence in case of opinion differences with the media and 14.3% would not vote at all. Therefore, it can be observed the vulnerability of respondents to media influence and their increased availability of entering a spiral of silence. However, 18.2% would continue to support the candidate or would not change anything in their behaviour.

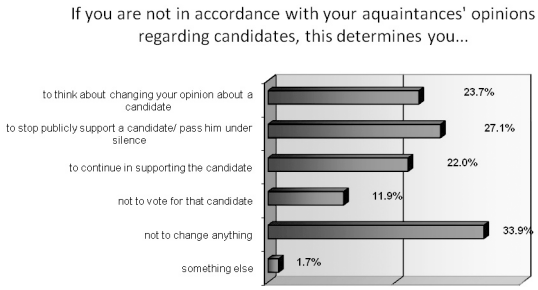
Figure 3. Changes determined by the lack of consonance with media.



In addition, beside changes induced by lack of consonance with media, were also induced changes by the lack of consistency with acquaintances. According to the research conducted by Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson and Hazel Gaudet, personal influences are stronger than media in influencing voters, since personal contacts are preferred as favourite sources of information about campaign especially by undecided voters or less interested in politics. Political discussions can have an increased influence in accordance with the importance of the persons who spread political messages or in accordance with the credibility of opinion leaders (Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet, 2004, p. 200).

Regarding the personal influence, friends or families' views are seen as more important than media views and the percentage of those who are in accordance with friends rather than with media is higher (61.6% to 50.6%). Still, when it comes to changes determined by the lack of consonance with friends, these are fewer than are those induced by media. For example, 33.9% responded that the fact of not being in consonance with friends, does not determine them to change anything, 22.0% would continue to support their favourite candidate, 23.7% would think about changing their views, 27.1% would not offer public support anymore and 11.9% would no longer vote for the same candidate.

Figure 4. Changes determined by the lack of consonance with acquaintances.



Therefore, the lack of consonance with the media views causes larger changes even though the recognized importance accorded to these views is lower. This can be determined by the fact that according increased importance to an abstract instance than to well-known people, can be difficult to recognize, and to have opinions supported by a whole media system is more comfortable than being supported by a group of acquaintances who share a common view.

Bias interference is clearly identified by voters, noting which candidates are put in a positive light and for which there is a negative attitude. For example, media attitude towards Traian Băsescu is perceived as negative by 79.9% of respondents and predominantly positive for Geoană by 44.5% or neutral by 35.4%. The attitude towards Antonescu is perceived as neutral by 51.2% and as positive by 40.9% of respondents and mainly neutral for Oprescu by 65.9%. Very high percentage for the perception of a negative media attitude towards Băsescu can contribute significantly to the appearance of a spiral of silence and to renouncing at publicly supporting the candidate for fear of being judged. Lack of consonance with media can lead to uncertainty and indecision with no effect at the voting level or with changes in voting preferences as a need for confirming the accuracy of their judgment. By making an association between perceptions of media attitudes towards candidates and voting intentions, it resulted that voting intentions for candidates who are negatively perceived in the media decrease consistently.

Although media power can be important in damaging candidates' image, it has limits in imposing preferences, receivers filtering information through their own system, through their way of thinking and reasoning, taking also into account the opinions of their friends and group members.

Opinion polls within electoral campaigns and their effects

Public opinion polls are predominantly delivered during electioneering and may be strategic components of inducting representations. As long as media coverage of such polls influences voters, no matter if changes determined by this influence are significant or not, they can be decisive in tight competitions. Within the research, there were a series of questions aimed at highlighting the contribution of polls in estimating the winner and in attitude changing.

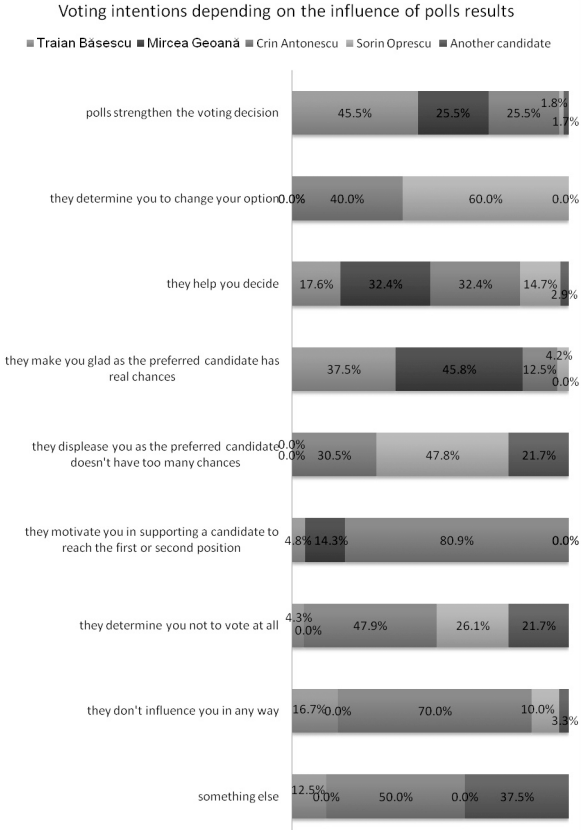
By associating voting intentions with winner estimations, it can be seen that those who vote for Băsescu believe that he will win at a rate of 71.4% and from those who vote for Geoană, 82.4% believe in his victory. Only 35.1% of those voting for Antonescu think he will win, while the rest of them give Băsescu more credit in winning. As well, 14.8% of those who elect Oprescu think he will win and 55.6% of them think that Băsescu will be the winner.

If those who want to vote for a candidate do not think he will win, they will lose their motivation and trust in that candidate's victory. Being on the losers' side may be a contributor factor for changing their voting intentions or for renouncing at paying their vote for any other candidate.

Asked how polls presented in the media influence them, 33.5% of respondents said that they reconsider their decision on a specific option, 6.1% change their choice and 20.7% find polls helpful in taking a decision. While 14.6% of them are glad when they see the results since the supported candidate has real chances, 14.0% are discouraged that their candidate does not seem to have chances in winning the elections. However, 12.8% are motivated to support a candidate to make him reach the first or second place. Another important effect is making people give up voting, this option being chosen by 14.0% of respondents, while 18.3% say that polls have no influence on them.

By associating these responses with the voting intention, it can be seen that polls results have a strengthening effect of the decision of Băsescu and Geoană's supporters, while in the case of Antonescu and Oprescu's supporters, these determine them at a greater extent to change their decision or to give up voting. Having media on their side, Antonescu's supporters are highly motivated to vote and make their candidate occupy the first or second position in rankings. In this case, the results of the polls have a diminished importance.

Figure 5. Voting intentions depending on the influence of polls results.



Combining the same answers with winner estimations, we see that those who strengthen their decision believe in Băsescu's victory, those who change their options think that the winners will be Antonescu and Băsescu, and those who believe polls help them deciding are estimating that Geoană will win.

Constantly positioning a candidate on a third or fourth place in the polls will lead to having a final place close to estimations results, which in fact are communicating about the importance given to a candidate. If a candidate is among the lasts means that he is of no political significance, considering that hardly anyone wants to vote for him. So, if there is not a considerable affiliation to that party or to that candidate, voters will turn their attention to those who occupy top positions.

Returning to the polls influence on changing voting decisions, respondents were asked to choose consecutively whom to vote between Băsescu and Geoană, Antonescu and Băsescu, Geoană and Antonescu, each candidate being placed first in the polls within a type of combination. Although the majority voting preference was not reversed in any of the cases in favor of the estimated winner within the polls, every election registered an average increase of 10% in favor of the candidate occupying the first position. Rallying effect in winner's favour exists each time, though not in such a manner as to influence the rankings. The case would not be the same if differences among candidates would be small or if rallying would be taken into account at a national level. In conclusion, the second main hypothesis behind the research is validated by the changes induced by polls in voting intentions and in attitudes towards candidates.

The Spiral of silence – on the majority or on the minority's side?

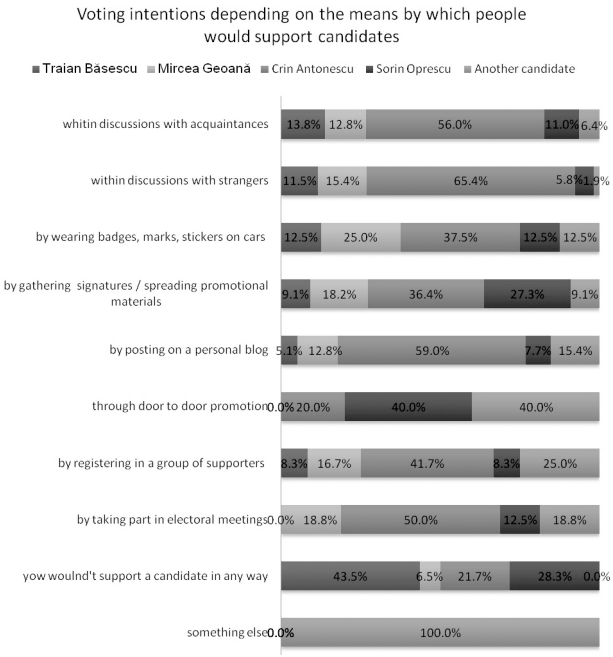
People constantly assess the opinion climate to see if their opinions are part of the majority trend or against it. In evaluating the opinion climate, one uses indices such as the availability of publicly supporting a candidate, the availability to involve in conversations with strangers and support personal views, although these views are different from the ones of their interlocutors. Usually people are confident when supporting their views within public conversations if they believe the majority shares resembling opinions. Another factor giving impetus to publicly expressing opinions is the media support for those views.

The research emphasized that even though Băsescu is estimated as the winner of the campaign, Antonescu and Geoană are the candidates for whom there is a higher availability for public support, these being sustained by media attitude and by trends identified within the climate of opinion. Asked by what means would be willing to publicly support a candidate, 66.5% of respondents chose discussions among friends, 31.7% would support a candidate in discussions with unknown people and 28.0% would not support the preferred candidate in any way. 23.8% would promote a candidate on their personal blogs, 9.8% would give support by participating in election meetings, 7.3% would register in a group of supporters, 6.7% would gather signatures / spread promotional materials, 4.9% would wear badges, put stickers on cars, and 3.0% would promote candidates from door to door.

By associating these responses with voting intentions, it can be seen that the greater availability to offer public support is for Crin Antonescu and then for Mircea Geoană, but with a lower percentage. Thus, it can be observed that candidates who are more publicly sustained, are those who benefit from media support and those who are perceived in a positive media frame. It may also interfere in the case of Antonescu's public supporters, the group pressure

since voting intentions among young people are the highest. On the other side, Băsescu meets the highest percentage among those who would not support in any way the candidate they want to vote for. It seems they acknowledge the danger of isolation and observe which is the growing trend regarding the candidates. By comparison, Remus Cernea benefits from a group of supporters convinced in their decision, who involve in actions along with other supporters such as participating in electoral meetings, joining a group of supporters, promoting the candidate from door to door or on their personal blog. Thus, they avoid discussions with strangers that would expose them more to isolation or critiques.

Figure 6. Voting intentions depending on the means by which people would support candidates.



Voters would choose to fall in silence or wouldn't publicly support candidates who either do not have media support or do not have good positions in the polls, or they are not appreciated within groups that voters are part of. Some of Antonescu's voters would change their option and vote for Geoană, as o consequence of the need to conform to families and friends' voting option.Voting for Geoană, however, is the option that implies the lowest exposure to isolation as the candidate has both media support and a good postion in electoral polls.

On the other hand, results are quite different in relation to the lack of consonance with media messages. In this case, those who would change options, previously wanted to vote for Traian Băsescu – 44.5% and for Oprescu – 40.7%, or for another candidate – 7.4%. Media succeeded to determine the appearance of a spiral of silence around Băsescu, having thus a significant influence on public support within the electorate. Among those who would keep silence over their options in order to be in line with the average, 51.7% would vote for Băsescu, 29.0% with Oprescu and 16.1% with other candidates.

The spiral of silence phenomenon develops most in Băsescu's case and much lower in intensity, among Oprescu's supporters. Regarding Antonescu's case, the spiral of silence appears

by reporting to acquaintances and not to media. The phenomenon takes place at a reduced scale, determined more by the results of electoral polls. When referring to media reporting, supporters are not determined to stop giving public support. Accordingly, the obtained percentage for passing over in silence opinions about a candidate in order to be consistent with the majority is 0% in Antonescu's case. Besides having media support, Antonescu's sustainers do not have to enter a spiral of silence since the majority of youngsters support this candidate publicly and want to vote for it.

Referring to the willingness of publicly supporting candidates, only 47.6% of respondents would discuss with pleasure with people who disagree with them about the candidates, 32.3% would talk, but without a real interest and 20.1% would not discuss at all. Of those who would gladly discuss with people having different opinions, 62.9% are the liberal candidate's supporters and 12.8% are Geoană's supporters. Among Băsescu and Oprescu's sustainers there is the highest percentage of those who would not talk at all about voting choices, deepening the spiral of silence in the case of these candidates, after estimating the climate of opinion.

In conclusion, although media consumption helps in assessing the climate of public opinion, within the 2009 campaign opinion polls showed that the majority is more willing to vote for another candidate, meaning that in this case, there is a numeric silent majority. Those who were not according enough attention or time to media political messages did not perceive correctly the climate change or the ascending trend. Their orientation factor in estimating the majority opinion was represented by electoral polls and thus their evaluation was partial and misleading. Opinions development and changes that took place before the official campaign period were slow and so the trend was not observed by enough people. It remained more in urban areas, among young and middle age categories. The campaign period was short and during this time, an ascending trend in Antonescu' s favor was formed, but it did not have enough time to be promoted and identified by voters. The upward trend was supported by an active minority, but failed to convert the majority and to become dominant. Additionally, a part of those active supporters did not go to vote or changed the voting option in the last minute, being discouraged by polls results and wanting to be on the winner's side.

Conclusion

After carring out the research and interpreting the results, it can be stated that main hypotheses, along with sub-hypotheses have been validated. This way, the hypothesis – the more people get in contact with media coverage of the electoral campaign, the more likely they are to be guided by issues, trends and values promoted in the media, was confirmed, emphasizing media power in creating a negative image of a candidate and in combating his campaign. Although effective in suggesting the major candidates, media failed to impose a winning candidate, their influence being limited by the results of opinion polls, by the time spent watching political information, by the importance granted to political issues and by electoral preferences after assessing the climate of opinion. Media influence is increased when there is not broadcasted information about particular candidates and so, those candidates are not considered important by the electorate. As well, media influence is significant when it determines the occurrence of the spiral of silence phenomenon. Their influence can change election results, even if it fails to impose the final winner.

In addition, the hypothesis about the influence of polls – the more the electorate finds out the estimations developed through surveys, the more changes will occur in their attitude

towards candidates, was also confirmed. Polls are a decisive factor in predicting the majority opinion and they influence the appearance of the spiral of silence. Candidates who occupy the last positions within polls have diminished chances of success as voters prefer to draw their attention towards candidates who occupy top positions or to give up voting. In this way, candidates having the first places in the polls are favored by the fact that media publishes these surveys.

The third hypothesis – the more voters notify that their choices are not popular, the more likely they are to pass them over in silence or to dissimulate them, was as well validated. Moreover, it could be identified a conformation to the views promoted by media on one hand, and conformation to survey results, on the other hand. The spiral of silence phenomenon was identified at the expense of Traian Băsescu, as a result of media influence and of pressure to conform to youngsters groups' preferences who like Antonescu, the segment involved in this phenomenon representing a silent group. Considering youngsters' voting intentions, we can say they represent a silent minority, but reporting to a national level we deal with a silent majority. The spiral of silence phenomenon was also identified among Oprescu's supporters, but they represent a silent minority, and the process is at a reduced scale.

Although the spiral of silence phenomenon did not alter the outcome of elections, intervening here other factors such as survey estimations, it influenced the availability of public support for candidates. Plus, it determined the extension of conformation to majority opinions and reduced the number of votes paid for candidates of which supporters were affected by fear of isolation, and contributed to electoral absenteeism. Media influence and the influence of polls, along with the spiral of silence phenomenon determined by the previous two, modify people's perception of opinion climate change and of the growing majority opinion trend, which determines changes in attitudes and voting behaviour.

The main purpose of this study was to emphasize effects on society in a concrete event as the presidential campaign, drawing attention on the importance of media influence, of opinion polls published during campaigns, of the interdependence between media agenda, political agenda and public agenda. Another purpose was to highlight the importance of the spiral of silence occurrence in determining conformation, opinion dissimulation, renunciation of public support for preferred candidates, rallies in favor of the estimated winner or renunciation of the voting act.

In fact, it is all about awareness of the importance of communication and its effects. Whether we speak about messages and information transmitted along with the broadcaster's own views, campaign strategies, acts of support from voters or acts against the campaign of a candidate, there are all forms of communication, which determine changes around us, at the level of perceptions and representations, of attitudes or behaviours. Therefore, after getting in contact with these forms of communication that tell us something about views that can be expressed publicly, we decide whom to support, what attitude to adopt – silence or active support and eventually, we choose for whom to vote.

The decision is not fully ours, but is the result of a series of factors such as the media attitude towards candidates, media targeted candidates that they broadcast messages about, associations with other news and used frames. Other factors are campaign interests, knowledge and previous experience, the importance given to the views conveyed in the media and the time allocated for watching TV political programs. In addition, several factors are involved in determining the final decision such as survey results, preferences of the groups we belong to or of acquaintances, the identification of the majority opinion, the trend that will strengthen in

the near future and opinions that can be expressed without fear of being isolated. Then, we assess our own readiness to publicly support a favourite candidate, we estimate the ability to face fear of isolation or to conform to contrary opinions that own the majority. We estimate if we can publicly support a candidate we do not like, adopt a different decision from the personal one or otherwise, fall in silence and maintain previous decisions, rally to the winner's side and then finally, vote. What seems a trivial process, however, is a complex process in which media use the influence and power that they possess.

The analysis of voting intentions for the public availability of supporting candidates could show that, even if voting intentions were in favor of some candidates, people were willing to change their mind after consulting the polls and watching political messages transmitted by media. Changes occurred also after estimating the opinions of their friends and families, being influenced by those opinions identified as secure ones, which can be publicly expressed without fear of isolation. This fear of isolation determines people to change their voting choices, renounce at voting, dissimulate opinions or pass them over in silence, rally to the winner or rally to a candidate that is supposed to enjoy more support in the near future. People are capable of a real metamorphosis for the sake of social relations, of a good public image and for public appreciation.

However, the investigation has some limitations, given by the small sample, which represents only one category of voters, so the phenomena were not identified at a broader level in the population, but only among youngsters. Also, the research has not been conducted to the second round of the campaign which could reveal new aspects concerning the verification of hypotheses. In order to have a higher degree of relevance, a research on the spiral of silence mechanism should be performed on large samples of age groups and at successive periods, by analyzing changes in attitude and behaviour of people and correlate them with media monitoring to identify changes in the climate of opinion. Research should be conducted for both rounds and continued after the elections to see whom people voted for in the last moment and what made them choose the final option. It would also be interesting to observe the phenomena at the next election, given that some candidates might coincide. Aditionally, smaller scale spirals should not be ignored, because all contribute to decisions and changes in voting behaviour and to establishing the final classification.

In conclusion, the research emphasized the importance of media influence, of media coverage of electoral polls during the campaign, the importance of the spiral of silence phenomenon in determining the voting decision or the publicly supported candidates. Public opinion and fear of isolation are significant factors in indicating the options to be chosen. Media effects require increased attention because influences exerted by intervening in politics, may change or determine the outcome of elections. Both the social scene and the political world are adapting to media imperatives, this leading to an unnecessary adding of superficial and spectacular coverage to our world, distorting the true views and needs, constraining our freedom and pushing us towards conformation or silence.

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Book reviews

Nicoleta CORBU, Mădălina BOȚAN

Telepreședinții. Radiografia unei campanii electorale [TelePresidents. An Inquiry into an Election Campaign], București: Comunicare.ro, 2010, 168 p.

Reviewed by Elena Negrea*

Presidential election campaigns have always been a valuable data source for both researchers in the fields of political studies or media studies, and journalists covering political topics. The fascination of watching the harsh rivalry between the candidates running for the office makes people spend more time in front of the TV or the computer, in search for information that, eventually, may or may not influence their vote. It would seem that it is not the content related to the candidates' political projects that people primarily seek, but the spectacle of the electoral confrontation. The candidates whose presence on TV increases significantly during the campaign become "telePresidents", true television stars, as the authors mention in the foreword of their book.

Nicoleta Corbu and Mădălina Boțan invite the reader to a retrospective analysis of the most recent Romanian presidential campaign, in which candidates, their supporters, journalists and the public itself played a role in the televised performance. Unlike much of the flourishing literature on the 2009 presidential elections, this book is the result of a thoroughly carried out research work. The authors have empirically tested two of the most renowned theories used to analyse the coverage of political elections by the media: the agenda-setting and the framing and priming theories.

TelePresidents. An Inquiry into an Election Campaign is divided into three sections. The first part of the book is dedicated to the analysis of the TV news, with a particular focus on the news related to the election campaign. The authors have used the theoretical framework provided by the agenda-setting theory and its further developments – the framing and the priming effects – to show how media have set the public agenda during the campaign, to measure the visibility of the presidential candidates and, finally, to identify the frames used by the media to present the political information and the priming effects. The findings of the content analysis used to test the agenda-setting during the 2009 election have showed that the news aired during the campaign covered political and election-related topics (the two Romanian news channels, *Realitatea TV* and *Antena 3*) or social and miscellanea topics, such as accidents, natural catastrophes, information on fashion or high life people (the general TV channels, *TVR1*, *ProTV* and *Antena 1*).

In terms of visibility, only three of the twelve candidates were significantly present in the media. This is a consequence of what the authors call "a specific media logic" which favours the "selection of those aspects considered being of interest for the watchers, and thus the focus is on the horserace to which only the candidates with real chances to win participate" (p. 52). Another interesting finding is that despite the fact that the information on the most visible

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candidate – Traian Băsescu – was mainly negative, this triggered a sort of a "boomerang effect" (p. 83), which eventually propelled him ahead of Mircea Geoană, his opponent during the second round of the election.

The third category of findings comprised by the first part of the book refers to the framing and priming effects identified during the election campaign. As expected, the conflict frame was the most used to present the political news during the campaign. The authors explain this as a consequence of the "logic of rating, which usually is correlated with the topics focusing on controversies and conflict, and which is better reflected by the famous saying used by the American press: *«if it bleeds, it leads*»" (p. 83). In terms of priming effects, the authors notice that the 2009 electoral campaign lacked the rational criteria for an evaluation of the candidates. The news analysed did not favour the use of the competence or the moral integrity criteria to assess the candidates participating to the election race; "since these criteria were not discussed in a thematic context, they played an insignificant role in the evaluation of the presidential candidates" (p. 78). In other words, it seems that "competence" and "moral integrity" criteria are irrelevant to the Romanian electorate when assessing the candidates. Furthermore, the electorate evaluates the candidates in terms of their capacity to win the electoral race – people seem to value rather the candidates' sporting performance in the race, than the content of their televised interventions.

The research methodology used and the insightful interpretation of the data obtained make this section of the book one of the most interesting empirical analyses of a Romanian presidential campaign done so far. However, even though the authors mention at the beginning of the book that the audience targeted is not exclusively formed by informed researchers or media scholars, the large public which they would like to reach may encounter some difficulties in reading through the vast amount of data presented. I think that a more detailed presentation of the theoretical background supporting the research and more space dedicated to 'translating' the statistical data presented might help the general public to more easily perceive the picture of the presidential election drawn by the authors. Other than that, this is a great piece of research work on the reflection of the media agenda, the framing and the priming effect in the 2009 Romanian election campaign.

The second part of the book comprises an analysis of the final televised debate between the two candidates who made it to the second round of the election. The analysis presented by the two authors focused on three aspects of the debate: the candidates' discourse, the visual rhetoric and the extent to which these two elements have contributed to the understanding or to the coverage of the duel between the two candidates. The "uncrowned queen" of the election campaign, the final debate seems not to influence the vote that much, despite the credit that one usually gives it. The 2009 election debate was a "rhetorical duel" (p. 100), which deepened the conflictive interaction between the two candidates. In terms of the quality of the discourse, the candidates' verbal interventions were limited, rigidly controlled by the moderator, and lacked the approach of relevant topics (such as political projects, economic measures to be taken, solutions proposed by the candidates, etc.). The visual format of the debate seemed to have been the subject of "affectedly grand scenarios" (p. 115). The uses of cameras and the architecture of the space made the watchers interpret the debate as a sports competition in which the self-presentation of the competitors and not the content of their discourse weighed more.

The last section of the book is the juiciest one. It comprises the analysis of the representations that journalists have of the political information and of the relationship between the

media sphere and the political sphere. The authors qualitatively examined the way in which journalists perceived the election campaign and the role that media played in it. Ten of the most famous Romanian journalists were interviewed. The results have showed that the interviewees thought that the 2009 presidential election campaign made impossible "an objective presentation of the political actors involved and of the important events of the election competition" (p. 153). The journalists have mentioned that there was no "ground zero" of this campaign, in which information could have been presented as objectively as possible, without the subjective involvement of different media outlets. As the quantitative analysis has also showed, the journalists considered that the conflict had been the leading element of the campaign. As for the journalists' role in the campaign, the interviewees have mentioned "the serious consequences on the credibility of the press triggered by the «mimicked equidistance»" (p. 155) that characterized the journalists' reporting on the campaign.

Nicoleta Corbu and Mădălina Boțan's effort to empirically study the 2009 election campaign has resulted in a very interesting and useful book not only for scholars and students interested in similar topics, but also for journalists and media analysts, or for the politicians who consider to embark on a presidential campaign at some point in their political career. I think that the valuable content of the work and the great presentation chosen by the authors are sufficient reasons for the aforementioned audience (and others too) to read their book one, two, five or even ten years after the presidential election…

Ceremony of awarding the title of Doctor Honoris Causa to Mrs. Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO

Paul DOBRESCU*

Introductory Speech

Mrs. Irina Bokova, the Director-General of UNESCO was Ambassador of the Republic of Bulgaria to France and Monaco, Personal Representative of the Bulgarian President to the "Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie" and Permanent Delegate to UNESCO from 2005 to 2009.

Born in 1952, Mrs. Bokova obtained an MBA from the Moscow State Institute of International Relations and studied at the universities of Maryland and Harvard in the USA. During her long and distinguished career, she also served as Bulgaria's representative to the United Nations and as her country's Secretary of State for European integration and Foreign Minister. Mrs. Bokova has long promoted the transition to European integration. As Founder and Chairperson of the European Policy Forum, she worked to overcome divisions in Europe and promote the values of dialogue, diversity, human dignity and rights.

On April 27th, 2011 Mrs. Irina Bokova was awarded the title of Doctor Honoris Causa by the National School of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, Romania. The ceremony took place at the Central University Library of Bucharest. We reproduce in this number of the Romanian Journal of Communication and Public Relations the Introductory Speech given by Professor Paul Dobrescu, Rector of the National School of Political Studies and Public Administration, the *Laudatio* speech delivered by Professor Remus Pricopie, Dean of the College of Communication and Public Relations, and the acceptance speech *Lectio Prima* given by Mrs. Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO.

Distinguished guests,
Dear members of the academic community,
Dear colleagues,
Dear students,

It is a great honour for us to welcome Mrs. Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO to this important event in the life of our University. The Senate of the National School of Political Studies and Public Administration decided to confer Mrs. Bokova the most prestigious academic distinction, that of *Doctor Honoris Causa*. Let me present to you the reasons underlying this decision.

Since we find ourselves powerfully involved in education, let me begin by making some statements regarding the role of education in contemporary society. I will do this drawing inspiration from various speeches delivered by Mrs. Irina Bokova and by her priorities as a Director-General of UNESCO.

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As Mrs. Bokova has recently stressed, UNESCO is driven by the conviction that "education is one the most powerful, positive forces for individual, national and international transformation". A closer look at the contemporary world shows that economic differences between states and regions reflect differences in the achievements of their educational systems. In order to close these economic gaps, the starting point should be the improvements in the education systems. To quote Mrs. Bokova, "at a time of uncertainty, one thing seems certain: education is the best investment for healthier societies and stronger economies", the safest and most reliable instrument of contemporary development.

I share Mrs. Bokova's view according to which "fundamentally, education is about values". Too often, we forget this hard truth. The contemporary society has taught us that a good education is the surest pass to good citizenship. Especially universities are key institutions whose responsibility is to instill to their students and future specialists modern, democratic values, the propensity for diversity, for mutual understanding between cultures and people.

In connection to the role of education, especially in times of economic hardships, please allow me to present a statement that has impressed me a lot. In the context of the global economic crisis, people and nations have been tempted to cut investments in education. In the last State of the Union Address, President Barrack Obama fought against this tendency. "Cutting the deficit by cutting our investments in innovation and education is like lightening an overloaded airplane by removing its engine. It may make you feel like you're flying high at first, but it won't take long before you feel the impact". This is a powerful remark, even a warning, and all of us should meditate upon it. I was very glad to find that this powerful view is publicly endorsed by Mrs. Bokova herself. As our distinguished guest has made it clear in a recent editorial, "despite times of austerity and because of them, we must invest in the power of education to transform societies".

There is a misconception, widely spread especially in Europe, according to which intellectual contributions are limited to books, studies, articles, works of art, etc. It is my belief that institutional building is an equally important intellectual contribution. Institutional building activities set up the infrastructure, the framework for the creative activities as such, open new perspectives for them and connect them to the requirements of each age.

In this context, I would like to reveal Mrs. Bokova's impressive record of institutional building endeavours in all her official positions and especially as the Director-General of UNESCO.

It is worth mentioning Mrs. Bokova's efforts to redefine UNESCO's mission in a globalised world, that of driving the global efforts in the field of culture, science and education. The core of this mission is participation in the global governance by exploiting UNESCO's vocation, which is truly global. As Mrs. Bokova herself underlines, in order to achieve this, UNESCO must have a forward looking vision and get involved in all the debates concerning the problems of the 21st century. Mrs. Bokova's term as a Director-General of UNESCO is based on the concept of the new humanism for the 21st century, meaning a new vision on education supporting sustainable development, a new vision on science and technology serving humanity, a new vision on culture stimulating tolerance and mutual understanding.

Let me mention one more thing. Our university has been very selective in awarding this academic distinction. Allow me to name just three personalities who received this special award: Professor Lord Anthony Giddens, the renowned sociologist, Honourable Lord Robertson of Port Ellen, former NATO Secretary General of NATO, and Professor Jan Sadlak, former director of CEPES – UNESCO, Bucharest, Romania. Let me welcome Mrs. Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO, to this gallery of eminent personalities.

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Remus PRICOPIE*

Laudatio

Your Excellences,
Distinguished Guests,
Distinguished Members of the Romanian Parliament,
Dear Mr. President of the Romanian Academy,
Dear Ministers,
Dear Members of the Academic Community,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have, today, the honor to attend a prominent moment in the academic life of the National School of Political Studies and Public Administration – SNSPA, occasioned by the awarding of the title of *Doctor Honoris Causa* to Mrs. Irina BOKOVA, Director-General of UNESCO.

As always, such an event is filled with emotion, and its source lies not only in the fact that an academic community is celebrating an international public figure, but also in the fact that, with the awarding and accepting of the distinction of *Doctor Honoris Causa*, the personality becomes a member of that same academic community. But alongside emotions, there also come some challenges, and the main one is to capture, in only 10-15 minutes, the multiple facets of the personality celebrated here today.

Although this type of challenge is not new for me, it was the first time that I felt the need for a methodological matrix. I felt that such a matrix would help me make sure that I would not overlook any of the main fields of this personality's career accomplishments. Thus, my approach started with a simple question: "What qualities should a person prove in order to be conferred the highest academic distinction?" and the answer, although complex, came out almost by itself:

a. Have an outstanding academic training;
b. Have a multiple, complex professional experience;
c. Be the promoter of innovative ideas and projects, that he or she has implemented successfully;
d. Be concerned with the capitalization of the experience and knowledge acquired, and with their transfer to the new generations;
e. Share and promote both the values of the academic community, and the universal values;
f. Be recognized internationally for his or her achievements;
g. Be a source of inspiration for those working in his or her field of competence, and also for the younger generations, in general.

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With this matrix of indicators in mind, I began building this *Laudatio*, starting with a look at Mrs. Bokova's outstanding academic training.

A. *An outstanding academic training*

Those who work in international relations know that there are some educational institutions that, if you are accepted there and manage to complete their programs, are in themselves a guarantee for the solidity of your academic training. Who has not heard of the Moscow or the Washington, D.C. schools of diplomacy? Who has not heard about the prestigious school of diplomacy in the heart of New England, at Harvard University? And Mrs. Irina BOKOVA has enriched her academic training at all these exceptional schools. She graduated:

– in 1976, from the Moscow State Institute of International Relations;

– in 1989, from the University of Maryland, School of Public Affairs,

– and in 1999, from the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.

Also, her interest in life long learning has proved to be a constant throughout her career, as shown by the completion of many programs, among which, the *NATO fellowship Program for Central and Eastern Europe on democratic institutions*, focusing on the national and legal mechanisms for the protection of minorities.

B. *A multiple, complex professional experience*

As for the professional experience, Mrs. BOKOVA's career has been both complex, and encompassing multiple fields of interest.

A dedicated diplomat, Mrs. Irina BOKOVA began her career as an Attaché and a Third Secretary at the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affaires, in January 1977. After five years of gaining experience at the Ministry, she was assigned the task to join the Permanent Mission of Bulgaria to the UN, in New York. Some might call it fate. I would call it commitment and determination to work in a highly prestigious, and, at the same time, complex international institution. After the mission in New York, Mrs. BOKOVA continued her activity in the areas of interest of the United Nations, and from 1986 until the events of 1990 which led to the democratization of this part of Europe, she held the position of *Advisor to the Minister of Foreign Affaires* in Sofia.

The democratic movements in Bulgaria in 1990, led to an important shift in the carrier of Mrs. Irina BOKOVA. The technocrat diplomat decided to get involved in the political arena. Thus, from June 1990, until October 1991, Mrs. Irina BOKOVA was a Member of the Constituent National Assembly, a political path that, however, was not taking her away from the field of international relations. As a result, Mrs. Irina BOKOVA has been:

– State Secretary on European Integration, at the Ministry of Foreign Affaires,

– Minister of Foreign Affaires;

– Member of the Parliament and Deputy Chair-person of the Foreign Policy, Defense and Security Committee, and the list can go on.

From 2005 to 2009, Mrs. Irina BOKOVA was delegated by the President of Bulgaria with the authority to represent her country as Ambassador to France and Monaco, and to lead the Permanent Delegation of the Republic of Bulgaria to UNESCO.

C. *Promoter of innovative ideas and projects*

Furthermore, if we take a look at the agenda that Irina BOKOVA promoted throughout her career, we cannot fail to notice that she has proved herself a promoter of innovative ideas and projects, as she has constantly been preoccupied with the cutting edge issues of the day.

Thus, at the beginning of her career she was interested in issues related to:

– political and human rights;
– the agenda of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations;
– equality of women;
– refugees rights;
– economic, social and cultural rights.

After 1990, Irina BOKOVA has started to address new subjects, such as:

– constitutional issues, taking part in the drafting of the new Bulgarian Constitution;
– the complex agenda related to the Council of Europe;
– being in charge of the Bulgarian agenda regarding European accession, a very challenging route that we, Romanians, on our turn, shared with our Bulgarian colleagues;
– issues related to youth, equality, education, development and peace;
– security-related issues.

D. *To spread the practice and values of professionalism when approaching the most sensitive issues*

Also, among the main interests of Mrs. Irina BOKOVA throughout her activity, a constant one has been spreading the practice and values of professionalism, especially when approaching sensitive issues. And she used various ways for achieving this: from the scientific publications found in the most prestigious libraries of the world, to public conferences held at top world class universities, and from participating in research projects, to an active engagement within professional associations. The list is too long to be reproduced here. However, I would like to dwell for a moment on a single example, from 1997. That year, Mrs. Irina BOKOVA founded and chaired *The European Policy Forum*, a non-profit, non-governmental organization whose main objectives, at that moment, were to promote the European identity and values, to encourage the intercultural dialog and the acceptance and support of diversity, and so on. I have not chosen this example by chance, but to point out that, nearly a decade before the accession of both our countries to the European Union, Mrs. Irina BOKOVA understood the need to promote the European ideas among the citizens of the Eastern-European countries, making use of all means and instruments available, not only through diplomacy, politics or administration, but also using the most effective mechanisms – the grass-root support of the civil society.

E. *Dedication to the values of the academic community*

In terms of the commitment to the academic values, I strongly believe that someone who searched for the best academic training in top educational institutions around the world, and who, after graduation, even without being a faculty member, kept a constant and close connection with the academic world, cannot but be an individual profoundly confident in the intrinsic values of the university and the academia.

F. *International recognition*

Of course, recognition is the ultimate validation of achievements, and the wider the circle of people and institutions that one gets recognition from, the more valuable that recognition is. Mrs. Irina BOKOVA has enjoyed international recognition of her work starting early in her career. However, her election as Director-General of UNESCO, in October 2009, is one of the highest forms of international recognition that a professional could ever receive. In October 2009, the 193 Member States of UNESCO voted, with a large majority, for Irina BOKOVA to become the new Director-General of one of the most prestigious organizations worldwide. Moreover, this vote has a significance that goes beyond the person chosen. Member States have endorsed, at the same time, several other elements:

– they voted for Irina BOKOVA, thus validating her professionalism;

– they gave a vote of confidence for an exponent of the gender equality and advancement of women movement, Irina BOKOVA, the tenth Director-General of UNESCO, but the first woman in this prestigious series;

– Member states gave a vote for Bulgaria, but also, implicitly, for the entire Eastern Europe, as a proof of and a support for the sustained efforts this part of Europe has undertaken to ensure its openness towards the world.

G. *The power to inspire the new generations*

As for the last indicator on the matrix – *the power to inspire the new generations* –, some questions came to mind:

What is the core power of someone who is dedicated to renewal, to bringing about and supporting new ideas, if not that of becoming a mentor, a guide for the new generations?

What is the hard work of a person, if it doesn't inspire others? What is a lifetime endeavor for, if it doesn't leave a legacy behind?

For Irina BOKOVA the answers are easy to find. Her work has been a model for many people of her generation and of the younger generations, both before and after becoming the Director-General of UNESCO. To understand this, all we need is to take a look at her numerous speeches hold worldwide, and at the reverberations generated by her messages, be it at the Robert Schuman Institute of European Studies in Florence, Italy, back in the late '90s, or at the College of Europe, Brugges, Belgium, in early 2000s, or her interventions and firm positions taken as head of UNESCO in Haiti, Peru, Morocco, Congo, Argentina, Kenya, Pakistan, to name just a few examples as, naturally, the list is much longer.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you may have already noticed, I have not made many references in my speech, so far, to the current work of Mrs. Irina BOKOVA at UNESCO. Two are the reasons for this. *The first* is that I intended to emphasize in this *Laudatio* the main elements defining the character and the intellectual power of the personality we celebrate today, and these things are not determined by the current position Mrs. Irina BOKOVA holds with UNESCO, but by the very fabric of which this Lady is made of. *The second reason* is that what Mrs. BOKOVA currently undertakes at UNESCO goes far beyond what a *Laudatio* would be able to cover. Still, there are some essential aspects of her present work that need to be mentioned here.

In the address to the 35th General Conference, on October 23rd, 2009, on the occasion of her installation as Director-General of UNESCO, and in different public speeches and sub-

sequent actions, Mrs. Irina BOKOVA expressed her determination to mark a time of renewing and revitalization in the organization's history. Among the objectives announced at the time, and immediately accompanied by concrete actions within the UNESCO Secretariat, one may note:

– *For the Education Sector*: the commitment to develop a methodological framework for the Member States to use in the quality evaluation of their own educational systems. Other new initiatives in the field are concerned with (a) women's literacy and (b) education about climate change and sustainable development;

– *For the Natural Science Sector*:

(a) the establishment of workgroups focused on fighting climate changes,

(b) adaptation of mandates for existing inter-sectoral platforms, and

(c) enforcing the resolution of the General Conference on the elaboration of a *Declaration* on ethical principles related to climate change.

– *For the Social and Human Sciences*: promoting a "*new humanism*" in which human rights and democracy are the conceptual auspices for addressing issues such as bioethics, migration and urbanization.

– *For the Cultural Sector*: In this field, the Director-General of UNESCO has announced her determination and has made definite efforts to give more visibility to this area, to attract extra-budgetary funds, so that, on one hand, the 890 objectives in the UNESCO World Heritage List would be well preserved and protected and, on the other hand, the list would come to include some other new objectives.

– *For the Communication and Information Sector*: one of the most interesting areas considered is the encouragement and support of linguistic diversity on the Internet; further more, of course, constant interest is given to strengthen the democracies of the world by guaranteeing fundamental human rights, including the freedom of expression, the access to information and the right to participate at the life of societies. Last but not least, the new Director-General of UNESCO is determined to be extremely proactive in the communication associated with the projects implemented by UNESCO.

As well, in all her interventions and actions, she has committed herself and UNESCO, with an impressive energy, in the assertion of culture and science as factors of development in the context of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, at a time when trade and finances seem like the only engines of economic development. Such a statement of interest is strongly reassuring and encouraging, especially for countries like Romania and Bulgaria, trying to use at best their comparative advantages in a highly competitive world.

In fact, capturing into a single statement the work of Mrs. Irina BOKOVA as Director-General of UNESCO, during the first half of her mandate, we can say, without reserve, that she has had the courage to reopen the discussion on our current challenges, and to encourage the intellectual elites of the world to get actively involved in shaping the future of our societies. That is exactly what the founders of UNESCO considered to be the main role of this organization in the world.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Please, allow me a confession. During the process of reviewing Mrs. BOKOVA's career and work, in writing this *Laudatio*, I was diligently looking for the best formula to describe in a synthetic manner the personality that we are celebrating here, today. And I was happy to find it in the statements delivered by her. Of course, beyond any doubt, Irina BOKOVA is a

diplomat, a professional, and an international leader. But, in my opinion, Irina BOKOVA is, above all, a *believer*, someone who strongly believes in the power of humanity and the strength of nations, someone who knows that the real power resides in dialogue, not in confrontation, and that the ability to listen to and respect the person next to you is the source of fruitful intercultural dialogue. These are the values that Irina BOKOVA has advocated all along her life and career, from her days as Attaché and Third Secretary at the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, back in 1977, until today, when she is the Director-General of UNESCO.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My endeavor here is the expression of the will of the Senate of the SNSPA to recognize exceptional work and professionalism. By awarding the title of *Doctor Honoris Causa* to Mrs. Irina BOKOVA, the Senate of the SNSPA not only recognizes her remarkable achievements so far, but also builds new bridges between the academic community of the SNSPA, and why not of the other Romanian universities, and our distinguished guest, Mrs. Irina BOKOVA, who, in fact, today, is becoming member of the Romanian academic community. Thank you very much for your attention!

Irina BOKOVA*

Lectio Prima

Professor Paul Dobrescu, Rector of the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration,

Professor Adrian Miroiu, President of the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration,

Profesor Remus Pricopie, Dean of the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration,

President of the Romanian Academy,

Madam President of the Commission on Culture of the Chamber of Deputies,

Dear Ambassador Nicolae Manolescu,

Honourable Professors,

Dear Students,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am deeply honoured to receive this *Doctor Honoris Causa* from the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, and deeply touched by your kind and friendly words. Created in 1990, the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration has played an important part in the rise of a new Romania after the end of Europe's divisions. This University has forged several generations of young leaders – in research, in the private sector and in the public administration. There is no nobler mission than this – to stimulate the minds of young adults and to inspire them towards public service.

I am deeply touched and very honoured to be here with you this morning, and especially as a citizen of Bulgaria, I feel very close to all of you. Bulgaria and Romania have moved forward together since 1990. The entry of Romania and Bulgaria into the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is a crowning achievement for both societies. We all know the work, the patience, and the will that went into these successes.

We are seeing similar impulses for transformation today in other parts of the world, in the societies of North Africa and the Middle East. We are seeing the revolutionary power of aspirations and ideas for human rights and dignity in which I deeply believe. The tragic act of a single individual in Tunisia – Mohamed Bouazizi – has affected the reality of millions.

The ways of politics are changing today at both the national and global levels. The economic downturn has sent shockwaves across the region and continents. Climate change is continuing an unpredictable march. 2011 has already witnessed the triple disaster in Japan (seismic, tsunami and nuclear), floods in Australia and Thailand, and the earthquake in New Zealand. No single state or society can tackle these challenges alone. This context calls for a stronger international order. It demands an effective multilateralism.

* Director-General of UNESCO.

I am convinced that managing the complexity of the world today calls for new policy mixes, for new ways of thinking. The strength of the United Nations lies here – in providing vital collective solutions to challenges in such areas as climate change, to take but one example, that extend beyond the capacities of States alone. In this context, the need for international cooperation for sustainable development, especially in education, the sciences, culture and communication has perhaps never been so great – to lay the foundations for resilience and growth, to develop new models of inclusive and sustainable development.

UNESCO's role lies here. Our value lies in its international leadership to foster collective action on key public goods like education, culture, science and communication.

UNESCO does not deliver development financial aid, but crafts the conditions for development. UNESCO does not itself keep the peace, but works to make it last. These global goals lie at the heart of an effective multilateral order. Development in the 21st century must, indeed, be holistic to be sustainable. Drafted in 1945, our Constitution declares that if wars start in the minds of men and women, then it is in the minds of men and women that the defences of peace must be built. This vision remains sharply relevant for tackling together the challenges of the 21st century.

Take education and sciences. They are indeed one of the most powerful, positive forces for individual, national and international transformation. They are also a motor for economic success and lasting peace. Education raises stakes for all countries – rich and poor alike. In the heart of Europe, UNESCO supports the work of Governments and the European Union to provide quality education for all.

Mesdames et Messieurs,

Dans cette enceinte de la Bibliothèque Centrale de l'Université de Bucarest, dont les murs sont les témoins de tant d'événements de l'histoire de votre pays, nous pouvons nous interroger sur la situation des sociétés européennes aujourd'hui. A travers elles, nous pouvons commencer à comprendre l'état du monde.

L'exigence de coopération, le besoin de multilatéralisme soulèvent naturellement la question de la diversité culturelle. L'Europe, dont la devise est « l'unité dans la diversité », s'interroge elle-même sur l'avenir du multiculturalisme. Les identités culturelles, les traditions et les valeurs s'installent au cœur des débats de politique nationale et internationale. Je suis convaincue que la tâche essentielle que nous devons relever dans le siècle à venir, est d'apprendre à gérer cette diversité, à travailler ensemble à la construction d'une communauté unie. Et je suis certaine que les pays qui apprennent à gérer leur propre diversité seront les mieux armés pour répondre aux défis qui nous attendent.

La Roumanie, ainsi que les autres pays de l'Europe de l'Est, ont de ce point de vue un rôle considérable à jouer pour le dialogue et le rapprochement des cultures et peuvent s'y investir davantage. Ces pays ont été par le passé des lieux de rendez-vous des civilisations et des cultures. Le patrimoine roumain porte la trace des brassages des cultures et des peuples qui laissèrent leur empreinte sur les murs des églises de Moldavie, inspirées par l'art byzantin, et les forteresses des montagnes d'Orastie, aux premiers siècles de notre ère. L'expérience de l'ouverture et l'intégration européenne sont venus renforcer ce sentiment. Elles ont convaincu toute une génération de la nécessité de respecter les idées des autres.

L'UNESCO a aussi un rôle important à jouer, en utilisant la culture, les industries culturelles comme des leviers de dialogue et de coopération.

Notre expertise nous permet de rapprocher les sociétés, de faire travailler des réseaux experts, des institutions très variées. Elle nous permet de construire des espaces d'intégration

régionale. La *Convention du patrimoine mondial* en est un exemple. En Roumanie, sept sites, du delta du Danube au centre historique du Sighisoara, sont inscrits sur la Liste du patrimoine mondial. Leur richesse exceptionnelle les rattache à l'histoire de l'humanité tout entière. Nous nous devons de les protéger. Je sais que la Roumanie est riche en patrimoine et j'espère que d'autres sites seront inscrits sur la liste.

J'étais, il y a quelques semaines, au Pérou. Ce pays a pris l'initiative d'inscrire le grand Chemin de l'Inca sur la liste du Patrimoine mondial. Il a été rejoint par les six pays d'Amérique latine traversés par ce chemin. Ils vont tous ensemble soumettre une candidature conjointe. Nous voyons des projets similaires prendre forme ici, en Europe de l'Est et du Sud Est – par exemple entre les pays qui ont le Danube en partage, comme la Roumanie, la Bulgarie, l'Ukraine, la Moldavie.

A l'UNESCO, nous défendons cette vision élargie de la culture et de la diversité culturelle, comme des accélérateurs diplomatiques, comme le moyen de gagner en autonomie, de participer au développement économique et social durable. C'est pourquoi nous avons publié en 2009 un rapport intitulé justement : « *Investir dans la diversité culturelle et le dialogue interculture*l. »

Nous allons fêter, cette année, le 10ème anniversaire de la *Déclaration universelle de l'UNESCO sur la diversité culturelle*. Il est essentiel d'améliorer nos compétences interculturelles, l'apprentissage des langues, la connaissance de la culture de l'autre. Toutes ces initiatives concrètes cherchent à donner à des gens issus de cultures ou de pays différents les outils intellectuels pour travailler ensemble. L'avenir nous montrera que nous en aurons – vous en aurez – de plus en plus besoin.

Mesdames, Messieurs,

Jean Monnet aurait dit, au soir de sa vie, que si la construction européenne était à refaire, il aurait commencé par la culture. Je ne sais pas si cette anecdote est vraie. Mais je suis venue ce matin avec un message : valorisez tant que vous pouvez la culture, les sciences, l'éducation. Ce sont des leviers d'épanouissement, ce sont des accélérateurs de développement, et des garants de stabilité. Ne sous estimez jamais leur rôle, il n'y a pas d'investissement plus sage.

Mon message aujourd'hui, comme première femme à la tête de l'UNESCO et comme ressortissante d'un pays voisin, est que notre région est pleine d'énergie, de talents et de richesses à valoriser. Mon message est que nous devons résoudre les problèmes conjointement, que ce soit la crise financière et économique, le changement climatique ou le développement durable. Osons être humanistes ! C'est la dignité humaine qui doit être prise en compte quand nous discutons des problèmes économiques.

Enfin, je suis très sensible à l'égalité des genres. C'est une priorité personnelle et une priorité pour l'UNESCO. L'égalité des genres n'est pas seulement une question de justice historique, mais la voie vers un développement économique et social plus équitable, y compris dans la région de l'Europe de l'Est et du Sud-Est.

Le grand penseur roumain Mircea Eliade écrit dans son journal *« Je n'admire que ceux qui persistent à créer tout comme si notre monde avait devant lui un millénaire de paix ».* Le génie du peuple roumain se reflète dans cet élan. Il a inspiré ses écrivains, artistes et compositeurs, il a été un moteur de l'histoire, et encore aujourd'hui. Vous êtes celles et ceux qui contribueront à forger le visage de l'Europe de demain. Je vous souhaite d'entreprendre avec le même optimisme, avec ce même élan.

Je vous remercie.

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