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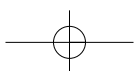
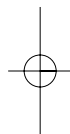
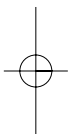
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Public Relations and Social Media



Liane ROTHENBERGER*

Terrorist Groups: Using Internet and Social Media for Disseminating Ideas. New Tools for Promoting Political Change

Abstract

Terrorism is one of the essential problems of our times. Most commonly, terrorist organizations have their origins in social movements that presume that they cannot reach their goal of promoting political change other than through violence. This paper deals with the use of the Internet, and especially social media, by terrorist groups. Social media seem to be an essential part in the groups' strategic communication concepts. They do not only use it for the groups' internal organization but mainly for the dissemination of ideas to a broader public. If the government wants to counteract terrorist movements, it also has to counteract their use of social media. Therefore, theoretical concepts of terrorism as communication, PR and propaganda will be presented as well as results of case studies in order to show the interconnectedness of terrorism and social media.

Key words: (counter-)terrorism; social media; social movement; political change through violence; recruitment; Internet.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the use of social media has been intensely discussed and researched in communication science (cf. for example Deans, 2009; Taddicken, 2011; Weißensteiner & Leiner, 2011). However, within this field the use of social media (and the Internet in general) by terrorist groups has been neglected.¹ This article aims at further closing this gap by presenting theoretical considerations on the basis of literary research as well as a first explorative qualitative analysis. We will try to find an answer to the following research question: Can the strategic communication endeavours of terrorist groups via the internet and esp. social media be perceived as public relations? The effort is of political and normative relevance, assuming that more effective counter-terrorist strategies could be developed if the knowledge about Internet activities of terrorist groups is increased and expanded.

In the first part of the article, I will concentrate on definitions of the "t-word" (Nacos, 2007, p. 8), then describe the use of social media in contrast to relying on traditional mass media reporting and subsequently investigate the advantages and disadvantages for different stakeholders. Finally, I will present the results of a case study on the matter at hand.

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2. Defining terrorism

Terrorist groups can be understood as social movements² using violence as a tool of creating public fear. The word “terror” has its origin in the Latin word “terror, terroris” which means “scare” or “fright”. “In its origins, the term usually meant violence carried out by a government or a ruling order, rather than, as later, the actions of antigovernment rebels” (Jenkins, 2003, p. 27). The latter perception evolved during the 19th century when Russian anarchists like Michail A. Bakunin fought against the Tsarist regime.

Today numerous definitions of terrorism exist and despite the heterogeneity one can deduce a common pool of characteristics that seem to be inherent in the phenomenon “terrorism”. One of these characteristics is the political purpose of the terrorists’ actions. Historian Laqueur, for example, describes terrorism as the use of covert violence by a group for political purposes (cf. Laqueur, 1982, p. 100). Schmid and Jongman had a look at 109 definitions of terrorism and at the words used in them. The terms “violence”, “force”, “political”, “fear” and “threat” appeared most frequently (cf. Schmid & Jongman, 1988, p. 5). Martin, too, scrutinized various definitions of terrorism and concluded by adding the following list: “The use of illegal force, Subnational actors, Unconventional methods, Political motives, Attacks against ‘soft’ civilian and passive military targets, Acts aimed at purposefully affecting an audience” (Martin, 2006, p. 47). Like Martin, in this paper I too will concentrate on understanding terrorism as violence of a social group to further political objectives; the violence is ultimately (but not necessarily physically) directed against a certain power that also has more military strength at its command than the group.

3. Terrorism and public relations

Public relations can be defined as “planned – or managed – communication” (Hunt & Grunig, 1994, pp. 5-6) or “*management of communication between an organization and its publics*” (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 6) which comprehends strategic communication techniques. Crenshaw already in 1998 stated that “terrorism can be understood as an expression of political strategy” and “may follow logical processes” (1998, p. 7). As we will see in the following, terrorists seem to be quite good strategic communicators. Hence, it is not surprising that some researchers have spoken of the “terrorists’ public relations”. Rada (1985) for example calls both the PR-media and terrorists-media relationships symbiotic. The reason for this is that the media are dependent on the “messages” delivered by public relations offices as well as have to report on the “messages” delivered through terrorist attacks. At the same time, the terrorists and public relations utterly depend on the media to distribute their messages. If we define PR as communication for the attainment of (political) goals, we should not be surprised to see that terrorist groups, in this respect, act similar to “normal” businesses and/or (N)GOs. Both want to win the public over to their causes without any payment.

But of course there is also a big difference between terrorists and “normal” public relations: “Both share the objectives of commanding attention, delivering a message, and influencing opinion [...], what ultimately separates the two is the social responsibility of the practitioner and the social utility of the end. Terrorism seeks legitimacy through self-definition, and not through the mandate of society” (Rada, 1985, p. 26). An enterprise which does not seek the support and acceptance of society or breaks common rules will not be successful

in public relations in a traditional sense. “Is not terrorism, after all, simply a public relations campaign, albeit sinister in intent? Terrorism aims, sometimes through violence but more often through coercion and fear, to influence opinions and behavior of specific publics. Public relations, likewise, seeks to influence the opinions and behavior of target groups but through information and persuasion as opposed to coercion” (Rada, 1985, p. 26). Both PR and terrorist groups are in need of (self-created) events or information to generate media content.³

We will now have a closer look at the relationship between media content and terrorist reaction/feedback. Interestingly, almost all terrorist groups deem the coverage very important and evaluate articles and newscasts. A proof of that is, for example, that the GAM terrorist movement attacked journalists after negative coverage. FARC instead invited news reporters into the Colombian hinterland to get an own (of course manipulated) picture of the situation. The German RAF was very professional and even created press clippings. Also in this way, terrorist groups show signs of PR professionals. In addition, professional communication guidelines exist. Most times, terrorists follow a certain manifesto by the founder or other historic person, which does not only contain political norms, goals, and advice, but also rules for communication. The IRA Green Book for example states that members are not allowed to talk to anybody about IRA activities, not even to one’s own family. The Tamil group LTTE even had their press offices in London and an own unit, called the “Nitharsan unit” to take pictures and video material for propaganda purposes. These were shown, for example, in youtube video messages. Addressees of such clips are on the one hand “enemies” that shall get scared in the face of the demonstrated strength, on the other hand potential supporters within and without the resp. country. As will also show the case studies, high importance has to be attributed to the groups’ diaspora regarding international public relations campaigns and fund-raising. The diaspora will propagate a negative image of the opponents / government of their home state to the public in their country of residence. They act as extended arm of the groups’ PR/propaganda central and sometimes the web presences are controlled from their whereabouts. The Internet enables the groups “to frame their actions and their ideologies in the manner of their choice without the intervention of government or media censors and gatekeepers.” (Tekwani, 2004, p. 9) This positive framing of a product (in this case immaterial) is one of the core concepts of successful PR.

4. The goals of terrorist groups

Terrorists want to gain resonance in the public sphere of a certain state or they even desire to have their problems recognized by an international audience. The distributed messages mirror the group’s ideology as well as self-image. Therefore, public relations-like communication seems to be a useful instrument. Previous to Internet times, this goal could only be achieved with the help of mass media which act as a transmitter of the terrorists acts and political demands. Nacos describes this “mass-mediated terrorism” as “political violence against noncombatants/innocents that is committed *with the intention to publicize the deed, to gain publicity and thereby public and government attention*” (Nacos, 2007, p. 26).

Today, it is also possible to gain publicity via social media. The “Social Media Guide” defines social media as “user generated content that is shared over the Internet via technologies that promote engagement, sharing and collaboration” (<http://thesocialmediaguide.com>). Alby (2007) emphasizes the content of social software which is aimed at communicating with

various network stakeholders who in turn can enrich the conversation through their own comments or links. The focus is on the “community” aspect, in contrast to traditional media where the focus was on the “distribution” aspect. “Different from traditional web applications that allow only *passive* information viewing, these web 2.0 sites offer a platform for users to *actively* participate in and contribute to the content/service provided” (Zhao et al., 2011, p. 3). Platforms and formats labeled “Social Media” differ from other forms of online communication as to be based on social software technology. Social software “is simply being leveraged to support and facilitate the creation and maturation of relationships between individuals, otherwise known as social networking. The value of social software lies in its ability to do two things. First, it helps to cross traditional barriers that keep individuals from creating relationships. [...] Second, social software assists people to better leverage their existing relationships in order to find knowledge.” (Burkhardt, 2009, p. 3); other authors prefer the expression “social web”, cf. Schmidt, 2011, p. 24) The technological level can thus be distinguished from the level of individual usage (cf. Michelis’ model of social media-levels in Michelis & Schildhauer, 2012, pp. 19-23).

Social media offer the possibility of reaching a wide audience in all parts of the world, and of networking and establishing contacts – an essential part of PR efforts. They can play a crucial role for the groups’ self-organisation as they offer anonymous interchange and volatility. The terrorists can also use it as a propaganda tool to distribute their ideas of political change. The terrorists thus do not have to rely only on the effect of their deed: “An important objective of many terrorist attacks is the creation of the *propaganda of the deed*, that is, the act itself carrying messages” (Picard, 1993, p. 13).⁴ If the terrorists can also demonstrate by their use of social media that they have a large number of supporters, the government will be under a great deal more pressure to react. Surely, there is also a downside of social media and the use of the Internet as a communication channel in general – that will be reflected in the next chapter.

In former times, terrorists had to rely completely and exclusively on the traditional media to communicate their causes; while today they can post their demands autonomously via Internet newsgroups, upload propaganda videos on YouTube⁵ and so on. “The use of terror serves not primarily the purpose of fighting, injuring or destroying the opponent. Rather, its primary purpose lies in the conveying of messages to the target audience(s)” (Bockstette, 2008, p. 8).

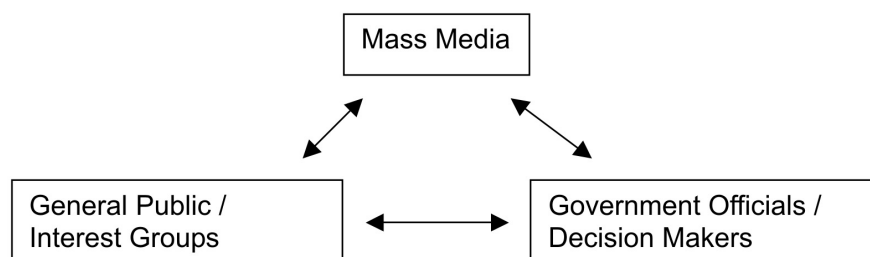
Changing patterns of communication have created new opportunities for all social movements and thus also for terrorist groups. Traditional mass media have not ceased to be important, but since new technologies are converging communication channels, the communication strategies combine a variety of media and the groups gain access to a broad field of communication platforms.

5. Terrorism: Stakeholders and their mutual relationships

Nacos states that “terrorists are particularly successful in exploiting the links between the mass media, public opinion, and governmental decision making” (Nacos, 2007, p. ix). She advances the “thesis of the media’s centrality in the calculus of terrorism” (Nacos, 2007, p. 7) – the same applies to every PR department of “normal” businesses that wants to make the media to accept their press releases. Furthermore, Nacos is sure: “most terrorists calculate the

consequences of their deeds, the likelihood of winning entrance – through the media – to what I call *The Triangle of Political Communication*” (Nacos, 2007, p. 15; see Figure 1).

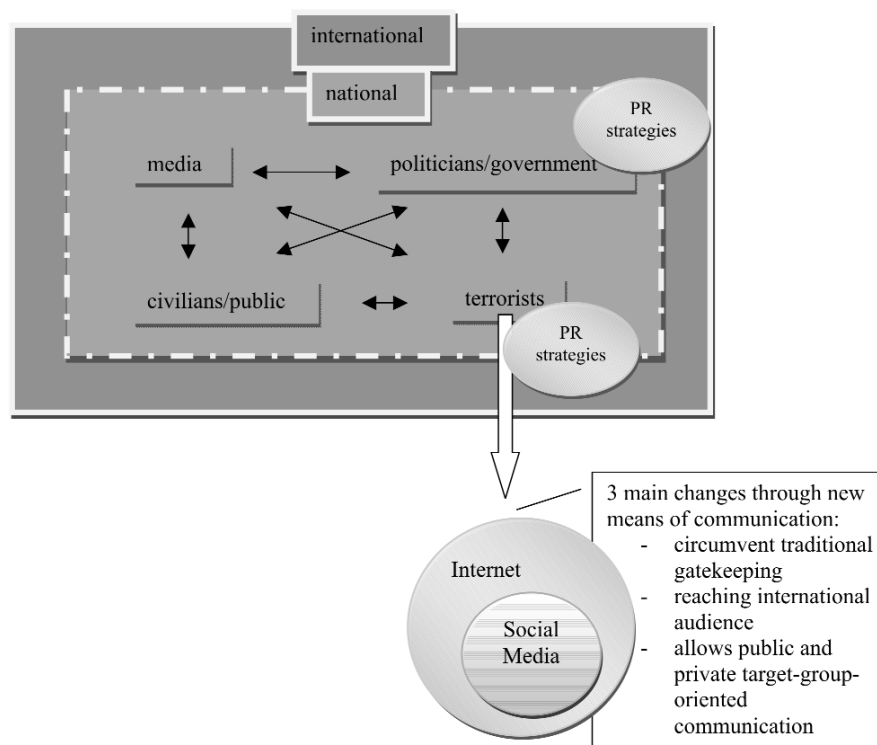
Figure 1. The Triangle of Political Communication.



Source: Nacos, 2007, p. 15.

This triangle surely has to be adapted as the terrorists form part of and also imminently influence the relationship of the stakeholders. Terrorists communicate internally within their respective group (as every other group of stakeholders does, too) and they communicate directly or indirectly (via the terror act) with political actors, the public and the media (see Figure 2). PR techniques are applied by politicians as well as terrorists in direction of all the other stakeholders.

Figure 2. Stakeholders' rectangle of communication.



Source: own depiction.

We should not forget that today public awareness on an international scale is very important for the terrorists, especially for separatist movements.⁶ That is why there are two fields encompassing the rectangle. In most cases, terror acts happen on a national level dealing with intrastate conflicts. But reaching political change or at least having the problem included in the political agenda of the respective government is much facilitated if an international audience is watching and perhaps even likewise pressuring for change – for example to grant more rights or autonomy to an ethnic group. The possibility to present their causes to an international audience is now much easier for the terrorists since the Internet offers a great variety of worldwide opportunities and access from everywhere on earth.

In the inner-Internet-circle, the social media form an important part of the terrorists' communication strategy. They can and – as the case studies will demonstrate – to a certain extent really do employ tools like social network sites (Facebook), micro-blogs (Twitter), photo- and video-sharing platforms (Flickr, Youtube), blogs, chat rooms and the like, to enhance and optimize their interpersonal, inner-group, national and global communication. Oftentimes, virtual and non-virtual communication takes place synchronously. The rectangle indicates politicians, civilians and media as the terrorists' primary target groups. But it is not only the "antagonists" or opponents that should be informed of certain events and the insurgents' causes. The terrorist groups also want to share their information with the ones at their side, with members of their group, potential recruits, with the social class or minority they think they represent as well as with other (competing or supporting) social movements. And these last-mentioned target groups are oftentimes excluded from media coverage as the media usually tend to support the status quo of a political landscape. In this context, social media offer an excellent alternative and provide space for communication between obscure marginal groups giving them the possibility to establish a public or private (password-protected) sphere using virtual meeting rooms for discussion and for sharing pictures, videos and documents (cf. for example Gendron, 2006; Bockstette, 2008). How exactly terrorist groups make use of the Internet will be explained in the following.⁷

6. Terrorists' use of the Internet and of the social media

"If one would realize the nature of the Internet and the nature of terrorism, he could not find anything surprising in the fact that these two phenomena are highly compatible with each other [...], the Internet is probably the most flexible, and universal tool the terrorists ever had at their disposal" (Bolechów, 2006, p. 33).

Following Bolechów, advantages of the Internet are the scarcely regulated access and the possibility to do without conventional communication channels which are coined by "primary definers" like the ruling politicians. Further benefits include interactivity, feedback, flexibility, low costs despite the wide reach, the largely anonymous nature of the Internet, and, last but not least, a locally decentralized, peripheral network structure which is easily accessible from all parts of the world while remaining relatively invisible. One could also add uncomplicated and cheap development and maintenance of the website, the possibility to communicate the same content simultaneously in different languages as well as to combine multimedia tools. Documents can be shared via file-sharing-platforms or file-uploading-services. Not only written but also visual and oral information can form part of the groups' PR

instruments, too, and can be exchanged via social media, for example on YouTube or using VOIP-applications. The World Wide Web makes it quite easy to achieve public effects while operating in secret. A video can be uploaded anonymously on YouTube and reach a wide forum⁸; a video leaked to a broadcasting station would be subject to the editors' gatekeeping. This antagonism of illegal secret operations and pursuit of public recognition is inherent in the terrorism macro-system. Of course, the Internet can also be used as a weapon, as in the case of cyber-terrorism or illegal data mining. The groups can try to undermine diplomatic and military operations by sowing counter-propaganda or disinformation and by gathering intelligence information, thus trying to control their own as well as counter-terrorism efforts.

Harkening back to the communication-rectangle in the upper part, we stated that PR activities emanate from both terrorist groups and governments. However, there is an essential difference in the outcome: One of the main goals the groups pursue with their social media activities is "to arouse fear and helplessness among the public, a tactic commonly referred to as psychological warfare." (Qin et al., 2006, p. 5) Governments, instead, try to arouse public approval and want the society to accept or even legitimise their behaviour (cf. Rada, 1985, p. 26: "mandate of society"). Qin et al. had a look at terrorist/extremist groups' web pages and the contents and state that "dynamic Web sites and forums provide snapshots of terrorist/extremist activities, communications, ideologies, relationships, and evolutionary developments." (Qin et al., 2006, pp. 4-5) They compared the terrorists'/extremists' use with that of U.S. government agencies and conclude: "The results showed that terrorist/extremist groups adopted similar levels of Web technologies as U.S. government agencies. Moreover, terrorists/extremists had a strong emphasis on multimedia usage and their Web sites employed significantly more sophisticated multimedia technologies than government Web sites. We also found that terrorist/extremists seem to be as effective as the U.S. government agencies in terms of supporting communications and interaction using Web technologies." (Qin et al., 2006, p. 14)

Creating their own websites allows the terrorists to state their causes from their own points of view, using their own terms and labels such as, for example, "freedom fighter", "revolutionaries" etc. One can provide ordinary text, movies, audio files or even interactive content, all for download, enabling worldwide viral dissemination of all kinds of materials (cf. Rötzer, 2004, p. 2). From propaganda slogans to instructions on how to make a bomb – the Internet is open for creating publicity as well as serving as a multifunctional non-hierarchical inner-group communication channel. Above all, the organisations – like any other business – use their web presence to present themselves and their ideology in a positive way. Most separatist movements, for example, try to legitimize their deeds by stating that the authoritarian oppressive regime does not leave them any other choice but to resort to violence (cf. Waldmann, 2005, p. 96). Terrorists more and more commonly utilize the Internet not only as an internal communication tool, but as an "advertising platform, distance university, and virtual terror camp" (Schäuble⁹, 2008, p. 10; own translation). Theveßen (2007, p. 61) even compared the role of the Internet for Islamic fundamentalist terrorism to a "University of Jihad". As noted earlier, it is practically effortless to put radical pamphlets or internal (technical) instruction / training material online and on these grounds social media definitely play an important role for the groups' self-organisation. However, the Internet – as far as literature testifies (Waldmann, 2005) – is not an appropriate tool for recruiting significant numbers of novices. Typically, new members are won via personal face-to-face persuasion, but the Internet surely has a motivating catalytic effect (cf. Waldmann, 2005, p. 98; Gendron, 2006).

As stated before, social media and the Internet in general do not have an exclusively positive potential for the terrorist groups' communication flow. A great disadvantage surely is that social media cater to very fragmented audiences. Thus, terrorists do not reach a universalistic audience but rather people who have themselves selected a certain page or share group. Of course, the preoccupation with the matter presented on the web page or within the virtual group can be quite cursory.

7. Case studies: method and results

Because of the permanent updating of online content, online information is not a very easy to handle research object. Many Internet sites, especially in the field of terrorism, go offline some days or weeks after they have been accessed and in some cases a profound analysis could not be conducted. But should that be a reason to stop research on the PR-like use of social media by terrorists? We do not think so. Permanent updating and renewal are obvious characteristics of social media. Hence, I will present the results of analyses conducted in two master seminars (summer term 2009 and winter term 2010/2011)¹⁰, keeping in mind that it is a selective inventory in a permanently changing process as it concerns evanescent material and multilingual sources.

7.1. Data collection

The method applied was an exploratory and qualitative approach of data collection and document case study analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Flyvbjerg, 2006). We selected the terrorist groups' websites by either already knowing the respective www-address from literature or by typing in the group's name in "Google" and then examining the respective pages.¹¹ A list of social media sources was collated from literature (e.g. Schmidt, 2011; Deans, 2009) and adapted to each single case. We scrutinized various social media tools in order to find out how the terrorist groups make use of them. We also included information from the groups' own websites from which they communicate to different stakeholders like politicians, the diaspora, recruits and so on. If no appropriate site was found, we switched to sites from the diaspora (e.g. in case of LTTE tamilnation.org and tamilnet.com) or political arms, e.g. Sinn Féin in the case of IRA. The sample included seven terrorist groups with religious, separatist or social-revolutionary motivation or ideology. Whether a social movement could be classified as a "terrorist group" or not was decided along the criteria of Elter (2008, pp. 24-25; own translation), which describe the characteristics of the actors, the terrorist organisations, and not only the phenomenon "terrorism". According to Elter, terrorist groups

- do not have the legitimacy of a state and do not have any legitimate political power;
- do not have a mass base;
- have political, ideological or religious motives and pursue long-term objectives;
- operate as illegal clandestine organisations or as a network of individual cells;
- have different organisational structures at different times in their history;
- typically have hierarchical structures but, at the same time, are divided into functional groups for specific tasks – such as the preparation of individual attacks;

- primarily focus on physical violence (which also aims to create psychological effects) and dramatic events that are intended to ensure propagation through mass media, reach the public and have a long-lasting shock value;
- therefore pursue the goal of triggering a spiral of escalation, and influencing opinions and actions;
- do not, however, aim at occupying a territory – in a military sense – for longer periods;
- always have an enemy defined by themselves;
- do not exclusively target this enemy during their actions but consciously plan – or at least tacitly accept – the deaths of innocent victims;
- draw on both the ‘propaganda of the deed’ and the ‘propaganda of the word’ – they admit responsibility for violent actions;
- have a logistics system as well as sources of financing;
- typically have a group of supporters and/or sympathizers.

Our sample of terrorist groups covers diverse communities, cultures and ethnological backgrounds from all parts of the world. In a first approaching step, we tried to use the scheme of categories provided by Shultz (1978, p. 11) and gather enough information about the respective groups in order to comply with the following classification: causes, environment, goals, strategy, means and form of organisation. What the groups have in common is that they do not communicate arbitrarily but in a target-group oriented way, which is a typical characteristic of public relations campaigns. The use of their communication tools is strategic and accurately planned. The terrorist groups’ main goal is to defeat their enemy (in most cases a certain regime) not militarily, but mentally.

Another methodological tool concerned our understanding of PR activities. Texts, pictures, videos etc. from terrorist groups can be considered as public relations, or in a broader sense: strategic communication, when the following criteria are met:

- positive communication of the group’s ideology and action in order to ameliorate the organisation’s reputation (can even include manipulation or deception of the audience);
- trying to influence the public’s perception of the organisation through impression management (cf. Merten, 2009, p. 56);
- semantic and visual elements having a touch of “propaganda” (the aim of both PR and propaganda is persuasion, hence no strict division is possible¹²);
- communication can be considered as networking of the organisation to its environment and stakeholders (cf. Szyszka, 2009, p. 135).

In order to decide whether information was manipulated, omitted or added, we compared the data given with facts from literature and detected exaggerated and descriptive/judgmental words resp. text passages.

7.2. Data interpretation

For the description of the cases and the data interpretation process we relied on the concept of “document case study analysis” (for the different types of case studies cf. Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, pp. 55-60)¹. As written above, the case study design started with an explorative beginning, followed by a collection of adequate data and sources (among other things by snowball sampling and information-oriented selection) and was narrowed to analytical core categories: use of language, pictures, sound (if existent). In order to give some recent examples, I will now present selected results for three groups (*Sendero Luminoso*, *Gerakan Aceh*

Merdeka and *Euskadi ta Askatasuna*) and their use of language and pictures on two social media tools: facebook and twitter (see table 1).

Table 1. Use of social media tools by terrorist groups.

	<i>Sendero Luminoso</i>	<i>Gerakan Aceh Merdeka</i>	<i>Euskadi ta Askatasuna</i>
Facebook	<i>language</i> phrases of unification (“nosotros somos muchos”, “unamonos a la fureza [sic] de la revolucion”), trying to convince with “facts” / referring to theses of Lenin, Stalin, Zedong <i>pictures</i> hooded, armed people, weapons, logos, flag, wounded people, illustrated links to youtube videos – <i>communication style</i> offensive, violent, iconic, demonstration of strength,	<i>language</i> words of war / battle (“pemimpin”, “pasukan”, “hari ke menangan”, “pejuang”) and religion (referring to muslim proudness, pork eaters) <i>pictures</i> training camp, uniforms, weapons, logo, victims, hooded figures, crowd – <i>communication style</i> pugnacious, martial, menacing, proud, demonstration of decisiveness / strength / unification	<i>language</i> intimidation (“puede acabar en muerte”), address directly (“a los pilicias [sic] locales de murcia”), referring to political decisions, phrases of unification (“euskal presoak, euskal herrira”) <i>pictures</i> flag, logo, Basque landscape – <i>communication style</i> offensive, iconic, demonstration of identity / Basque nationalism
Twitter	<i>language</i> intimidation, provocation (“keiko [Fujimori] te dejastes derrotar por el simple cachaquito”), threat (“tenemos una nueva oportunidad de vengarnos”) <i>pictures</i> hooded man in front of microphones wearing shirt with SL-logo – <i>communication style</i> offensive, violent, threatening, partly directly addressed to politician (“keiko”)	— (no account)	— (account deleted)

Source: own depiction (referring to data collected on October 2nd, 2012).

As we did not have enough resources to update material for all groups, I will now present the results of the first two case studies phases. We will treat each single group separately and – due to limited space – highlight only the main examples of the groups’ use of social media. Afterwards, I will summarize and compare the results in the conclusion. Of course, one has to keep in mind the restrictions of the case studies: They are only a first exploratory step; and there have been language limitations despite the international student group’s assistance in making it possible to evaluate content in seven languages (spoken more or less fluently).

ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna, Basque Homeland and Freedom; Spain; separatist movement; founded in 1959): ETA is very active in the Internet space. Even the Basque newspapers like Gara that were said to be related to ETA and therefore closed down several times had to switch to Internet publication in order to react more promptly to their social and political surroundings. ETA uses blogs and online videos that arouse patriotic feelings, quoting songs about Basque soldiers. The Etxarras are portrayed as heroes during military training, fighting for the “just cause” of an autonomous Basque country. In another video, you could

see masked men preparing a bomb. ETA also thinks of the international public in the web, offering subtitles in English and/or French. For some months in 2009, ETA could also be followed on Twitter.

IRA (Irish Republican Army; Northern Ireland; separatist, religious motivation; founded in 1919): The IRA has a quite hierarchical structure that includes a “Director of Publicity”. That alone shows the importance the group attributes to the topic. At the beginning of the Internet era, the IRA used the web to communicate via email and used USB sticks to exchange information quite secretly. Now in times of social media, the scope of the IRA’s Internet activities has developed much further. Even though it is doubtful that the IRA itself uploaded videos on their ideology and activities on YouTube, these videos have reached a large audience and helped recruit new sympathizers. The magazine “An Phoblacht” is available on the web and vehemently advances the cause of the Northern Irish separatists. One can also connect to it via Facebook or read its tweets via Twitter.

Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path; Peru; social-revolutionary, Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideology; founded in 1970): Sendero Luminoso continues to exchange relevant intergroup information in interpersonal communication settings like conferences or congresses where the movement’s progress is evaluated (cf. Barnhurst, 1991), but they also have accounts on social network sites (SNS) and communicate via, for example, Facebook. They use YouTube to upload propaganda videos and run webpages containing SL-sympathetic content. As Sendero Luminoso was a terrorist organisation that for a long time operated in secret and avoided contact to all media (in contrast to other groups that published press releases etc.) because it considered the media to be part of the feudal and bourgeois system they wanted to fight, the new technologies now offer a welcome possibility to communicate directly from group to stakeholder, while continuing to avoid direct media contact. Internet communication is apt to reach the target-group of students, distributing propaganda to convince them to become leftist rebels. The Quechua-speaking, and sometimes illiterate, Peruvian *campesinos* in remote rural zones are still more easily contacted via radio frequencies or by direct oral communication or wall paintings.

FARC-EP (Fuerzas armadas revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del pueblo, Revolutionary armed forces of Colombia – People’s army; Colombia; social-revolutionary, Marxist-Leninist ideology; founded in 1964): On its websites, FARC provides information about the history of the organisation, its founders, leaders and revered personalities like Ché Guevara. Similar to most terrorist groups’ websites, FARC rhetorically tries to legitimize their acts and to portray the government as the evil oppressor of the people. FARC has posted many links on its sites so that people interested in the topic can easily navigate to other web spaces of, for instance, close social movements or citizen bloggers. Thus, a network structure is established which is also used for recruitment and fundraising. The information is usually available in various languages in order to reach a global audience. Internal and external information can be exchanged in an almost uncensored manner. However, to reach the national rural audience living in the jungle, FARC still communicates via traditional radio emissions. Furthermore, FARC also made propaganda videos and even invited European film-makers to shoot their documentaries in the jungle. Most of the videos can be seen on YouTube.

GAM (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, Free Aceh Movement; Indonesia; separatist movement; 1976-2005): GAM was not very active in the use of social media but rather relied on traditional media to gain publicity and support. They attacked journalists who reported in a critical manner about their actions. GAM issued brochures and press releases to communicate their statements through the international media because they needed international awareness to

push their cause – the separation from Indonesia. We wondered why they did not make use of the Internet for that purpose, as it would have made direct communication to international media, to the Aceh diaspora, as well as to potential recruits much easier, especially during the time of coverage restrictions imposed by the Indonesian government. In the 2012 data sampling they were active on Facebook (see above), but not on Twitter.

LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam; Sri Lanka; separatist movement; 1976-2009): LTTE is a true master in online communication, employing numerous tools like websites, forums, social networks and blogs. They even tried to create an “online-nation”, a virtual state of all Tamils, sharing their opinion on Internet platforms.¹³ All the LTTE’s online efforts have helped the organisation gain international public awareness, attract the media, and propagate their causes. Social media were (and are still) used to recruit new members, to fundraise and to justify the terror attacks. Tekwani (2004) provides a list of PR materials naming for example “text-articles of historical analysis, accounts of the struggle, biographies of martyrs, descriptions of the majority Sinhalese’s acts of oppression and discrimination. It is also done using graphic visual imagery” (Tekwani, 2004, p. 4). Even the LTTE radio station “Voice of Tigers Radio” was linked to many Tamil websites (cf. Tekwani, 2004, p. 6). As the Tamils have an enormous diaspora, they benefited from the possibility to publish their web content in different languages like Tamil, French and English. The so-called LTTE Nitharsan Unit provided propaganda material intended above all for Internet purposes. One of the LTTE functionaries stated the importance of entering the “blogosphere” (cf. Nacos et al., 2011, p. 27) because thus he could keep in contact with members that otherwise would not have the opportunity to “talk” to him. He used the blog primarily to share opinions and focus on intergroup aspects. In contrast to this, official websites were used to issue political statements for the target group of the Sri Lankan government. Political change was induced by all communication platforms. A deeper analysis of the distributed content shows that the LTTE fighters were portrayed on pictures and videos as brave, united and dedicated to the cause, a depiction which would make the intergroup circle or diaspora members feel proud of them. However, other videos could be found on YouTube: pictures of the Tamil landscape with emotional soft music chosen to encourage people to admire the land’s beauty and want to protect it. LTTE’s Nitharsan Unit was also good at storytelling, e.g. providing video footage of how Tamils were killed by Sinhalese, but neglecting to show how they had provoked them beforehand. Furthermore, LTTE was active on Facebook and Twitter, having quite a number of followers. Blogs like www.eelam.com offer a substantial amount of possible postings, e.g. to Facebook, del.icio.us, [digg](http://digg.com), [StumbleUpon](http://StumbleUpon.com), [buzzup](http://buzzup.com), [BlinkList](http://BlinkList.com), [myspace](http://myspace.com), [mixx](http://mixx.com), [LinkedIn](http://LinkedIn.com), [reddit](http://reddit.com) or furl.net. The Tamil’s websites are quite well interlinked and hosted from various servers in different countries. At www.eelamweb.com you could donate to the Tamil’s cause and even buy products such as flags, videos or CDs. Tekwani lists even more PR material sold by online stores like “posters, cards, audio and video tapes, flags and T-shirts” (Tekwani, 2004, p. 7). Taken all in all, LTTE certainly knows how to use the web and especially social media to communicate with various kinds of target-groups.

Al Qaeda (“The Basis”; Arab world / Afghanistan; religious (Islamist) / jihadist motivation; founded around 1988): All al Qaeda’s material found in the web follows the purpose of creating an anti-Western atmosphere. Al Qaeda makes extensive use of all Internet and especially social media features; in fact, their existence is almost limited to a “virtual network”. Al Qaeda (and their media production company as Sahab) benefit from the technological convergence that the Internet allows in that everyone can become a TV producer. When used for

internal communication, e.g. knowledge transfer and educational purposes, al Qaeda shows, for example, videos of training sessions or offers instructional manuals. Video statements of al Qaeda's leader(s) are directed to internal as well as external audiences. The group furthermore runs newsgroups and discussion boards to distribute and discuss information with members and sympathizers. The group's online magazines, however, were not very successful. Al Qaeda's use of social media and the Internet in general is so immense and professional that not all aspects can be highlighted here. Gendron (2007) assesses al Qaeda's sophisticated media strategy as *the* crucial element for the sustained existence of the movement. Bockstette (2008) analyzed the strategic management techniques of jihadist terrorists¹⁴ and concluded: "The mass media and especially the Internet have become the key enablers and the main strategic communication assets for terrorists and have ensured them a favourable communication asymmetry. With these assets, terrorists are able to compensate for a significant part of their asymmetry in military might" (Bockstette, 2008, p. 5). He points out jihadist terrorist groups' extensive use of new media and video messages.

"The frequency, quality and style of the video messages are getting more and more professional and the techniques used are increasingly sophisticated. The media rhetoric is mainly built around the visual component" (Bockstette, 2008, p. 13).

But even though the terrorists oftentimes rely on the Internet – to recruit and persuade people, they also apply "face-to-face methods utilizing prayers, speeches and sermons in mosques and Koran schools" (Bockstette, 2008, p. 18).

8. Discussion

Summing up the findings, we conclude that the strategic communication endeavours of terrorist groups via the internet and esp. social media, in our opinion, can be perceived as public relations – but a terrorist act cannot be perceived as a PR event, because then (as stated in part 3), the "social utility of the end" (Rada, 1985, p. 26) is missing.

The studies have shown that terrorist groups use a vast amount of social media tools for their PR-like communication. One has to assume that parallel to the progressive possibilities of social media communication, the use of them by terrorist groups has increased. Social media offer almost real-time and target-specific communication. We have not conducted similar studies in earlier years, but literature supports the thesis that most of the movements have shifted from using static websites to using "online forums and blogs as a more secure way of disseminating their propaganda material. These forums offer access to files stored on free storage sites" (Bockstette, 2008, p. 18). YouTube, Facebook and Twitter are frequently used by the analyzed terrorist groups (except GAM). In the future, it will be necessary to see the development of Google+, of what relevance it will be approximately two to five years from now. Another shortcoming of the text is that we only had look at the internationally most common social media applications. In further studies one should specialise on applications on a national or even regional level. To name an example: In the Basque country, besides Facebook, Tuenti belongs to the "two leading networks" (Fernández & Benito 2011, p. 89). And, of course, further research should expand on more detailed categories as it is obvious that ETA's and all the other groups' use of online/social media can hardly be portrayed sufficiently in one short paragraph as this gives only anecdotal evidences.

In a second step, we will then have to have a look at what we can learn from the analysis on a more general or even theoretical level. Can we deduce a typology of terrorist organisations according to their online/social media use? How would it relate to established typologies, i.e. do separatist organisations – sometimes having a longer history than religious groups – use the internet differently? Do organisations with a strong centre differ from ones which have a more loose/network cell structure? What role do the organisations' country/regional contexts play, considering that some operate in environments where internet access is widely established (e.g. ETA in Spain) whereas others operate in rural areas in Peru, Colombia etc.? The answers to these questions remain research desiderata.

Until now, we can conclude that, just as in their many other activities, also in their social media announcements the terrorists quite simply follow their two main goals (cf. Gerrits, 1992, p. 36): demonstration of their own strength and exhibition of vulnerability of the authorities. However, the possibility of confusing the political agenda has increased with the new web applications. Online tools and especially social media have revolutionized the terrorists' communication. They now act more offensively, managing independently and strategically their flow of content to various actors, but at the same time working more anonymously and at a global range which had not been the case in pre-Internet times.

What does this mean in terms of practical consequences? In a nutshell: Only if we know about the recent communication and use of social media tools of terrorists, will we develop counter-(PR-)strategies. Intelligence services already have begun to build bogus Internet sites, log in to newsgroups or join discussion boards in order to gather information. Only through knowledge about the multiple communication tools and adequate reactions can political upheaval be prevented.

Rezumat: Terorismul este una dintre problemele importante ale lumii în care trăim. De cele mai multe ori, organizațiile teroriste își au rădăcinile în mișcări sociale care admit că nu-și pot atinge scopul, acela de a promova o schimbare politică, decât prin violență. Acest articol analizează folosirea Internetului și în special a *social media* de către grupurile teroriste. *Social media* par să devină o componentă esențială a comunicării startegice folosite de aceste grupuri. Ele folosesc aceste instrumente cu precădere pentru a disemina ideile lor către publicul larg, și nu neapărat în vederea unei mai bune organizări interne. Guvernele care urmăresc să contracareze mișcările teroriste trebuie să contracareze și folosirea *social media* de către aceste grupuri. Această lucrare prezintă aspecte teoretice referitoare la terorism și comunicare, terorism și PR, precum și terorism și propagandă. De asemenea, sunt discutate studii de caz pentru a demonstra relația dintre terorism și *social media*.

Cuvinte-cheie: (contra-)terorism; *social media*; mișcări sociale; schimbare politică prin violență; recrutare; Internet.

Notes

¹ A recent example for the use of social media is a four minute video uploaded on YouTube in which a Salafi Muslim threatens a journalist who had reported critically about the Salafi movement in the Rhine-Main-area (cf. Beucker, 2012). It was deleted by the YouTube parties in charge shortly after apparition.

² Reasons for the evolvement of social movements are given by Klandermans & Tarrow (1988), using both resource mobilization theory and new social movement approach. Della Porta (1988) describes how social movements can be understood as a precursor of terrorist groups.

³ And sometimes it is quite useful to be near to the relevant media, as Laqueur states (cf. Laqueur, 1982, p. 133): The rural guerrilla in the 1960s often times moved to the big cities to commit their crimes because the media then would be nearer and thus faster in coverage. In the big cities, the terrorists could always rely on the presence of journalists, photographers, TV cameras and consequently a big audience.

⁴ "Terrorism is the exercise of violence or the threat of violence against an unarmed and/or unsuspecting population to coerce it to meet the demands of the aggressor" (Biernatzki, 2002, p. 5). And: "[T]he political terrorist's victim is symbolic. A victim is chosen who is representative of a target group that is strategically involved in the terrorist's political goals" (Schaffert, 1992, p. 44).

⁵ Or the Islamic counterpart Islamtube.com.

⁶ In order to substantiate this statement, one might mention the Tamil demonstrations and sit-down protests in European cities like Berlin in 2009 or the announcements of Hasan di Tiro, GAM-leader, from his Swedish exile. Both resulted in media attention.

⁷ Important publications on the issue have also been made by Weimann (2006; 2007) and Theveßen (2007).

⁸ Even though it might be deleted after some time, as happened with the Salafi video mentioned in footnote 1.

⁹ Schäuble at that time officiated as Minister of the Interior. His statement has to be reflected on from that normative perspective.

¹⁰ Data collection passed in May and June 2009, in November and December 2010 as well as on October 2nd, 2012.

¹¹ It remains obvious, that the authenticity of the web pages could not be entirely ensured. For us, characteristics like very extremist content, concealment of website credits as well as the fact, that some pages were offline again after a few weeks, made us incorporate the respective site in the data pool. In further studies, a more reliable method to identify and delete faked websites should be developed.

¹² Pfau and Wan (2006, p. 102) define public relations "as a form of strategic communication, in which persuasion plays an integral role".

¹³ "A case study is a detailed examination of one setting, or a single subject, a single depository of documents, or one particular event" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 54).

¹⁴ An extensive overview of the use of "new media and communication technologies to build a Tamil nation and a Tamil national identity on the World Wide Web" is provided by Tekwani (2004).

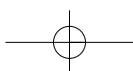
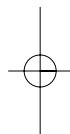
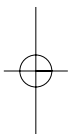
¹⁵ Torres, Jordán and Horsburgh (2006) take into account not only Internet but also traditional media in their analysis of "the Global Jihadist Movement Propaganda".

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A Model for Assessing the Online Reputation of Public Actors

Abstract

The aim of the paper is to identify a set of indicators for describing the online reputation of public actors. The method used was content analysis. Five indicators and a sixth constructed indicator (the online reputation score) were identified for a comprehensive description of the online reputation. The model was tested on a sample formed by the online reputation profiles (data obtained via Google search) of the elected Romanian members in the European Parliament. The results showed that two of the indicators, online control and online visibility, have no significant correlation (or a modest correlation, respectively) with the online reputation score. At the same time, an external variable, the level of trust of the associated group, exerts an influence to the online reputation score of the individual public actors. Thus, the present research opens new topics of discussion in studying the online reputation.

Key words: reputation; social media; indicators.

1. Introduction

The development of the online space has triggered an important change in the evolution of political and institutional actors on the public stage and, concurrently, a change in the communication practices they use. The explosion of potential audience at a world scale has brought diversification of groups interested in the evolution of a public issue and the public debate surrounding it (groups connected to a problem by identity and interests, but not by location). In an informational society that becomes more and more abundant, the concept of “reputation” becomes more and more important, since the public perceives only the most visible part of the information released in the public space. Previous research in different social fields (economics, marketing, management, organizational sociology, communication) has demonstrated that, even if it is intangible, reputation is one of the most important assets of a company, closely related to financial and business success, and with a significant impact on company performance and behaviors (Roberts & Dowling, 2002; Rindova, Williamson, Petkova & Sever, 2005; Boyd, Bergh & Ketchen, 2010; Ponzi, Fombrun & Gardberg, 2011). The diversity of fields in which reputation was studied produced the benefit of holistic perspectives: for instance, in the structural and environmental model, the reputation-dimensional, organizational and inter-organizational contexts are the main factors that produce challenges to reputation (Rhee & Valdez, 2009, p. 151). At the same time, the interdisciplinary approach to research on reputation has made difficult interconnectedness between studies. Different def-

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initions and perspectives have led to consistent differences in empiric approaches and research (Rhee & Valdez, 2009, pp. 149-150; Rhee, 2009, p. 677), and in the scholarly debate.

In spite of the rich and diverse scholarship on the subject of reputation, there are still some aspects that receive less attention from scholars. For example, the evolutionary nature of reputation, the fact that reputation will suffer damage and repair in the life cycle of a company (Rhee & Valdez, 2009, p. 151), has received little attention in scholarly writing. Also, little or no attempts have been made to study the construction of online reputation and to systematize its dimensions. The latter point was the reason behind the current research study whose aim is to identify and describe the online reputation of public actors, by using a sample of institutional actors from Romania.

2. Theoretical background

The theories that conceptualize reputation and its role in organizational dynamics were initially grouped in two directions. The first direction, named the resource-based view, is rooted in the economic perspective that considered reputation as an asset or resource that enhances and maintains organizational performance. The reciprocal influence of reputation and performance in organizations have been described in several studies (Roberts & Dowling, 2002; Rindova et al., 2005; Boyd et al., 2010), to name but a few. Strategic resources are valuable, rare, free from imitation, without substitutes and accompanied by auxiliary resources in order to be used effectively, and reputation has all the four characteristics of a resource, as Bergh, Ketchen, Boyd and Ketchen show (2010, pp. 2-3). As a resource with such characteristics, reputation may lead to competitive advantage (Boyd et al., 2010, p. 589). At least 125 studies published between 1991 and 2007 examined the link between resources and performance (Boyd et al., 2010, p. 589).

The second direction is based on a sociological and institutional perspective and grounds on social cognition theories. From this perspective, reputation is a collective knowledge about a firm (Rindova et al., 2005, p. 1036). Scholars using this perspective investigate the attitude formation processes in individuals and groups and the convergent mechanisms that transform individual attitudes in reputations (Fischer & Reuber, 2007, p. 58). A part of their studies emphasizes the role of organizational signals both in forming and in reflecting reputation (Fischer & Reuber, 2007, p. 57). According to the signaling theory, an organization signals different attributes to stakeholders, such as the quality of human capital, new products or market aggressiveness (Fischer & Reuber, 2007, p. 58; Ponzi et al., 2011, p. 15). The signals, which function as external or internal inputs to stakeholders, are likely to influence the perceived quality of the organization (Rindova et al., 2005, p. 1037).

The study of Rindova et al. (2005) integrated the two directions and proposed two dimensions for the concept of reputation, the “perceived quality” and the “market prominence”, respectively. As Boyd, Bergh and Ketchen (2010, p. 590) emphasized, the first dimension (the “perceived quality”) is rooted in an economic orientation and is driven by the quality of inputs and productive assets, while the second dimension (the “market prominence”) is based on the sociological tradition wherein is included the media evaluation, expert intermediaries and association with high-status actors.

A classification of the definitions of reputation is made by Lange, Lee and Dai (2011). The authors consider three perspectives in defining reputation: the prominence perspective (“be-

ing known”), the componential perspective (“being known for something”) and “the generalized favorability” perspective. The first category of definitions emphasizes prominence as central concept, and the general awareness or public visibility of a company. Rindova et al. (2005, p. 1038) observed that visibility or “prominence”, the large recognition of a company among stakeholders, may be a very important dimension in reputation. The importance of prominence or notoriety is denied by other scholars, who have observed that prominence is distinct from reputation and that prominence actually mediates the effects of reputation on performance (Boyd, Bergh & Ketchen, 2010, p. 594).

A second category of definitions ties visibility with a set of attributes (Lange et al., 2011, pp. 157-159), and views reputation as a representation or coherent image in the mind of a consumer or stakeholder, formed as a consequence of direct or indirect interaction with the organization. This second dimension is known in the literature as “the componential perspective on organizational reputation” and states that reputation “constitutes an assessment of a particular attribute or characteristic” (Fischer & Reuber, 2007, p. 57). In this view, reputation is built on a collection of stakeholders’ expectations, and takes into account previous experiences and the signals and intentions to fulfill these expectations (Fischer & Reuber, 2007, p. 58). From the same conceptual direction, Rhee and Haunschild (2006, p. 102) define reputation as “a subjective evaluation of the perceived quality”, made by consumers on the company.

Furthermore, a third category of definitions emphasizes that perceiving is not only a subjective evaluation but implies also an emotional process (Rhee & Valdez, 2009, p. 146; Ponzi, Fombrun & Gardberg, p. 32). Thus, reputation ceased to be a perception or a behavior in response to public’s expectations and is defined as a generally favorable attitude of stakeholders towards a public entity. For example, Fombrun (1996, p. 72) defined reputation as “a snapshot that reconciles the multiple images of a company held by all of its constituencies” and also as “a representation of a company’s past actions and future prospects that describes the firm’s overall appeal to its key constituents when compared to other leading rivals”. The perceivers use multiple and aggregate assessments, which are compared with the assessments of other companies, and make an overall evaluation of the attractiveness of the company (Fischer & Reuber, 2007, pp. 56-57).

In an attempt to unify different types of definitions, Lange et al. (2011, pp. 163-167) have proposed a three-dimensional model that has notoriety, “being known”, on the vertical axis, the distinct image, “being known for something”, on the horizontal axis; and “generalized favorability” on the depth axis. In building the three dimensional cube, the authors have given several examples of companies placed in different places inside the figure, depending on their coordinates for each of the three axes.

Before investigating the mechanisms through which public actors construct their reputation, it is necessary to distinguish reputation from other close concepts, such as: image, trust, social status, legitimacy. The organizational image has been defined as the mental models that outsiders have about organizations, and as what insiders believe that outsiders think about it (Fischer & Reuber, 2007, p. 55). But, as shown by the abovementioned definitions, reputation has a comparative nature (an organization is compared by stakeholders with other organizations, cf. Ponzi et al., 2011, p. 19), while the image is an independent representation, a collection of characteristics or attributes.

Another concept that might be confused with reputation is social status. Both concepts try to explain the process of differentiating social actors within a social setting; but, unlike reputation, which can be actively and intentionally managed, social status is awarded for intrinsic

sic characteristics or affiliations, and is unrelated with past performance or performance potential (Bergh et al., 2010, p. 16).

The sociological concept that also needs to be distinguished from reputation is trust. Reputation and trust have a common characteristic, multidimensionality, and are strongly correlated: a good reputation leads to trust as well as other outcomes (Roberts & Dowling, 2002, p. 1079); meanwhile, reputation is valuable because reduces the uncertainty of stakeholders when evaluating firms as potential suppliers (Rindova et al, 2005, p. 1034). Trust is a result and simultaneously a base for the self-maintaining mechanism of reputation, because “customers value associations and transactions with high-reputation firms” (Roberts & Dowling, 2002, p. 1079).

Finally, legitimacy and reputation have in common the fact that both involve an external assessment from stakeholders. However, legitimacy requires the existence of cultural models that offer plausible explanations for the organization, while reputation presupposes comparison with other companies (Fischer & Reuber, 2007, p. 56).

Several attempts have been done to describe the components of reputation. Roberts and Dowling (2002, p. 1078) decomposed the overall concept of reputation in “financial reputation” (a component predicted by previous financial performance) and “residual reputation” (the effects of reputation building activities that have no impact on current financial performance). Furthermore, Deephouse (2000, p. 1091) has introduced the concept of “media reputation”, defined as “the overall evaluation of a firm presented in the media”. Media reputation is “a collective concept connecting the firm, media workers, stakeholder sources of news about firms, and the readers of news” (Deephouse, 2000, p. 1098). According to the resource-based view, the author shows (Deephouse, 2002, pp. 1098-1099), media reputation has all the characteristics of a resource (valuable, rare, imperfect imitating, no substitutable). In order to test the effect of media reputation on organizational performance, the author integrated the resource-based reputation theory with mass communication theories. Media was considered not only a provider of signals, but a participant in the process of social construction. The results of Deephouse’s research have shown that media reputation increased the relative return on average assets, i.e. ROA (indicator of organizational performance).

In describing the resource properties of media reputation, Deephouse (2002, pp. 1097-1099) has shown that media’s role is to reduce information asymmetry between managers and stakeholders, and to create a channel of interaction of managers with stakeholders. Deephouse’s demonstration is applicable in the case of online reputation: the online media has the same role in signaling the quality of a company’s services, bringing value to the organizational assets. Also, the online content is produced through complex interaction and it is not imitable by competitors. Further, online reputation is different by other engagements of the company (as formal contracts) and cannot be replaced with other resources. And finally, the online reputation is a rare resource, because not all companies or public actors manage their visibility on the web.

Social media offer the opportunity for organizations and public actors to interact with stakeholders in a one-to-one formula, which allows stakeholders to assess authenticity (Harquail, 2011, p. 245). Previous studies have shown that the use of social media in strategic communication creates a positive perception of the relationship of users with a public actor or a candidate (Sweetser & Lariscy, 2008, p. 175). Social media have shifted the classic asymmetrical, monologue-driven communication efforts of an organization into symmetrical, dialogic communication that determines an increase of engagement and satisfaction (Bortree & Selzer, 2009, p. 319). According to the unidirectional model of organizational communi-

cation, it was easy to represent the reasons, values and even the actions of organizations in a self-serving way (Coupland & Brown, 2004, pp. 1327-1328). Social media represent a shift in the perspective and in the practice of organizational communication, since they offer the opportunity to gain trust by allowing a greater control of users (either internal or external publics) over relevant information (Reddington & Francis, 2011, p. 217), but, at the same time, they render the organization vulnerable to actions and statements of a potential unlimited audience. Some scholars have noticed the lack of control that makes the activity of communication strategists more complex than ever (Coombs & Holladay, 2012) and the slow adaptation of organizations to social media tools (Alfonso & Miguel, 2006, p. 267).

Rotter (1967), cited by Mayer *et al.* (2006, p. 87) defined social trust as being the “expectation of an individual or of a group that the promise, the verbal or written statement of another individual or group will be fulfilled”. At a social level, we could speak about the availability to trust manifested by an individual or by a group. Nations, communities and groups may have different levels of availability to trust. Some recent surveys have shown a general decrease of the availability to trust (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2012). This tendency emphasizes the necessity to study trust building and restoring leverages.

As recent data have revealed, there is a general fall of trust in all countries (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2012, p. 5) and the worrisome tendencies of 2011 intensified in 2012. People distrust more and more institutions, NGOs, businesses, banks (the latter, with a global decrease in trust between 5% and 11%). Only technology and media maintains at the previous year’s trust level, which was high for technology and moderate for media (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2012: 8). With respect to the trusted media sources, while general sources of information register an increase of trust from consumers, social media sources register the greatest amount of increase in trust: 75% in comparison only 10% for traditional media sources (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2012, p. 16). Also, looking at the specific data in this survey, there is a strong decline of formal sources (CEOs, official spokesperson) and an increase in trustworthiness for ordinary people (22% between 2011 and 2012) and regular employees (16%) (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2012, p. 21). According to this tendency, social media rise in the public’s informal assessment of value as information source. Social media encourage many people to believe that the information is accurate and to use it as an honest and complete information source. All these are arguments in favor of assessing the online reputation of organizations and public actors.

Using Deephouse’s definition of components of reputation, the study described in this paper considers *the online reputation* as the overall evaluation of a company or public actor presented on the web. This definition takes into account the fact that most of the entries (articles and postings) released on the web are generated through social media. A secondary concept that has been introduced in this study is *the online reputation profile*, formed by the most representative information and postings released on the web about a public actor.

According to several of the above cited articles (Rindova *et al.*, 2005; Lange *et al.*, 2011), prominence and favorability are considered in the present paper as key variables for assessing reputation and specifically the online reputation. Prominence refers “to the degree to which an organization is visible and well known” while reputation involves an assessment of being good or bad, assessment made by stakeholders (Boyd *et al.*, 2010, p. 594). In this study, the variable introduced to assess prominence is *the online visibility*, the proportion of articles and postings released by a search engine that refer to the individual actor, as result to a search using his/her name.

Furthermore, favorability refers to the positive overall assessments made by stakeholders, or to the prevalence of positive assessments compared to negative assessments, among the individuals who formed an attitude about the organization. Fischer and Reuber (2007, p. 59) introduce a variable as “valence” to measure favorability – the degree of positivity or negativity in individual stakeholder’s attitudes. Favorability is also considered a key variable in the present study and is introduced in the design of research for assessing the online reputation.

Since reputation can be managed intentionally by managers (Roberts & Dowling, 2002, p. 1078), the content generated on the web by managers or public actors should be considered as an effect of their intentional actions. I introduce here another variable, *the online control*, which is the amount of content that has been generated directly on the web by a public actor or his/hers communication officers. Also, another variable introduced in the research design is the importance of online media sources. The importance of online media sources is expressed by *the online rating*, or the percentage of users who access a web address in a specific moment.

Finally, another objective of the present study is to inquire about the influence of a third party in the construction of online reputation. Rindova et al. (2005, p. 1043) have demonstrated that “the prominence dimension of reputation depends on support and endorsement by influential third parties, as institutional intermediaries and high-status actors”. Following Rindova et al.’s research (2005), the specific third party in the present study is the associated group and, specifically, the correlation of individual public actor’s reputation with the social level of trust of their associated groups. Until now, previous research has determined only the general influence of third party groups and influential actors, without specifying factors or patterns, hence my interest in pursuing this goal, too.

Although the dimensions and definitions of reputation refer primarily to companies, they can be easily transferred to individual public actors, too. A public actor has a symbolic relationship with stakeholders, which is equivalent to an organizational relationship, offering “services” and “products”, communicating professionally and being compared with the competitors in the same field. Thus, the reputation of individual public actors can be conceived of and assessed by using the same concepts and instruments as the organizational reputation. The assessment is easier for public actors, since the complexity of reputational dimensions is reduced in the case of an individual. Thus, there are no internal factors that need to be balanced (as the multiple influences of employees or of temporary members)

The following research questions were set:

RQ1: Are the online visibility and the online control correlated to a positive online reputation of public actors?

RQ2: What categories of online reputation profiles can be identified in the sample, using a coherent set of indicators?

RQ3: Is the online reputation of a public actor influenced by the level of social trust of its associated group?

3. Method

The various perspectives on reputation have produced several indicators in assessing reputation, such as the dominant position in the industry, the position in economic tops (e.g.

“Forbes”), the opinion of job seekers, prominence and perceived quality, financial reputation and media discourse, (Lange *et al.*, 2011, pp. 171-172). Several methods have been used empirically to translate reputation in operational terms: perceptions assessed through interviews, coding of media discourse, assessing favorability in public discourse (Lange *et al.*, 2011, p. 176). Inspired by previous research, this study has introduced adequate variables for describing the reputation of individual public actors.

Another challenge for the research design has come from the characteristics of the web, which are not always appropriate for traditional content analysis. Contrasting the narrow application of traditional content analysis methods to the web with an alternative conceptualization of what content analysis should become in response to the challenges of new media, Herring (2010, pp. 234-239) has introduced the “web content analysis”. Web content analysis is a method that recasts content analysis notions such as comparable units of analysis, fixed coding schemes, random sampling and reliability of coding, but draws also characteristics from other methods to address characteristic features of the web (as hyperlinks or images) (Herring, 2010, pp. 243-244). In the present study, the traditional features that Herring emphasized as necessary to maintain were considered also necessary for the methodological validity. The only non-traditional element which was introduced was the online rating as weighting coefficient in two of the formulas.

The operational variables are: the online visibility, the online control, the online rating and the favorability of online articles and postings. From these variables resulted five simple indicators and a complex indicator (described below, in the “indicators” section).

4. Sample and data

The sample of public actors comprised Romanian members in the European Parliament (33 members, elected from five parties, and activating in present in the European Parliament). The research has been carried out between 7 and 14 October 2012 using the same method of search and the same data for the online rating of sources.

A recent study (Madden & Smith, 2010, pp. 8-10) found that more than a half (57%) of internet users have used a search engine to look up their name and see what information is available about them online, and that reputation management became a defining feature of online life for many internet users. Also, the search behavior of internet users in order to find available information about others (new personal acquaintances or public actors) is considered by scholars a frequent practice (Madden & Smith, 2010, p. 2)

The data for each public actor have been obtained by giving “search” with the name of the public actor on Google “web” section. Only the articles on the first two pages obtained with Google search have been evaluated. Thus, 20 results (postings and articles) were obtained for each actor. A total of 660 recording units (articles and postings) were analyzed, coded and included in the calculation formulas of the six indicators.

To collect data about the online audience and rating of sources, the site Alexa.com and the Romanian site *traffic.ro* (a website that registers the online visitors for all the important online sources) were used. To calculate the online rating, weekly and monthly coefficients of online audience were consulted.

5. Recording units, categories and coding

The recording units in this analysis were the entries (articles and postings) released by Google search engine, after a search using the public actor's name. Given to the number of variables and to the complex system of indicators that resulted, the categories were dichotomies in two cases. For the online visibility, the categories were "0" and "1": "0" if the article did not refer to the public actor (and was either a false link, an article about an individual with a similar name or only a referral in a series of names). For the online control, the categories were "0" and "1": "1" if the content of article was directly generated by the public actor (being the personal site, personal profile in a social network, or an official site publishing the biography).

Each recording unit received a favorability coefficient, as it follows: (3) intensely favorable; (2) favorable; (1) mention; (0) outside the topic, refers to other actor; (-1) slightly unfavorable; (-2) unfavorable articles; (-3) intensely unfavorable articles. For example, a unit coded with "+2" was a positive attribute, the announcement of a promotion or a title won by the public actor, or the expression of a positive intention (as the intention to introduce a law proposal, for example). For coding as a "+3" coefficient, the public actors receive strong positive attributes (as "the most active politician from Parliament"), win a prestigious prize or promotion, or have actions with impact to groups (for example, introduce a motion for sustaining a policy to support autistic children). For negative coefficients, the criteria corresponded to the actions and characteristics considered "negative" (for example, coding with "-2": a scandal generated to a party, incrimination in a process; or being accused of plagiarism and fraud of public funds, in case of "-3" coefficient).

A second aspect of coding referred to the online rating (expressed initially through percentages). For coding, an online rating of 6% had a corresponding value of 6 as importance coefficient of the source. Thus, the importance coefficient of sources varied on an interval between 0 and 10. The smaller sources (as blogs and local online magazines) were rated with a conventional importance coefficient of 1.

Coding of online social networks as sources used the data of Alexa.com site. The data indicate the number of users in these networks (the potential audience). Because of the huge number of users, the online social networks have a high power to release content on the first pages in Google. Being very powerful in the number of users, the video sharing network Youtube has been coded with "10", and the online social network Facebook, with over 5 million users in Romania, has been coded with "8" as a source. Wikipedia was coded with "5", while Twitter, a small network with only 50.000 users in Romania, was coded with "2".

6. Reliability

All the articles were coded by the author of the paper. The dichotomies in categories ("0" and "1" codes) needed no assessment of reliability. Also, the online rating was derived from online statistics, without involving human subjectivity. The only part of coding which needed a test of reliability was the assessment of favorability. A doctoral student was instructed with the correspondence of favorability coefficients (ranging from -3 to +3) and coded in parallel 100 recording units. The percentage of similar coding with the author was 90%.

7. Indicators

The indicators that compose the model of assessment are grouped in two categories: (a) simple indicators, aiming to describe the online coverage: the online visibility, the online control, the balance in coverage, the intensity of negative elements and the height of sources; (b) a complex indicator, “the online reputation score”, calculated using favorability, importance of sources and online visibility.

7.1. The description of online coverage

The first indicator is *the online visibility* of a public actor (defined above as the amount of content released by a search engine as result of search using his/her name). This indicator is low when the public actor has “competitors” with the same name or a similar name. The indicator is also low when the public actor had no actions presented by media/online media and did not create direct channels for delivering information in social media. The desirable level of this indicator is over 80% for a public actor.

Furthermore, *the online control* refers to the amount of content generated directly by the public actor (or his/hers communication officers) on the first two pages in Google, as result of searching; in other words, the proportion of online channels of communication controlled by the actor. The level of this indicator shows the capacity of the public actor to influence directly his online overall impression (either to express own position or to answer to other’s position). A fine level of control varies between 0,25 (5 entries in first two Google pages directly generated by the public actor) to 0,35 (7 entries directly generated by the public actor).

A third indicator is *the balance between negative and positive coverage* on the first two pages in Google, the proportion of articles/postings releasing negative information about the public actor at a certain moment. This indicator shows the trend of the online media coverage (the proportion of negative coverage) at a specific moment. A score over 0,5 indicates a negative coverage for more than a half of entries.

A fourth indicator is *the intensity of unfavorable coverage*, which refers to the proportion between the sum of negative coefficients and the sum of positive coefficients, regardless of the importance of the source. This indicator expresses the general climate in commenting about an actor, and the intensity of potential crisis factors. The difference between the fourth and the third indicator consists in that the intensity takes into account only absolute values for articles (is a quality indicator). A score of over 1 of intensity indicates that the negative online coverage is more powerful than the positive online coverage.

Finally, the fifth indicator is *the height*, the mean of audience coefficients for all sources which compose the sample of data. The height of online reputation expresses the importance of sources which cover a public actor. Scores over 4 will be registered when the online coverage is constructed by central media sources; scores under 4 will be registered when the online coverage is constructed by local or unimportant media sources.

7.2. The score of online reputation

In constructing the formula of the score of online reputation (ORS) (composed by the author of the paper) also included the principle of weighting coefficient according to the rating

of sources (Halic & Chiciudean, 2004). The formula for the primary score of online reputation (an intermediate score) is:

$$\text{ORSI} = [\sum (i1 \times n) \times 2 + \sum (i2 \times n)]/3$$

i1, i2 – favorability coefficients for each of the ten articles displayed on the first page, respectively on the second page in Google as result of search using the public actor's name;

n – rating coefficient (calculated as explained above in the “coding” section).

The interval for “*i*” values (favorability coefficients) tends from -3 to +3, and the audience coefficient ranges from 1 to 10. Thus, the maximum value for ORSI, in this variant, is 300, but very high scores are less likely to be encountered in practice. The usual values for ORSI will be placed on a scale from -100 to +100. A value from 1 to 50 is considered modest (could be obtained from neutral mentions only), and only a value over 50 will be considered significantly positive.

The formula for the final online reputation score considers also the “empty” places of the first two pages in Google and thus includes online visibility, distinguishing among visible and non-visible cases and introducing thus both prominence and favorability in this indicator.

$$\text{ORS} = \text{ORSI} \times V/100$$

V/100 – the online visibility score, expressed in percentages (10%)

As in the case of ORSI, only a value over 50 will be considered relevant.

8. Results and interpretation

The analysis showed uniformity in some aspects of the online coverage and also in the online presence of public actors. Thus, a common feature for the majority of actors in the sample was the high visibility, from 80% to 100%. The exceptions were two cases with a very low (Viorica Dănilă, 15%) and moderated (Silvia Țicău, 75%) visibility. Further, most of the public actors in the sample have a moderate level of online control, by developing their own channels of communication. Almost all of the actors have personal sites, blogs, Facebook accounts and/or Wikipedia pages. The level of online control varies from 3 entries through personal channels to 6 entries through personal channels in the first two pages in Google. The balance is different from one case to another, depending of what part of the sample is considered. In the negative side of the sample (cases with negative online reputation), the interval ranges from a singular case (Adrian Severin) who passes through a reputation crisis (table 1: balance 0,7 and ORS -69,3, the lowest score) to another case (Rares Niculescu) who nearly enters in a reputation crisis (table 3: balance 0,45 and ORS 0,3). In the positive part of the sample, various situations and levels of indicators could be found, from a modest online reputation score (as 20 for Adina Valean or 12 for Cristian Tănăsescu) to high scores (as 99 for Ramona Mănescu) (see table 2). Another difference is the height: some public actors in the sample are covered in central media sources in comparison with other actors, who have access only to local media and personal channels (example Iosif Matula and Oana Antonescu, table 3).

Table 1. Members in European Parliament from Social-Democratic Party.

	Name	Visibility %	Control	Balance	Intensity	Height	ORS
1.	Corina Cretu	100	0,25	0,05	–	3,6	43
2.	Sabin Cutas	95	0,25	0	–	2,1	26,6
3.	Viorica Danila	15	0	0	–	0,6	0.75
4.	Adrian Severin	90	0,20	0,55	0,7	5,5	-69,3
5.	Ioan Mircea Pascu	100	0,35	0,15	0,2	3,6	39,3
6.	Silvia Tica	75	0,20	0,05	–	1,6	10,2
7.	Daciana Sarbu	100	0,20	0,15	0,2	5,4	54,6
8.	Victor Bostinaru	90	0,30	0,1	0,3	4,7	62,3
9.	Catalin Ivan	100	0,25	0,1	0,01	4,6	74,2
10.	Ioan Enciu	95	0,15	0,1	0,1	3,5	34,1
11.	Minodora Cliveti	100	0,35	0	–	2,1	32,7

Table 2. Members in European Parliament from Hungarian Democratic Union, Great Romania, National Liberal Party and independents.

	Name	Visibility %	Control	Balance	Intensity	Height	ORS
1.	Sogor Csaba	80	0,25	0,45	1,8	3,5	-19,3
2.	Laszlo Tokes	100	0,15	0,5	2,3	4,1	-11
3.	Iuliu Winkler	95	0,20	0,05	-	2,1	35,4
4.	Elena Băsescu	100	0,25	0,25	0,1	4,8	58,5
5.	Corneliu Vadim Tudor	90	0,15	0,60	2,1	4,7	-23,7
6.	Gigi Becali	100	0,1	0,35	0,2	5,3	14,3
7.	Cristian Tanasescu	80	0,2	0,05	-	1	12
8.	Adina Valean	100	0,35	0,25	0,3	3,6	20
9.	Cristian Busoi	95	0,2	0,05	-	3,8	39,9
10.	Norica Nicolai	95	0,25	0	-	3,7	49,4
11.	Renate Weber	95	0,3	0	0	3,1	28,4
12.	Ramona Manescu	100	0,25	0,05	-	5	99

Table 3. Members of European Parliament from Democratic-Liberal Party.

	Name	Visibility %	Control	Balance	Intensity	Height	ORS
1.	Monica Macovei	100	0,20	0,30	0,7	4,8	10
2.	Theodor Stolojan	100	0,25	0,20	0,4	4,4	17,3
3.	Traian Ungureanu	85	0,20	0,05	-	3,2	29,2
4.	Cristian Preda	100	0,25	0	-	4,8	50,8
5.	Marian-Jean Marinescu	100	0,20	0	-	4,3	42,6
6.	Iosef Matula	95	0,25	0	-	1,7	23
7.	Sebastian Bodu	100	0,25	0,05	-	1,9	33,4
8.	Petru Luhan	100	0,30	0,25	0,4	3,3	41
9.	Rares Niculescu	100	0,15	0,45	1,2	4,5	0,3
10.	Oana Elena Antonescu	90	0,30	0,15	0,1	2	11,5

A. *Correlation of online visibility/online control with the online reputation score* To test the correlation of each of the two variables with the online reputation score, the correlation analysis (Pearson correlation coefficient) has been used. For a normal distribution of cases, necessary when applying the Pearson correlation test, two cases were excluded (the case of Adrian Severin, with an ORS of -60,3; the case of Viorica Dănilă, with only 15% visibility). The exclusion of these cases was maintained for the T- test for independent samples, in the third part of this section. Further, for studying the relationship of online visibility with online reputation score, it was used the primary score (ORSI) because the final score (ORS) included already the online visibility for each case. The results of correlation test are as it follows (table 4 and 5):

Table 4. Correlation test of online visibility (independent variable) with ORSI (dependent variable).

Correlations

		ORSI	V
ORSI	Pearson Correlation	1	.364*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.044
	N	31	31
V	Pearson Correlation	.364*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.044	.
	N	31	31

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05

The interpretation of Pearson correlation test shows that the correlation of online visibility (independent variable) with online reputation score (dependent variable) is significant at a $p = 0.044$, $p < 0.05$, but the correlation is not strong. The correlation coefficient has a value of only 0.364, explaining only around 13% of the variance of the dependent variable. This result means that, with a probability of 95%, it is a positive correlation of the online visibility with the online reputation score (public actors who are more visible online could have a higher level of the online reputation score), but the correlation explains only a small part of the variance of dependent variable (ORS).

Table 5. Correlation test of the online control (independent variable) with ORS (dependent variable).

Correlations			
		ORS	C
ORS	Pearson Correlation	1	.338
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.063
	N	31	31
C	Pearson Correlation	.338	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.063	.
	N	31	31

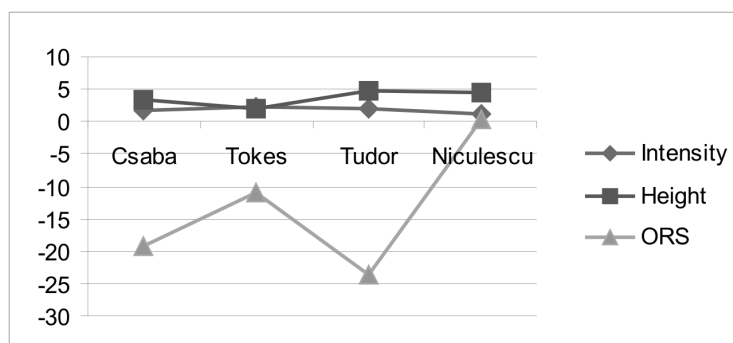
The correlation between the online control (independent variable) and the online reputation score (dependent variable) is not significant ($p = 0.063$, $p > 0.05$). The online control as independent variable does not explain the variation of the dependent variable (ORS).

B. Categories of online reputation cases

Four categories of online reputation profiles have been identified:

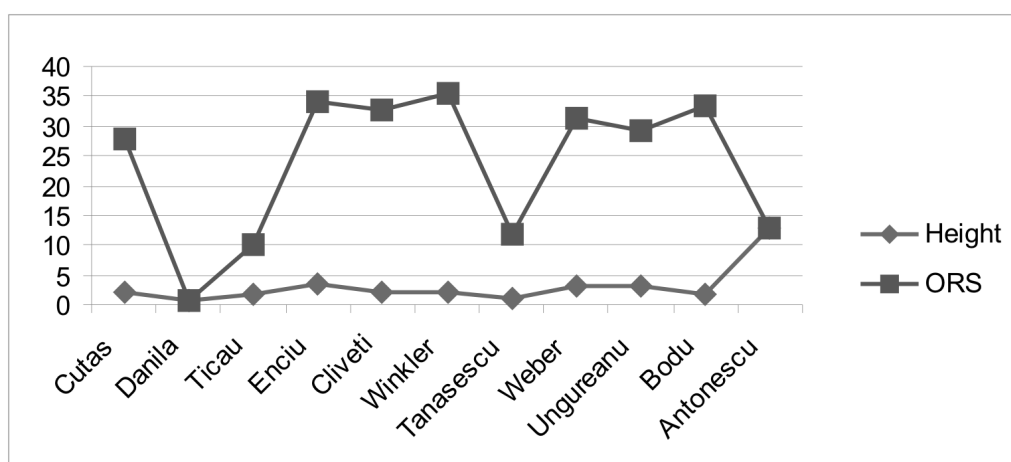
a) *Public actors with negative online reputation.* The public actors in this category either had a constant negative media coverage and were labeled as extremists (as Corneliu Vadim Tudor or Laszlo Tokes), either have in present a reputation crisis (Adrian Severin or, almost, Rares Niculescu). The negative online reputation is associated usually with negative balance, intensity over 1.00 and with the prominent height of sources (over 4) (see figure 1). In figure 1, Adrian Severin's case was not included because the reputation crisis cases should be discussed separately.

Figure 1. Public actors with a negative online reputation.



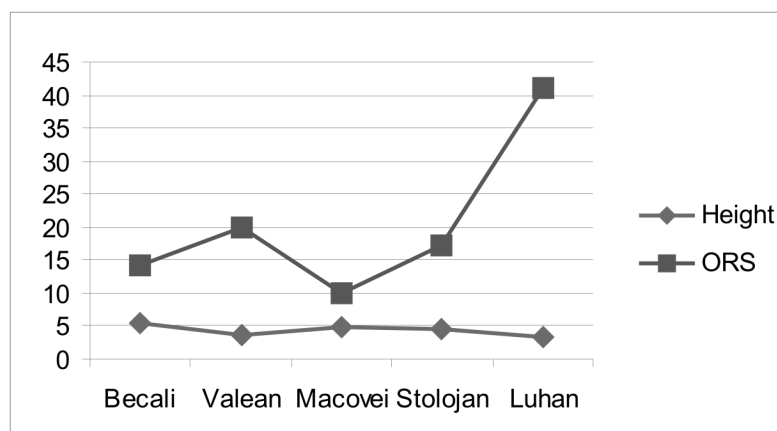
b) “Low profile” public actors. This category includes cases with a slight positive online reputation and a limited unidirectional communication (see fig. 2). The controlled channels are mainly static sites, CVs or non-active profiles in social networks. The balance is positive but the height is small, because the online reputation is built mainly through local sources. The news released are mainly neutral, and the online reputation profile is built through addition of small neutral mentions. Many cases from the sample are included in this category (Oana Antonescu, Iosef Matula, Sebastian Bodu, Traian Ungureanu, Renate Weber, Cristian Tănăsescu, Minodora Cliveti, Ioan Enciu, Viorica Dănilă, Silvia Țicău, Sabin Cutaș).

Figure 2. “Low profile” public actors.



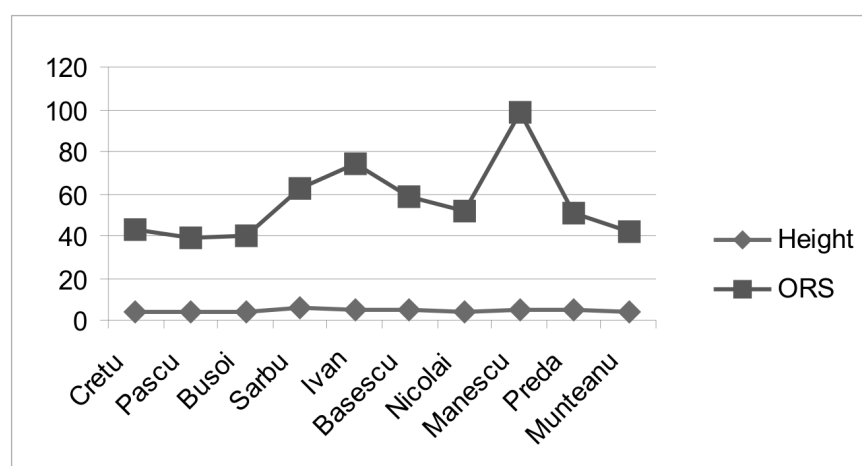
c) Controversial public actors. The cases in this category showed an oscillation between positive coverage and negative coverage, and the low score of reputation resulted from the controversy (as examples, Monica Macovei, Theodor Stolojan, Gigi Becali, Petru Luhan, Adina Vălean). The profiles included in this category have a high balance (over 0,25) showing that over a quarter of online sources released negative news and opinions about that particular actor, and a height which goes from moderate to high (see fig. 3).

Figure 3. Controversial public actors.



d) Public actors with positive online reputation. The cases in this category register a positive tendency in their online coverage, combining a positive balance with a moderate height of sources (see fig. 4). Usually, the public actors in this category combined political actions and media positive relationship with an expert position (the statements and comments of current events are also a mean to gain visibility in the online space). Also, these public actors showed an availability to dialogue with publics in social networks (Ramona Mănescu, Norica Nicolai, Daciana Sârbu, Cătălin Ivan, Victor Boștinăru, Cătălin Preda). Two cases from this category also demonstrate the importance of positive events in enhancing and restoring the online reputation: Cătălin Ivan and Elena Băsescu had a happy event few weeks before measurement (the birth of his children and her wedding, respectively) which brought a great amount of positive online content about Cătălin Ivan and, in case of Elena Băsescu, a temporary restoration of a controversial online reputation.

Figure 4. Public actors with positive online reputation.



C. The influence of the social level of trust of associated group on the online reputation of individual public actors

To reach the third goal of research, it is necessary to take a closer look to the political tendencies that indicate the social level of trust of associated groups. The recent surveys showed a fall in trust of the former government party of Romania, the Democratic-Liberal Party, for many social categories, while the other smaller parties maintain to a modest level of trust. As prediction, recent market polls reveal also a pessimistic expectation for Democratic Liberal Party (PDL) results in the general parliamentary elections in winter 2012, and modest expectations for the other parties (RISE, 2012, p. 13). Thus, the Democratic-Liberal Party, the former government party, is expected to win only around 24% of the votes in the next 2012 elections, while the Social-Liberal Union is expected to win over 62% of the votes (RISE, 2012, pp. 21-25).

This part of analysis tested the difference of online reputation score means between the group of European parliamentarians of Social-Liberal Union (USL) and the group of European parliamentarians from the other parties. The size of groups was equivalent (15 political actors in the first group, 16 political actors in the second group). The T – test for independent samples was used. The statistical results are as follows:

Table 6. Results of T-test for independent samples.

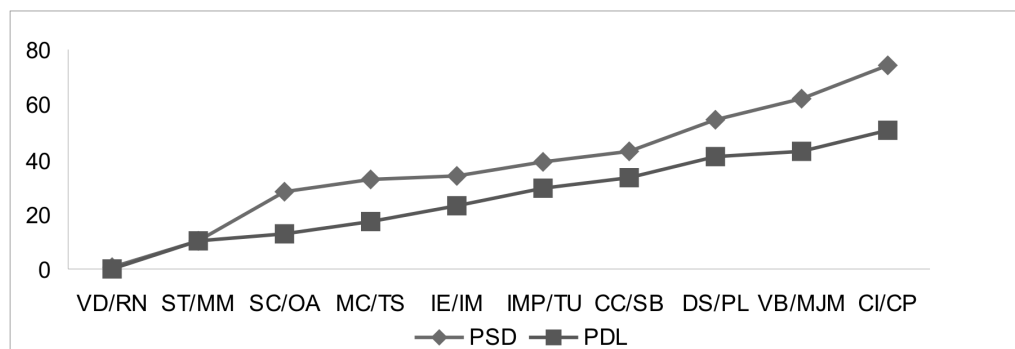
Group Statistics										
usl		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean					
ORS	1.00	15	42.1800	23.64249	6.10447					
	2.00	16	19.6625	24.33937	6.08484					

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
ORS	Equal variances assumed	.145	.706	2.610	29	.014	22.51750	8.62751	4.87226	40.16274
	Equal variances not assumed			2.612	28.959	.014	22.51750	8.61915	4.88826	40.14674

In the second table, the Levene's test for equality of variances is not significant ($p = 0,706$, $p > 0.05$) thus, the hypothesis of equal variances cannot be rejected. Further, the t test is statistically significant ($t = 2,61$, $df = 29$, $p = 0.014$, $p < 0.05$). The mean of online reputation scores in the Social-Liberal Union group ($M = 42,18$, $SD = 19,66$) is significantly greater (mean difference = 22,51) than the mean of online reputation scores in the other parties' group ($M = 19,66$, $SD = 24,33$).

The graph below (fig. 5) compares the online reputation scores for members of the Social-Democrat Party with the online reputation scores for members of the Democrat-Liberal Party, on a matching basis, after ordering their online reputation scores (ORS) from low to high.

Figure 5. The comparison of the online reputation score for members of two opposed parties.



Note. The names are transformed in initials, and the order of comparison is from the lowest online reputation score to the highest online reputation score for both political groups.

9. Discussion

The results of correlation analysis and the T-test for independent groups have shown that the online control does not determine a positive online reputation, but the online visibility might have a slight influence. The result is not surprising, because the online control shows only how much a public actor is aware of the importance of online communication and has own channels to communicate with publics, however it says nothing about the other aspects of the online strategy (as the interactive online attitude or the relationship with social media).

On the other hand, the level of social trust of the associated group tends to be an influence factor for the members' online reputation. The explanation of this influence could be found in the spiral of silence theory (Noelle-Neumann, 1993), as social media framing and evaluation could be influenced by the tendency of decline of a group. Further reflection should be given to this idea, especially in the direction of testing other group factors which could influence the online reputation.

Another aspect that should be also explored in the future is the dynamic of online reputation. The model of assessing online reputation describes data only corresponding to a moment. The data in online sources change in time consistently. Stability and change in time of online reputation is a separate topic of reflection, which should be further investigated.

Furthermore, the system of evaluation with six indicators proposed in this paper is based only on prominence/online visibility and on favorability. The qualitative dimension of reputation (the specific attributes that compose reputation) is not included in this frame. Further research should include a qualitative dimension, by considering the attributes that differentiate the online reputation profiles of public actors.

Finally, in order to be appropriately used in the professional practice, the model should be tested on several other groups (for expanding the area and avoiding specific factors of field, as in this paper the political and institutional field).

10. Conclusions

This study attempts to bring a significant contribution to the development of the reputation field, by expanding the reputational approach into the web area and by proposing a coherent model for evaluating the online reputation of individual public actors. The research has proposed a set of indicators for the assessment of online reputation. The online control and the online visibility are more connected with the actions of a public actor, while the balance, the intensity and the height are more connected with the effects of actions on the online coverage. The sixth constructed indicator, the online reputation score, includes favorability, online visibility and a weighting coefficient (the online rating of web sources). The application of the model on a sample of Romanian public actors (members in the European Parliament) has shown several similarities and differences in analysis and allowed the distinction of four categories of online reputation profiles: public actors with negative online reputation, "low profile" public actors, controversial public actors and public actors with positive online reputation. As correlation between variables, online visibility had a slight positive correlation with the online reputation score, while the online control had no influence on the online reputation score. Finally, after introducing the level of trust of different political groups in the sample as independent variable, the difference in means between groups was statistically

significant, thus the members of the group with a higher level of trust had higher online reputation scores.

In practice, the results of this research can be used by practitioners in order to build appropriate communication strategies for public actors. The research has drawn attention to several implications that occur from conceiving reputation as formed by complementary components, the online reputation being one of them. These findings could be used to further explore other aspects of analysis, especially the reputational dynamics or the social construction of reputation.

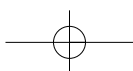
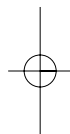
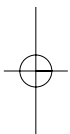
Rezumat: Scopul lucrării este identificarea unui set de indicatori pentru evaluarea reputației online a actorilor publici. Metoda folosită a fost analiza de conținut. Au fost identificați cinci indicatori și un al șaselea indicator sintetic (scorul reputației online) pentru o descriere cât mai completă a reputației online. Modelul a fost testat pe un eșantion format din profilele reputaționale online (date obținute prin căutare Google) ale europarlamentarilor români. Rezultatele au arătat că doi dintre indicatori, controlul online și vizibilitatea online, nu corelează semnificativ (sau, respectiv, există o corelație slabă) cu scorul reputației online. Însă o variabilă externă, nivelul social de încredere al grupului asociat, exercită o influență asupra scorului reputației online al actorilor publici individuali. Așadar, această cercetare deschide noi subiecte de discuție în studiul reputației online în special și al reputației în general.

Cuvinte-cheie: reputație; social media; indicatori.

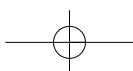
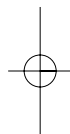
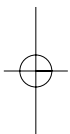
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Varia



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Media Framing of Sports Competitions. Going Beyond the *War* and the *Show* Frames of Sports Events

Abstract

As an interdisciplinary field, sports activate and re-contextualize a wide repertoire of symbolic elements, among which *war* and *show* ethos seem to be the most prominent. The aim of this study is to go beyond the “war” and the “show” frames duality and to discuss the emergence of a new hybrid construct: the *sports war-show*. Based on a discourse analysis of textual and visual units – images and their corollary captions, the study outlines the way in which media frame an international sports event, i.e. the 2011 Women’s Handball World Championship. While the evaluative potential of the textual component proves to be underused in media’s coverage of sports competitions, the visual component is defined by a clear tendency to dramatization and personalization, using the war and show elements in order to stress out the affective loading and the competitive tension of sports events as global *war shows*.

Key words: soft war; warrior ethos; social dramaturgy; sports war-show; visual media framing.

1. Introduction

The symbolic value of the social field of sports is based on the referents to which sports are related. From a simple recreational appendage to the “hard” spheres of action in the social dynamics, sports have become a cultural product that plays the role of a complex composite of elements gathered from complementary areas such as politics, education, economics, media, dramaturgy or medicine. Its interdisciplinary nature makes sports subject to a hybrid social imaginary, in which alternative, but not exclusive metaphoric anchors can be found. The lens one chooses to wear influences the way in which one recreates the entire significance of this field, since sports itself is a social construct. Even though it is just a symbolic metonymy, viewing sports as a mirror of society is rather an excessive use of the isomorphism perspective upon sports-society relation. However, sports are an integral part of the overall social dynamics and can be thus understood as a “product of the social relationships within that (particular) changing society” (Horne, Tomlinson & Whannel, 2005, p.21).

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“War” and “show” are probably the most familiar analogies when it comes to approaching sports dynamics; as early as in the ‘50s Stone (*apud* Birrell & Donnelly, 2004) spoke about the dual dimension of sports as both performance and competition. These two master-frames of the social field of sports can be associated with the dichotomy between the dramaturgical model of sports as spectacle and the belligerent model of sports as clash between opponent parties. Each metaphor implies a different orientation in redefining the roles of the actors inside the field of sports, as well as beyond it, different social expectations, attitudes and practices. The performative dimension of defining sports dynamics is based on the strong correlation between the representational sphere and the corollary sphere of action (Moscovici, 1997) – the former being the engine for the latter.

After discussing the main sources of similarities that sustain these two taken for granted analogies: sports-war and sports-show, this study outlines the emergence of a new hybrid metaphor of sports as “war-show”. This corresponds to the consumerist profile of today’s society and to the intensive commodification process that sports have been subject to on the global stage. Moreover, based on this war-show dyad and using discursive analysis tools, the second part of this study focuses on comparing the use of these metaphoric anchors by sports actors and media when referring to real competition contexts. Are these frames dominant in sports discourse or do we rather face an artificial “desk framing”¹ of sports dynamics? How far do these analogies go and how consistent are they when referring to concrete communicative contexts? In other words, can we find sufficient arguments to sustain these social representations of sports competitions?

Due to the liquid boundaries between sports and other social areas, especially in terms of social and discursive practices, the value of this study goes beyond the sports field. The symbolic imperialism of competitiveness, as guiding principle in almost every aspect of our lives, brings along a large scale use of the social imaginary attached to it. Therefore, dominant frames such as “war”, “show” or “war show” become significant communicative resources in redefining and re-contextualizing the competitive ethos, whether we speak of sports, business, entertainment or political competitions.

2. It’s time for “war”!

The zero-sum logic of sports competitions brings this social field close to the warrior ethos. Sharing the confrontational general frame of action, sports and war are all about parties fighting each other to win. Whether we speak about the end of a battle or about the finish line in a competition, in the end, what really matters in both cases is who wins. Seen as a “surrogate for war” (King, 2008) or an “alternative for war” (Hilvoorde, Elling & Stokvis, 2010), sports redefine the classic coordinates of war in terms of competition, keeping the form, but changing its content. Based on this sports-war analogy, the main aspects that this section will address include: the wider dynamics of sports geopolitics, sports’ symbolic capital and its identity function, as well as the structural similarity between competition and war ethos in terms of design and vocabulary.

Based on the metonymic principle of representation between nations and sports actors, the “global moment” that Andrews and Cole (2002) consider to be crucial in rethinking the dilemma of the nation demands also a re-evaluation of the position of sports. After gaining its autonomy as a social field per se, surpassing its initial marginal status, sports are nowadays both

an outcome and a stage for globalization, bringing nations together at the same table. International competitions provide the general frame and context for national actors – through their sports representatives, to confirm, reaffirm or even redefine their position on the sports world map. Beyond general principles of fair-play and fairness, which sustain the moral axis of sports activities, sports dynamics means, first of all, power relationships. However, sports are part of the “soft power” ammunition of nations, as they rest on the inducement pole of the “inducements (*carrots*) or threats (*sticks*)” spectrum of power behaviors (Nye, 2004). The increasing importance of soft power over the classic primacy of hard power brings sports closer to the fluid boundaries of international relations, which are not limited to politics. If we were to simplify the mechanism beyond sports competitions, the hard core of this social field remains the superiority-inferiority dyad, as it manages to create and to reproduce “asymmetrical relations of domination” (Giardina & McCarthy, 2005, p.166). Sports actors and their nations are fighting for supremacy recognition at both the regional/continental and the global levels and all their repeated confrontations contribute to a “warrior” history of battles, as well as to super-powers versus outsider classification. Figure skating dominated by Russia, handball dominated by Nordic countries, football dominated by Brazil, athletic trials dominated by Kenyan runners, feminine gymnastics dominated by Romanian teams, they have all worked as stereotypical representations on the global map of sports geopolitics.

Although sports competition can be seen as a symbolic form of conflict, at the same time, sports ethos is built around the imperatives of fairness and respect. No other thing can speak more about fair play than a sports competition. The moral demands of the Olympic spirit counterbalance the *win at all costs* logic of competition, showing why sports are more than a game. This is why sports competition is an acceptable form of war and why sports became one of the most valuable assets in terms of public diplomacy. Among the non-state actors that entered the international scene, sports have gained their role in the overall *paradiplomacy* (Xifra, 2009) sphere of action; in this context, *paradiplomacy* refers to the international relations conducted by non-central governments on their own. Sports actors contribute to the national branding and act as informal diplomats for their nations. Due to their accessibility and popularity, sports provide contexts and tools for intercultural exchange and for comparisons between nations. However, competition stresses out the meritocracy principle and the continuous battle for supremacy and thus, diplomacy comes second in the overall dynamics of sports events.

In international sports competitions victories and defeats are not primary about individuals or teams, but rather about entire nations. In the end, what really counts is the flag behind the sports actor and its symbolic value. Pride and shame are two facets of sports performances coin and they are closely related to a complex phenomenon that combines extrapolation with contamination effects from the sports actor to the nation he or she represents on the global stage. But what are nations fighting for on the sports battlefield? What is it at stake? Consonant with the “soft power” horizon, sports victories bring and consolidate the symbolic capital of nations, adding to their laurels of glory. This diplomatic instrumentalization of sports achievements or failures, whether we think of them at the institutional level or at the level of common practice, is strongly correlated to the fact that “sports offers a rich source of stories which can, in many ways, function as a direct mirror of national identity” (Hilvoorde, Elling & Stokvis, 2010, p.90). When talking about sports, the “I” and “we” swing is always taken for granted and, along with it, personal and public narratives that sustain this identity function of sports. Moreover, sports activate national stereotypes, but also create

new ones. Crossing like Beckham, running like Bolt, swimming like Phelps, serving like Federer are now part of a global repertoire, but, before becoming brands *per se*, they communicate about being proud to be English, Jamaican, American or Swiss. Every nation has its sports heroes around whom the “we” feeling is kept alive. The intensity of experiencing sports competition is hence a consequence of the identitary dimension that sports battles are built on, and the spontaneous “We won! Long live the champions!” is just one example of an entire repertoire of shared experiences generated by sports.

Besides these dimensions of sports-war analogy, there are also structural similarities between sports competition and war. If every game is a battle, competitions are seen as the overall frame of a sports war. Moreover, the cyclic features of major competitions have generated a routine of war and peace time in which competition itself constitutes the time for action and supremacy challenge, while inter-competition pause provides time for preparing and regrouping the team for the next “war”. These soft wars on the sports battlefield have their own stable calendar. Time is therefore predictable when it comes to sports wars. Even the post-match conferences play their role as temporary armistice and acceptance of the outcomes of sports battles, outlining this image of sports competition as a form of “ritualized war” (Elias, 1980/2002), which, in turn, serves as a symbolic representation of world’s geopolitics.

Another level of structural similarities is the competitive design of sports battle, especially when it comes to sports that imply the interaction between two opposite parties (i.e. football, handball, tennis, volley, fencing etc.). The symmetry of teams’ disposal on the sports field, the competitive clash and the zero-sum fight for the same final goal, they all replicate the dynamics of war battlefields. This is when another component should be brought into discussion as a corollary indicator of the sports-war analogy: the common discursive resources. We can conceive them in terms of attack versus defence position, victory and defeat, a whole arsenal of techniques, captains and heroes, strategies and tactics, all in all, a consistent warrior ethos that has been socially internalized and that now defines the competitive nature of sports. The difference between war and sports competition consists mainly of rules of the game and the degree of violence involved during the confrontation. Sports competition can be thus seen as a symbolic war replica in which the global normative frame keeps the confrontations between sports actors in a safety and controllable zone. As much as this war framing of sports activities has been perpetuated and socially used, sports are subject to an oxymoronic duality of the symbolic wars in times of peace or what can be called the *cyclicity of global soft wars*. The case study discussed here focuses on the design and combative dynamics of sports actors’ confrontation, seen as the hard core of the warrior ethos.

3. It’s show time!

The anchor of modern sports is well embedded in ancient rituals and festivals (Guttmann, 1978) and, even though today it is defined by rationalized form and content, sports continues to be understood as a symbolic revival of those ancient festivities on a consumerist platform. The interactional nature of sports activities, and, moreover, their high level of public exposure, make sports a resourceful field for performance studies, which can be seen as a “practice of aesthetic communication” (Pelias & Van Oosting, 1987). Sports are a cultural product that swings between authenticity and fiction, due to the fact that it is, more or less, an experience outside the common social order and it is mostly focused on the effects of a rather *re-*

hearsed spontaneity of the game. Competition is not primarily about comparing abilities and praising physical intelligence; it is about stimulating affective involvement and collective catharsis. Beyond confrontation and adversity, ethics and global values, sport is “primarily about shared experiences” (Hilvoorde, Elling & Stokvis, 2010) and thus it can be understood in terms of a syncretic, but spectacular dramaturgical form.

The metaphor of sports as show is based on the “intersensory experience” (Kennedy & Hills, 2009, p.136) attached to the dynamics of competitions. To define the dramaturgic frame of analysis, as the general platform in examining sport events, there are four pillars that sustain the sports-show symbiosis: actors, impression management, the performance itself and the regions of performance, all of them parts of Goffman’s conceptual field. Each of these elements is correlated to one of the *sine qua non* components of a unity of action: the social entity behind the action (the sports actor), the way in which he or she acts (the impression management), the outcome of action (the sports performance itself) and the context of action (regions of performance). The representation of sports dynamics in terms of show is part of the overall metaphor of life as theatre. Thus, the social field of sports can be understood as one of the parallel stages of the complex structure of social performances.

If we were to discuss sports activities in terms of Goffman’s typology of interactional units, they reflect the “platform performances” category (Goffman, 1983, p.7). This means that sports dynamics is primarily characterized by the fact that it takes place in the presence of a well defined audience. Therefore, the abstractization of the show metaphor is, in case of sports social field, reduced to a minimum level, as the degree of similarity between sports competition and dramaturgical spectacle is rather high. They both involve an audience, a team of performers (actors or athletes), a particular platform of action (stage or sports field), the public nature of performance and a clear delimitation of the performance in terms of space and time. The sports competition, seen as the defining action-unit for the dynamics of the social field of sports, has a dual dimension: on the one side, the performance which is put on stage, on the other side, the performance which audiences attend to. This is why sports actors are forced to adapt their “entire repertoire of gestures to the physic and symbolic presence” (Beciu, 2009, p. 44) of the audiences in front of whom they perform. It is all about the transitive nature of sports performance, implied by the dialogic model of sports public representation, which is a permanent construct of the interaction between sports actors and their audience. The social value of sports does not come from the competitive episodes themselves, but rather from the effects and significance that they generate among large scale audiences. The physical confrontation between opponents is only the input, not the essence of sports as a social construct.

Sports actors find themselves subject to a complex repertoire of roles, mainly because of the various identity layers that are activated inside the social field of sports. Due to the symbolic value attached to sports, “questions of identity and identification are of critical importance both for the routine functioning of sports and for some of the problems recurrently generated in connection with them” (Dunning, 1999, p. 3). On the competition stage, sports actors play their role in accordance with a normative horizon of social expectations, trying to harmonize individual, organizational and cultural standards. Sports actors are faced with a phenomenon of overlapping roles, as the boundaries between identity referents become fluid. An athlete can play, at the same time, a technical role as goalkeeper in the field, a motivational role as his team’s leader, a symbolic role as his nation representative and a marketing role as image of a brand; each of them with its own script and demands. During competition, everyone in the sports field is, first of all, an actor, playing what can be called

a *composite role*. Every sports performance in front of an audience implies a permanent balance between “to be” and “to seem to be”, sustaining Manning’s (1991, p. 76) “*two selves*” thesis: one self is a public performer carefully controlling his acting impressions; the second self is a cynical manipulator behind this public performance. Therefore, the most important aspect of social performances, sports ones included, rests on the impression management (Goffman, 1959/2003), as the final success of an action depends on the social actor’s ability to maintain the control over his audience. However, in the case of sports competition, the element of surprise and the level of improvisation are quite high because sports actors have to interact not only with the audience, but also with their opponents. Therefore, the initial script is always in jeopardy as the dynamics of sports competition is based on action-reaction sequences between adversary parties. All in on, on the competition stage, individuals are rather improvisers than simply sports actors.

Regarding the spatiality and the perception boundaries of sports performances, it can be noticed that there is a widening process of the *exposed region* – the place where performance is given and, thus, visible to the public – to the detriment of *backstage* (Goffman, 1959/2003) of sports performances – the place that is meant to be kept hidden from the audience. This is a consequence of the structural effects which mass media have upon the sports social field, as a significant part of what was once considered private space became object to media interest, and, therefore, to public scrutiny. In this context, a new conceptual distinction should be introduced between sports show as form of artistic act and sports show in trivial terms. The overall grandeur of the sports spectacle is just one side of the entertaining capital of sports competitions, as well as of “sports circus” (Breivik, 2000) or of “sports carnival” (Giulianotti, 1995) framings of sports events. However, each attempt to define the competition means different social expectations and, hence, different roles which sports actors have to perform.

The limits of the dramaturgical perspective upon the sports social field are strongly connected to the fact that this is a rather descriptive model, focused on answering to a “How?” range of questions, but bypassing the “Why?” aspects. Although sports competition and sports actors depend on audiences and, therefore, are deeply engaged in the production of sports show in the field. Winning the game or the race is the defining principle of competition itself and, in some cases, may even require cutting off the entertaining value of the performance, for pragmatic reasons.

4. Sports competitions facing eclectic times

For many years now, the dominant perspective in analyzing sports as a social phenomenon has been that of viewing *sports as war* and *sports as show* as complementary metaphors in defining this field. But are these categories really exclusive? What are the premises for a hybridization process and what does this new construct mean?

Both “war” and “show” frames are related to a strong affective anchor, as they are based on emotional intensity and collective catharsis. Identification with a “we-ness” referent is part of the overall principle of shared experiences that works as their common ground. Furthermore, strategy or script, both social performances imply training, coordination, and, most important, control and discipline when sports actors play their roles. However, the main element that has replaced the comparative logic with an overlapping one was the dramatization and personalization tendency of media discourse (Craig & Beedie, 2008, p.158). And what

can be more dramatic than war? Beyond its symbolic value, the war frame has also a high market value for sports industry in which competition is, first of all, a commodity, responding to the dynamics of the consumer society (Baudrillard, 1970/2005). The show of sports soft wars is even more spectacular and, overall, it sells well. Wars on the sports battlefield have a significant narrative value, but, moreover, they create heroes who are then subject to branding exploitation. From cosmetics to cars, from video games to social responsibility campaigns, athletes have been used to gain public attention and acceptance. Sports have even become an important “training field” for film or TV show stars, as sports actors are used to the spotlights and to the V.I.P. life style. As for the sports competition itself, as an entertaining act, it has become a media asset that brings people in front of TV and, thus, assures advertisers’ interests. In a media ethos dominated by entertaining principles, sports have managed to find and consolidate their place on the prime-time short list. Entertainment and tension, emotion and conflict, for most of us, sports competition is nowadays a mediated experience, as we tend to live it from behind the screen rather than on the stadium. Therefore, sports competitions are now designed and redefined in terms of media shows. The market value of sports competition and sports brands, of athletes or clubs, led to an entire sports industry. Little by little, the economic value of sports competitions has become as important as their symbolic dimension and competing for hosting major international events such as the Olympic Games or World Championships or competing for broadcasting rights is a strategic objective with significant image and financial implications in the long run.

Experiencing sports competitions as symbolic *war-shows* brings entertainment to another level, as “sport spectacles are sites of short-lived, but intense affective investments, enabling spectators to swing constantly between emotional highs and lows” (Kennedy & Hills, 2009, p.28). Shifting our attention to the war framing is no longer enough for defining sports competition, as sports actors are expected to do more than fighting each other. Competing is just the framework for an entertaining construct that is meant to bring that “wow” effect of a show. Hence, the “how” component became more important than the “why” trigger of sports competitions. While war ethos adds more drama to the sports show, at the same time, the show ethos brings entertainment to the sports battlefield. Nevertheless, despite the similarities and fitting level between the three metaphors of sports competition, the choice for one of them acts as an interpretation schema for the entire competition dynamics. The main aim of this paper is thus to identify if and how media’s discourse employs these three framings in reporting of the dynamics of international sports events.

5. The “how” and “what” anchors of the methodological approach

Because most of our sports experiences are mediated ones, it can be said that, in the end, sports competitions are rather media constructs than “live” events. Due to the high level of public interest, international sports competitions are thus a resourceful media input, having a “great potential in terms of narrative capacities” (Hilvoorde, Elling & Stokvis, 2010, p. 92). The way in which sports competitions are framed by the media determines our representation of the entire competition ethos. It also has the potential to influence what we notice and remember about a particular sports event, as well as how we evaluate and choose to act in relation to it (Entman, 1993). Mediating our access to sports competitions, journalists are involved in a permanent act of redefining and interpreting them. If we admit the symbolic value of discourse,

as well as its performative function, media framing can be understood as a tool used in “emphasizing or deemphasizing particular facets” (Iyengar, 2005, p. 5) of sports competitions.

There are two complementary dimensions that the following case study puts under discussion: visual and textual framing. Using the frame analysis approach, the aim of this study is to stress out if and how sports competitions are defined in terms of war, show or *war-show*. If verbal framing reflects the dominant approach in analyzing media discourse, visual framing is considered to “be less obtrusive, more easily taken-for-granted” (Messaris & Abraham, 2001, p. 216). Based on the assumption that words and images work together in building the overall journalistic message, this study considers the way in which text and images interacted with each other in outlining the range of possible meanings behind media discourses regarding sports competition. Images act as one of the main triggers for press articles and, moreover, as significant tools among media’s framing arsenal. They relate to the whole article in a metonymic manner and set up the readers’ horizon of expectations regarding the subject of the article, as well as the general register that defines the journalistic position towards it. Moreover, images and photographs in particular are used in staging journalistic objectivity, because of the “reality effect” attached to the visual component (Bourdieu, 1996). However, the framing power of an image can be strengthened by the verbal framing of images itself and, hence, the divergence or convergence between the two components should be approached in terms of narrowing or widening the polysemous nature of visual messages. Despite images’ *indexicality*, which brings “an implicit guarantee of being closer to the truth than other forms of communication” (Messaris & Abraham, 2001, p. 217), they cannot be analyzed independently of the textual context that they are placed in relation with. As Bourdieu has noticed, a photo “means nothing in the absence of a caption that tells us what we should read, [...] because to name means to make things visible” (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 19). In other words, it means to guide readers towards one of the many keys of interpretation. If the saying “an image is worth more than a thousand words” has become nowadays more or less truistic, the influence of text upon images is also undisputable. Nevertheless, what can and should be put under scrutiny is the nature of text-image relation in terms of framing power.

The corpus of the study gathers 241 press articles from the online platform of four Romanian national newspapers: two general daily newspapers (“Adevărul” and “Evenimentul Zilei”) and two sports newspapers (“Prosport” and “Gazeta sporturilor”). All articles are related to a major international competition: the 2011 Women’s Handball World Championship, where the Romanian team was seen as one of the favourites and, secondly, all the selected articles have a text-image structure. The time period included was of one month, starting with 25.11.2011 and ending with 23.12.2012, covering the preview scripts of the competition, the competition itself (2-18.12.2011) and the post-factum scrutiny of the event.

This study is structured into two levels of analysis: the first one aims to outline if and how prominent are the three frames of sports competition in media’s approach of the 2011 Women’s Handball World Championship, and the second one focuses on a more comprehensive approach of the visual message, outlining the representative elements that images are grounded on. While the first step provides a quantitative perspective, the second part of the case study adds a qualitative one, stressing out the way the war frame, the show frame and the *war-show* frame of sports competition are built upon.

6. At the grass-roots of *war-show* framing

This first phase of analysis employs an inductive approach of the corpus, in order to identify the criteria that will be further used in defining the coding schema applied to the two types of units of analysis: main image of the article and the corollary caption. Regarding the image selection, it must be said that, in the case of the photo gallery, only the main image attached to the article made the object of the analysis.

For the visual component, the criteria used in defining the show frame (see Figure 1.1 below) were the presence of an audience (spectators) or the explicit presence of media recording apparatus (i.e. cameramen, microphone, reporters), as well as the press conference context, which is considered a media sports construct designed for infotainment purposes. The war visual framing (see Figure 1.2) was defined as an explicit presence of a confrontation situation between representatives of the two competitive parties (teams), in terms of direct body contact or confrontation placement of actors that recreates a fighting ethos. As for the *war-show* framing (see Figure 1.3) of sports competition, a cumulative principle was applied, the presence of both show and war elements placing images in this third eclectic category of sports dynamics' representation (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Sports show, sports war and sports war-show visual framings.



Figure 1.1. Sports show



Figure 1.2. Sports war



Figure 1.3. Sports-war show

The textual component covers both the explicit and the implicit levels of framing. Explicit war referents like “war”, “weapon” or “battle”, as well as soft linguistic elements of war ethos related to aggression and confrontation vocabulary are thus taken into account. The explicit use of show referents that turn to the dramaturgic model (i.e. “spectacle”, “show”, “stage”, “spectators”, “actor”, etc.) are doubled by implicit emotional referents regarding the entertaining effects attached to living sports competition as a show experience (i.e. “entertaining game”, “dramatic episode”, “outstanding performance”, “exciting moment”, etc.). Similar to the visual register, the textual *war show* frame is defined as the presence of both war and show elements in the same unit of analysis.

In trying to answer the first research question regarding the prominence of the three frames on both textual and visual dimensions of media discourse, two hypotheses are put under discussion:

Hypothesis 1: *War-show framing of sports competition is more prominent than sports war or sports show one-dimensional frames.*

Hypothesis 2: *War-show framing is more prominent in the visual representation of sports competition than in the textual one.*

The first hypothesis is based on the eclectic nature of the postmodernist representational process, but, to a greater extent, on media's orientation towards syncretic forms and towards the corollary dramatization and infotainment principles that define the media social field. As for the second hypothesis, it is related to the characteristics of visual versus textual power of message synthesis. While images manage to compress a wider set of signs and messages, the evocation power is lower when it comes to short textual units as captions. Therefore, defined in general terms as summative construct, the *war-show* framing is expected to be more present on the visual level than on the textual one, as images provide a more suitable platform for framing hybrids.

Before approaching the dynamics of the three frames that make the subject of this study, some general aspects regarding the structure of the corpus must be made. There is a *duplication phenomenon* among visual units, which is more powerful in the case of general newspapers than in the case of the sports ones. While the proportion of images that are used for at least two different articles is around 25% in the case of sports newspapers, it reaches 40% in the case of the general newspapers. The percentage is 47% if the same image is used in four different articles. Narrowing down the variety of visual units, media stress out, by repetition, dominant competition framing and, furthermore, they contribute to the emergence of a pre-defined, uncontextualized visual representation of sports competition. This is because a significant part of these photos are not from the particular competition episode that the article is covering, but instead they are taken from other sports events. Using photos from previous sports competitions is a common practice for sports articles and is based on the assumption that sports competitions are highly similar and that is why contextualization is not imperative for transmitting the intended message. As a consequence, it could be said that the informative function of competition images is rather insignificant compared to the affective capital that they activate. Images are hence primarily meant to recreate the emotional experience of the competition and secondarily, if not optionally, to speak about facts, numbers and specific aspects.

Elements from war or show ethos have been identified in 66.8% of the articles, which confirms the fact that these two metaphors of sports competition have been socially internalized and used on a large scale as they are grounded on common knowledge. However, while the frequency of war frame for the visual component of the articles is quite low – 9.13%, especially when it comes to sports newspapers, where the percentage drops under 6%, the differences between the show frame (29.5%) and the *war-show* frame (28.2%) is less than one percent. Therefore, one of three articles analyzed focuses on the visual representation of the competition dramaturgy, while in almost one third of the images war and show ethos are overlapping in order to capture this mixture of confrontation and entertainment. Even though we cannot say that there is a clear dominant framing, there is, however, a significant tendency to include the sports actors-audience dyad as the core unit of the show metaphor, whether images reflect a sports show or a sports war-show framing.

At the textual level, only in 11.2% of the articles elements of war or show ethos have been identified as part of captions. Moreover, even for these few cases, implicit forms were preferred to hard framing approach. Half of these elements are correlated to war principles or vocabulary and another important part to the dramaturgic register – leaving *war show* framing as an incidental presence (with only two implicit textual structures). Despite the very few examples, it was noticed that explicit war framing was used in addressing the eliminatory game, thus acting as a mobilizing element for the decisive competition moments.

The team's mascot. The Norwegians celebrate on the podium. The son of Kristine Lunde-Borgersen holds the spotlight [...] and of course he applauded the performance (*gsp.ro*, 29.11.2011) – *show framing*.

Why Brazil? The World Championship is played in a total obscurity, with only few hundreds of fans at each game (*prosport.ro*, 7.12.2011) – *show framing*.

Let the blood spill! LIVE TEXT Romania–Croatia, starting with 18:30, in the eighth final phase of the World Championship (*prosport.ro*, 12.12.2011) – *war framing*.

Aurelia Bradeanu in a combat against Croatians at the EC (European Championship) 2010 (*gsp.ro*, 11.12.2011) – *war framing*.

Thriller at Brazil–France. The South-Americans have strangled the world vice-champion (*prosport.ro*, 7.12.2011) – *war-show framing*.

Talida Tolnai, one of the heroes from EC 2010 in a role that makes you think of the famous statue from Rio (*gsp.ro*, 2.12.2011) – *war-show framing*.

However, the small number of relevant units for testing our initial hypothesis enforces a different approach. Absence is, in fact, resourceful as well, because it raises the question of what has replaced this type of framing. In order to answer this ad-hoc research question, two complementary steps have been made: an inductive analysis of captions in order to build a coding scheme, followed by a simple content analysis aiming to provide a quantitative dimension of the typology of captions.

Captions have been grouped into four generic categories: *informative*, *descriptive*, *narrative* and *evaluative*. Informative captions are limited to presenting statistics, the name of the sports actor that is the subject of the image or the competition schedule, thus maintaining an assertive register. Descriptive textual constructs are based on a short presentation of what can be seen in the image, without any reference to things or actors outside the image focus or any interpretation of that particular situation. Narrative captions add to the descriptive level elements regarding the context and the story line behind that visual snapshot. As for the evaluative category, the main component is the interpretative one, providing a clear key of decoding the polysemous message of an image. All four categories reflect a scaling of journalistic objectivity, starting with the maximum level of journalistic distance in case of informative captions and reaching the maximum level of implication with evaluative ones. Moreover, the framing effect is closely related to evaluative constructs, although soft forms can be identified among the other categories. Nevertheless, if textual framing is soft, then the power over the visual message is insignificant.

Ada Nechita scored 6 times for Romania in the game against Tunisia (*evz.ro*, 5.12.2011) – *informative caption*.

Talida Tolnai receiving flowers from a fan (*adevarul.ro*, 9.12.2011) – *descriptive caption*.

Adina Fiera had interventions to both her knees. She panicked when she got hit during the game against Cuba. The doctors had to take out the liquid from her left knee (*gsp.ro*, 9.12.2011) – *narrative caption*.

The moaning goal! Romania has never looked so bad in defence: THE NUMBERS of the World Championship (*prosport.ro*, 10.12.2011) – *evaluative caption*.

Based on the assumption that the lack of a textual component strengthens the visual framing, one other category was added to the coding scheme: the absent caption. While in the

case of general newspapers there is a one-to-one correspondence between images and captions, one out of five images used in sports newspapers (19.3%) lacks a corollary caption. However, in total number of articles analyzed, the absent captions represent 13.7 %, informative captions 35.6%, descriptive captions 8.3%, narrative captions 9.1% and evaluative ones 33.2%. As it can be noticed, media's general approach of captions is mostly centred on the no-framing intention pole, as the cumulative percentage of absent and informative captions is close to 50% (49.3%). Moreover, among informative captions, a distinctive subcategory was identified, due to its frequency (50% of informative captions and 17.8% of all article units covered by the study): *name captions*. This type of caption is, in fact, an act of simply naming the actor that images are presenting, without any other comment. For those readers familiar with sport actors, name captions have no value at all, acting more or less as absent captions. Moreover, even for the evaluative captions, journalists turned to a strategy of staging their objectivity by using, in many cases, fragments from the public statements of sport actors in order to highlight a position towards competition aspects without explicitly affirming and assuming the responsibility of evaluation (i.e. Chintoan: "We make too many mistakes! The next game is a life and death one" – *prosport.ro*, 9.12.2011). To sum up, given the profile of captions, a comparative approach to the visual component in terms of prominence of the three framings (sports war, sports show and sports war-show) has proven to be inconclusive for this case study.

This first descriptive level of analysis revealed two main aspects regarding the visual-textual framing dyad: elements related to the show ethos are highly present in visual framing of sports competition, although there is no clear preference for sports show over the *war-show* framing and, secondly, the framing potential of captions is underused in media coverage of sports competition. Thus, besides the functional auxiliary role that captions respond to (if present), their prevalent assertive nature magnifies the significance of the visual tools that media use in framing sports events. This is why the second part of the analysis will be focused on the content of sports war, sports show and sports *war-show* visual framing. Which elements of war and show ethos are brought into the spotlight and which are pushed to the background?

7. Soloists and backstage actors on the media stage of sports competition

In discussing how press images recreate and, at the same time, frame sports competition by choosing what and how to show, this last section of the present study aims to outline the visual component of sports war, sports show and sports *war-show* media framing. After a mono-dimensional approach of war and show most prominent visual referents, because sports *war-show* framing was defined in summative terms, only the additional aspects brought by the mixture of war and show elements will be addressed.

Visual war ethos is related to two general categories of images: a *combative* and a *strategic* one, both of them stressing out the dynamics of competition as confrontation. Combative images (see Figure 2 below) present an explicit physical contact between players, reflecting the aggressiveness of sports battles. Beyond this aggressive clash between players, combative images are built on a powerful affective capital, catching the tension of the confrontation between opponent parties. Facial expression is one of the key tools of introducing dramatic accents which contribute to that "mobilizing force" of images (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 21). Sym-

bolic soft wars by nature, sports confrontations take, in many moments, the form of a real fight. Moreover, the journalistic tendency to focus on the player who attacks and to use images in which they are underrepresented in relation to defence players highlights the aggressiveness' component of sports war ethos.

Figure 2. Representative samples of combative images.



Strategic representation (see Figure 3 below) related to the war framing of sports competition includes situations in which, although physical contact is not present, the placement of players suggests a previous or a forthcoming direct confrontation. Putting the opponent parties in relation to each other and, thus, recreating the confrontational design of sports competition, strategic images minimize the aggressiveness of games' dynamics as compared to the combative ones. The core element of these images is the interactional structure of competition, which, in turn, bears a high level of similarity to the war design in terms of the "strategic" disposal of the opponents on the battlefield.

Figure 3. Representative samples of strategic images.



The variety of elements and principles borrowed by journalists from the show ethos is wider than in the case of the "war" approach to sports competition. However, the core component remains the actor – audience dyad and the clear delimitation between the competition stage and public's arena. In terms of a show typology emergence, four categories of images stand out as consistent visual constructs: *game confrontation dynamics*, *side-line game dynamics*, *post-game celebration* and *press-related events*. While the first three relate to the actual field of competition, the last one turns to sports actors' official presentation and interaction with press representatives as an act of public exposure.

Images that can be subscribed to the game confrontation dynamics focus on players' performances on the field, on individual or group sports actors being on the spotlight of the competition stage. Side-line game dynamics covers actors and situations that are considered to be part of the overall game performance, but are seen as secondary or auxiliary levels of action (i.e. coaches' reactions, teams' time-out moments or reserve bench activity during the

game). Post-game celebration images show the reaction of sports actors after their performances and focus on their emotional public extroversion in front of the competition show audience. Besides the press related context, all the other three dimensions of sports show imply the presence of the audience, as explicit anchoring of the dramaturgical model.

Figure 4. Representative samples “game confrontation dynamics” images.



Figure 5. Representative samples “side-line game dynamics” images.



Figure 6. Representative samples of “post-game celebration” images.



Figure 7. Representative samples of “press-related events” images.



Audience is the one that gives sports competition the show glamour, and, therefore, it is important to reflect on how sports audience is been included in the media visual discourse upon sport competition. Audience was part of more than a half (56%) images covered by the

study, but, with two exceptions in which the public as a collective actor and an individual supporter were in the close-up view as main actors. In all the other cases, audiences act as a background element. Not only do the images focus on sports actors and their performances, but (with one exception), there is no explicit visual message regarding the interaction between sports actors and their public. Thus, the relation between audiences and sports actors is generally framed in a static register, despite the fact that they represent the two sides of the same coin of sports show. This minimization of the audience role in the overall construct of sports competition as show is further outlined by the *modality* of its visual representation. Generally defined as the represented “realism” of an image (Bell, 2001, p. 30), visual modality was used as criterion in analyzing the role that media attributes to audiences in addressing the sports competition dynamics. Along with the maximum modality of close-up view upon the public, the background presence in the corollary images of the articles analyzed was divided into three modality levels: high, medium and low. The distinction between these three levels refers to the accuracy and specificity of public visual representation. While low modality means washed out body forms and a significant blurring effect, in contrast, high visual modality relates to recognizable individual profiles among people in the audience. The visual analysis showed that media tends to use a low (57%) and a medium (27.7%) modality for sports audiences’ representation – having as reference point the total number of images that the public is part of. These percentages stress out even more the decorative role that audiences have in media’s visual framing of sports competition, acting as an element through which sport actors are closely brought into the spot light.

Figure 8. Representative samples for visual modality of audience representation.



Fig. 8.1 Low visual modality



Fig. 8.2. Medium visual modality



Fig. 8.3 High visual modality

By overlapping specific elements from sports war and sports show ethos, media end up with a more expressive framing of sports competition. What was once only a soft form of physical confrontation between opponent parties now becomes just an input for a spectacular form of show in which competing means, primarily, entertaining. Although most images provide a collective perspective over the competition dynamics (image include more than one person), there is a clear tendency to provide, through compositional or modality tools, a multilayer structure of actors’ relevance for the competition context. In doing so, a personalization effect is being introduced in framing the sports competition dynamics. Soloists, secondary actors or just background utility men, they are all parts of a visual construct aimed to combine two action designs, and, therefore, to increase their emotional and expressive capital.

8. Conclusion

Admitting the fluid boundaries between sports, war and show ethos in terms of design and dynamics, as well as in terms of common vocabulary, this study questions the mono-dimensional approach of sports competition. Based on these two complementary referents – “war” and “show”, there is a more suitable framing of competitions as *sports war-shows*. This hybrid construct reflects the marketization profile of the sports social field, but also the eclectic nature of competition itself. Sports competition is both confrontation and entertainment, the mixture of the affective resources of the dramaturgical and the worrier ethos amplifying the market value of sports events as expressive commodities.

One of media’s framing tools, image articles contribute to the overall discursive representation of sports events, since today most of our sports experiences are mediated. The high frequency of show elements outlines media’s tendency to redefine competition dynamics in a dramaturgical register. Although we cannot confirm of a clear dominance of sports *war-frame*, there were some interesting insights that this case study brought into discussion. One of them refers to the fact that captions are underused by journalists, thus moving the focus upon images themselves as hard core elements of the visual-textual dyad. Furthermore, if present, captions have an assertive form, providing an informative or a strict descriptive message that has no power to influence the visual one, hence, invalidating the framing power that Bourdieu attributed to captions. As for the three framings that were the narrow focus of this analysis, on the textual level, there were more implicit than explicit elements borrowed from the war and show ethos and just two cases of an occasionally mixture of the two. By contrast, war and show elements constitute a significant visual resource for sports competition framing. If physical confrontation between players seems to be the core warrior aspect, the sports actors-audience dyad grounds the social dramaturgy design of the competition dynamics. The close-up view upon the confrontation between players, with a clear focus on the offensive sports actors, manages to amplify the dramatization effect of media’s visual construct of the competitive situation.

Stressing out the confrontation tension as outcome of both physical and emotional components of the game, sports competition is visually defined as a *war-show* put on stage by sports actors in front of the public. However, the low modality of the audience representation and the lack of clear interaction between the two dramaturgic poles – actors and public, highlight the soloists role that media attributes to sports actors in the overall script of sports competition. Even the fact that the close-up view is preferred to a panoramic image of the competition dynamics, that could cover the stage of confrontation, the side-field transitory setting and the audience area, is a way of subscribing to the dramatization and personalization principles of sports media ethos.

By examining the media covering of international sports competition, this study proposes the “war show” frame as a new concept that reflects the hybridization and commodification process of sports events, as well as a coding schema for analyzing how media’s discourse portrays and redefines sports competitions. The descriptive approach and the focus on the three sports competition frames (i.e. sports war, sports show and sports war-show) work as a framing research act itself, as any other media frames (textual or visual) were not brought into discussion. Extending the analysis to a wider framing typology, as well as addressing the relationship between visual units and the textual core body of the article or the framing at the level of headlines constitute resourceful future directions of research. This study also pro-

vides some guiding lines for building a coding scheme for a more structured analysis of the visual component of sports articles, covering the warrior and dramaturgic dimensions of media's discourse on sports competitions. Admitting the limits of this case study, as it does not reach an exhaustive approach of the relation between the visual and the textual component of sports articles, the study manages to open the door for future research of sports competition through the framework of the "war-show" concept. All in all, in discussing the media approach of sports competition, the *sports war-show* concept should be addressed on both theoretical and methodological levels, due to its high integrative value in defining the dynamics of sports competitions.

Rezumat: Datorită naturii sale interdisciplinare, câmpul social sportiv activează și recontextualizează un repertoriu complex de elemente simbolice, printre cele mai proeminente numărându-se cele din sfera războiului și a spectacolului. Studiul de față își propune să meargă dincolo de abordarea dihotomică a "războiului" și a "spectacolului" și să pună în discuție emergența unui concept hibrid: *spectacolul războiului sportiv*. Analiza discursivă ce acoperă atât dimensiunea textuală, cât și pe cea vizuală a mesajului jurnalistic – imaginile și legendele aferente acestora – este orientată asupra cadrajelor pe care media le folosește în prezentarea unui eveniment sportiv internațional (Campionatul Mondial de Handbal Feminin, 2011). În timp ce potențialul evaluativ al dimensiunii textuale este puțin valorificat de media în prezentarea dinamicii competiționale, la nivelul componente vizuale a fost identificată o tendință clară de dramatizare și personalizare. În acest sens, elementele din sfera imaginarului social al războiului și al spectacolului au fost folosite pentru a accentua încărcătura afectivă și tensiunea competițională asociate evenimentului sportiv ca spectacol global al războiului.

Cuvinte-cheie: dramaturgie socială; război-spectacol în competițiile sportive; încadrare vizuală mediatică.

Note

¹ By "desk framing" we refer to the process of designing framing categories without any correlation to the research object and without any contact to the actual dynamics of the research field, ending up with interesting labels that do not fit the actual referent.

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Florina CREȚU*

Lights, Camera, Action! How the 2009 Romanian Presidential Debates Portrayed Political Candidates**

Abstract

In the last two decades, the concept of public sphere has reached international academic debates, its meanings have constantly changed and have been adapted to various domains. Particularly, in media studies, the question that needs to be addressed is this: to what extent the public sphere represents an arena of deliberative communication and equal access, as Jürgen Habermas had envisaged it? Thus, many authors claim that the mediated public sphere provided by television today no longer values the aforementioned elements, leading to its dissolution. However, the meanings of this concept have been constantly reviewed, which requires a more careful consideration of this claim. Hence, the paper aims at understanding how the initial criteria of the public sphere have been assessed by academics in order to develop a personal definition of the concept.

We argue that a main prerequisite of the mediated public sphere is that of deliberative communication, understood as equal representation granted by the media to political actors. Inspired by media bias theories, the empirical part of the paper addresses the following question: To what extent is the mediated public sphere a deliberative one? In order to answer it, the present paper examines the visual means used for portraying the political candidates and their supporters in the last Romanian presidential debate.

Key words: mediated public sphere; visual bias; mediated deliberation; Romanian presidential debates; visual semio-pragmatic analysis.

1. Introduction

Along with the advent of the public sphere concept in social sciences, modern democracies, communicational sites and media systems have been faced with a new ideal they had to consider, one way or another. Thus, numerous scholars have been concerned either with identifying such spaces of debate and sense-making in the public realm, or with exploring the existence of the Habermasian criteria in the political and the mediated world. For instance, if some have focused on developing new paradigms of the public sphere, such as the “work-place” sphericules (Roberts, 2009), the cultural (McGuigan, 2005; McKee, 2005) or the religious public spheres (Eisenlohr, 2010), others have questioned whether various forms of

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political communication (Agre, 2004; Moy & Gastil, 2006; Page, 1996) and especially media discourses (Beciu, 2003; 2006; 2011; Benson, 2001; Charaudeau, 2005; Jamieson & Birdsell, 1988) fulfill different deliberative standards.

Whichever the approach, each study has highlighted not only the continuous centrality of this concept today, but also different definitions of the public sphere. We argue that this constant conceptual shift is due not only to the various domains it has been operationalized by, but also to the changing relevance and applicability of some of its internal elements.

This paper aims to analyze how these intrinsic elements have been evaluated in the established literature and by focusing on deliberative communication; it aims to propose a normative perspective of the mediated public sphere. Considering the ever-lasting claims regarding its dissolution (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1993; Bourdieu, 1996; Habermas, 1962/ 1989; 1992; Hart, 1994; McNair, 2003; Mehl, 1996; Postman, 1986; Putnam, 2000), the study will test their validity by exploring the deliberative quality of the 2009 Romanian presidential debates.

2. Inquiring into the Bourgeois public sphere

In Habermas's seminal book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, the public sphere is defined as "the sphere of the individuals that gather as a public" (Habermas, 1962/ 1989, p. 27), a communicational *locus* in which citizens engage public authorities in a rational-critical debate in order to reach the common good. According to the German author, the political public sphere resides in a communicational network-based on equal access, rational, deliberative discourse and the desire to go beyond one's personal wellbeing.

Allegedly, along with the evolution of mass-media and the spread of capitalism, the borders between "public" and "private" have been harder to delineate, public relations and the culture of emotions have replaced rational deliberation and solitary reflection, thus generating the dissolution of the public sphere. From Habermas's perspective, this dissolution was amplified by the media, through their trivialization of rational debate, transforming it into "sellable pack for box-office" (Habermas, 1962/1989, p. 164).

Ever since it was translated in English, Habermas's book has raised many issues regarding the validity of its claims. Firstly, various authors such as James Curran (1991) and Peter Dahlgren (1991) have questioned not only the alleged rational character of the 18th century general discourse, but also the extent to which this ideal is even tangible. Furthermore, according to Dahlgren (1991), the periods of advanced liberal capitalism have favored other forums for shaping people's political conscience, such as information exchange networks, rumors, gossip; these forums have provided a certain framework for cultural expression.

Regarding the negative influence of the growing culture of emotions on the public sphere, Lunt and Pantti (2005) have shown in their study of Jerry Springer's talk-shows that emotions themselves may represent a catalyst for developing a genuine mediated public sphere. In this context, emotional involvement is seen as one of the triggers of participation in the public life. Concurrently, as Chambers (2009) points out, the distinction between reason and passion represents a product of the Enlightenment ideals that is less grounded in everyday reality.

As for the desire to reach the common good, agonistic pluralists such as Chantal Mouffe (1999), Dana Villa (1992) and James Tully (2000) suggest that this represents a mere slogan of those wishing to achieve hegemony. Thus, what is specific to human nature in general and politics, in particular, is the struggle for one's personal interest which, paradoxically, is what

makes a democracy function properly. From this perspective, deliberation is seen as a futile process, which, whenever attempted, will only work on a short-term.

Nonetheless, deliberative communication has acquired various meanings throughout the literature and evaluating its importance for the public sphere requires an in-depth analysis of how this concept has evolved. The next section of this paper will address this issue.

3. Searching for the deliberative in the mediated public sphere

The initial definition of the public sphere has insisted upon deliberation as an essential means of obtaining political legitimacy. Thus, as pointed out by scholars in the field (Benhabib, 1996; Cohen, 1996; Dryzek, 2001), democratic institutions would attain legitimacy only if they provide for a dialogical setting between citizens and public authorities. This conception is rooted in the project of “discursive” or deliberative democracy (Benhabib, 1996; Dryzek, 2005; Dryzek & Niemeyer, 2008; Elster, 1998; Giddens, 1998), that emphasizes not only the importance of rationality, but also of understanding deliberation as an essentially consensual process (Habermas, 1962/1989; Habermas, 1992; Cohen, 1996; Elster, 1998).

Thus, if earlier deliberative theories (Bell, 1999; Gutmann & Thompson, 1996) focused on the way in which the political or civil society generally interacts with the state, later views (Dryzek & Niemeyer, 2008; Fishkin, 1991; Gastil, 1993; Luskin, Fishkin & Jowell, 2002) have shifted their focus on democratic initiatives of deliberative dialogue and their positive results in small groups. The gap between these two strands of theorization has marked a new perspective on deliberation. According to different scholars (Gastil, 1993; Shapiro, 1999; Walzer, 1999), in the context of mass society, *direct deliberation is only possible in small groups*, which is why its study was directed towards small-scale approaches.

The intangibility of deliberation itself has been underlined by other approaches as well, leading to different interpretations of it. For instance, Dahlgren (2006), Mansbridge (1999), McKee (2005) and McGuigan (2005) show that narrowing this concept to criteria such as reaching consensus or rational argumentation runs the risk of not acknowledging the other forms of communication available in the public realm. Moreover, as claimed by others (Agre, 2004; Page, 1996), everyday mediated discourses and discussions among citizens fail to pursue the ideal pattern of deliberative communication. In the public realm, dialogical exchanges between individuals can be rather chaotic, irrational, unresponsive, fragmented and, most of the times, not so concerned with evaluating every expressed opinion.

As Page has pointed out (1996), particularly in the mediated public sphere, where political journalism is no longer focused on providing a forum of debate for political actors, the project of genuine deliberation is less feasible. From this perspective, the mediated sphere in mass-societies can be considered deliberative if it provides equal access to all viewpoints or equal representation to relevant actors (Page, 1996; Page & Shapiro, 1992). Thus, equal representation is deemed as the essential prerequisite of a deliberative public sphere.

If traditionally the deliberative quality of mediated communication was analyzed by exploring whether the media allowed for a framework of debate between political actors (Beciu, 2003; 2006; 2011; Benson, 2001; Charaudeau & Ghiglione, 1997/2005; Jamieson & Birdsell, 1988); or one of interaction between politicians and the public (Clayman, 2004; Livingstone & Lunt, 1994/2001; Lunt & Pantti, 2005; Kaid, McKinney & Tedesco, 2000; Tedesco, 2004), this idea has triggered a different line of research in political communication.

This research path seeks to examine the mediated public sphere as a domain whose deliberative nature resides in equal portrayal.

Although many scholars have not explicitly formulated the concept of deliberative communication as such, their studies have investigated it in the broader context of mass-media democratization, even before Page's initial theorization (Page & Shapiro, 1992). Thus, various empirical research has demonstrated the equality of portrayal between various categories like black and white (Merritt, 1986), male and female candidates (Gidengil & Everitt, 2003; Niven & Zilber, 2001), incumbents and challengers (Goodnow, 2010; Reinemann & Wilke, 2007), or various party leaders competing in electoral campaigns (Kepplinger, 1982; Tiemens, 1978), etc. Hence, these types of studies have addressed, in a different ways, the deliberative quality of mediated discourses from the perspective of media bias.

Conceptually, deliberative communication has come a long way in the literature dedicated to the public sphere. Regardless of the various meanings it has been associated with, its relevance in evaluating the development of mediated discourses remains, to a certain extent, unquestionable. Furthermore, its re-interpretations have considerably influenced the meanings of what we call public sphere. If in the beginning the public sphere was understood as an abstract forum of communication between citizens and the state, based on rational consensus, its ulterior approaches associated it with a media arena that might be the subject of subliminal influence.

While research on the deliberative quality of political communication has focused extensively on the potential dialogical framework provided by the media, very few studies have approached, from the perspective of public sphere theories, the equality of representation in the mediated realm. However, we consider this to be an essential element not only for everyday opinion formation, but also for assuring a certain degree of democratization in political journalism. Furthermore, we argue that studies concerning media coverage of political events should always refer somehow to the concept of public sphere. That way, we would not only have a multidimensional image of how the media embody different public spheres of influence, but also richer and more nuanced interpretations of the concept.

In the context of the abovementioned theories, we argue that an essential prerequisite of a genuine public sphere resides in the so-called "mediated deliberation" (Page, 1996), that is, providing equal representation of political candidates and viewpoints. Otherwise, the potential imbalances or biases in representing them may constitute a symptom of a sphere of subliminal influence.

As illustrated above, various academics have looked into the topic of media bias and have tried to measure this phenomenon in different sub-disciplines and empirical areas. The next section of this paper will try to highlight some of its particularities in order to narrow down our personal outlook of the mediated public sphere.

4. The biased mediated public sphere

While various academics have explored and confirmed the media bias hypothesis by focusing on the types of political candidates involved (e.g. male versus female candidates, one party leader versus another, etc.) – as shown in the previous section – they have also highlighted the different media channels within which this phenomenon has occurred. For instance, Reinemann and Wilke (2007), Page (1996), Bennett, Lawrence, Livingstone (2007)

and others (see Entman, 2007 for more references) have assessed the balance of viewpoints in printed press, indicating a pro-establishment tendency in the media coverage of political events. Nonetheless, in printed press, by analyzing the images in the articles, Goodnow (2010), Waldman and Devitt (1998) have shown that different camera angles and background elements in candidates' pictures favored some over others. Therefore, it would seem that through the use of different semiotic tools, media actors tend to convey their own views regarding political candidates.

Kepplinger (1982), Merritt (1986), Grabe, Bucy (2009) and others (Fiske, 1987; Grabe, 1996; Tiemens, 1978) stressed the role of visuals in highlighting a certain media partisanship in television. Their analyses showed that by means of camera angles, duration on screen, synchronization with speech and even lighting, different media actors generate a more or less obvious visual bias. For instance, in his analysis of the Ford-Carter debates, Tiemens (1978) found out that by means of camera angles, screen placement, higher shot frequency and duration in frame, the broadcast had tended to favor Jimmy Carter over his counter-candidate. Similarly, Kepplinger (1982) showed that news programs broadcast by televisions ARD and ZDF during the German electoral campaign visually favored one candidate against the other. Thence, various television channels become the subject of what Hartley calls "semio-spheres" (Hartley, 1999) of influence, domains of hidden codes and meanings.

Although the growing role of visuals in political communication has been outlined by many authors (Chouliaraki, 2006; Fiske & Hartley, 1978/2003; Messaris, 1997; Vliegenthart, 2012), empirical research in this field is still to be conducted. Particularly, the study of visual bias in televised political broadcasts remains rather unexplored.

However, not acknowledging the importance of this deontological issue in political communication equals, to a certain extent, not understanding the transformations and particularities of media institutions. As Tiemens (1978) and others have shown, this phenomenon is hardly new and it reveals deeper problems of various democratic systems. Furthermore, ignoring this type of mediated discourse implies not only denying the essentially visual character of television, but also its effects on our perceptions concerning political actors and issues, in general. In this regard, some experimental studies (Kepplinger & Donsbach, 1990; Wicks, 2007) have shown that different visual regimes for portraying political candidates might influence the way in which they are *perceived and evaluated by the electorate*.

In the context of all the theories outlined here, we argue that any mediated public sphere represents, first and foremost, a "semio-sphere". Through the use of various codes, either visual, written or virtual, media institutions may convey their own views regarding the political world. The question is to what extent they do so and if they tend to favor specific political candidates over others.

In the first two sections of this work, we have tried to delineate our personal understanding of the public sphere based on various critiques expressed towards the initial Habermasian theory. We concluded that if most of its prerequisites have been questioned in the established literature, the role of deliberative communication, regardless of its meanings, remains essential. Considering Page's (1996) definition, as equal representation and the multiple studies assessing it from different perspectives, we contend that this notion is becoming increasingly important in the context of growing ideological claims in political journalism.

Having in mind the prominence of visuals in today's political communication (Chouliaraki, 2006, Fiske & Hartley, 1978/2003; Messaris, 1997; Vliegenthart, 2012), this study defines the mediated public sphere as *a visual semio-sphere that should provide equal representation*

to its actors. We consider this principle to be important, especially in the case of electoral campaigning, where most of the visual slant tendencies have been observed (Grabe, 1996; Grabe & Bucy, 2009; Kepplinger, 1982; Merritt, 1986; Tiemens, 1978) and where candidates' portrayal is usually deemed as essential for voting decisions.

However, the question one might pose is: does the mediated public sphere comply with this condition or is it rather a domain of influence and bias, which defies normative ideals? Obviously, addressing this question makes sense only if we consider the multiplicity of spherules, which is why we will try to explore this issue on a specific media landscape.

5. Is the mediated public sphere a deliberative one?

As mentioned in the introduction, one of the postulates that have inspired this study is that modern political communication no longer values deliberative communication (Bourdieu, 1996; Habermas, 1962/1989; 1992; McNair, 2003; Mehl, 1996; Postman, 1986; Putnam, 2000). However, this concern has been expressed in relation with the quality of public debate in television broadcasts. Nonetheless, the issues it raises still stand for the idea of mediated deliberation, as forwarded by Page (1996).

This empirical study is guided by the following question: to what extent is the mediated public sphere a deliberative one? Answering this question requires that we highlight our personal understanding of these concepts. Here, the mediated public sphere is understood as a *visual semio-sphere* that should provide equal representation to its actors. Hence, its deliberative dimension will be measured by means of equality of portrayal, and the lack of this attribute will be considered a visual bias. This definition does not understate the importance of deliberation in media discourses, but is designed to highlight the salience of equal portrayal in political communication, as outlined in the previous section.

Since previous research in visual bias has been carried out in the field of electoral communication (Grabe, 1996; Grabe & Bucy, 2009; Kepplinger, 1982; Merritt, 1986; Tiemens, 1978), this study will use the same approach. This choice is justified not only by the relevance of this field for public opinion formation and voting decisions, but also by the fact that it represents a climax of political communication practices. Thus, we expect that the results of our analysis are illustrative for the everyday mediated discourses in our research area, to be exposed below.

This research analyzes television broadcasts and, particularly, televised debates. This approach views today's centrality of television as our main public sphere (Dahlgren, 2006) and electoral debates as one of the most popular genres of political communication (Pfau, 2003). According to Pfau (2003), final presidential debates are amongst the few television formats that can attract extremely large audiences and can help the electorate gain more insights into the candidates. Furthermore, they represent an object of academic research that has known a flourishing development in the last three decades (Best & Hubbard, 1999; Bowers & Memon, 2011; Chaffee & Chloe, 1980; Davis, Yawn & Beatty, 2000; LaMarre & Landreville, 2009; Senior, 2008; McKinney, Rill & Watson, 2011; Warner, Carlin, Winfrey, Schnoebelen & Trosanovski, 2011).

At this point, the reader might probably wonder why the deliberative quality of televised debates is to be explored through their visual dimension, rather than their thematic or interactional aspect. Many scholars have analyzed the deliberative quality of debates by evaluat-

ing whether the media had allowed for a framework of debate between political actors (Beciu, 2003; 2006; 2011; Charaudeau, 1993; Charaudeau & Ghiglione, 1997/2005; Jamieson & Birdsell, 1988; McKinney, 2005) or for one of interaction between politicians and the public (Kaid, McKinney & Tedesco, 2000; Tedesco, 2004). However, it seems that no study has explicitly assessed the deliberative quality of electoral debates by means of equal visual portrayal and from the perspective of public sphere theories.

We have argued that this dimension is important for three reasons: first of all, the increasing visuality of political communication calls for a greater interest in this field, currently less explored (Chouliaraki, 2006; Grabe, 1996; Grabe & Bucy, 2009; Graber, 1987; 1990; 2001; Messaris, 1997). Secondly, while a few studies have thoroughly measured the equality of candidates' visual portrayal in electoral debates (Merritt, 1986; Tiemens, 1978), they have failed to connect their findings with the broader context of mass-media democratization. Thus, the deontological issues they have raised do not give us more insights into the specificity of the media landscape these studies had stemmed from, nor do they provide some information concerning their consequences for the public sphere, both theoretically and empirically. Finally, while the deliberative quality of televised debates, understood as the dialogical framework provided by the media, still remains an important topic in the established literature, further investigations should consider its visual dimension as well, in order to explore whether mediated public spheres are becoming spheres of influence.

Given the various accusations and proofs of media bias in the Romanian media landscape (ActiveWatch, 2009; Boțan & Corbu, 2011; Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 2012), this paper will refer to the 2009 final presidential debate in Romania. This choice is justified by previous research indicating that this particular political show was filmed differently by the two private televisions which broadcast it, Antena 3 and Realitatea TV (Beciu, 2011; Corbu & Boțan, 2010). This study will examine whether these media actors have favored some candidates, or they have provided a deliberative debate.

6. The context and particularities of the 2009 Romanian presidential debate

Ever since the fall of the communist regime in 1989, electoral debates have played an essential role both in the Romanian media landscape and in the political world. Throughout the years they have become more and more controversial and, also, legally regulated (Beciu, 2006; 2011). Due to various accusations of media bias, the National Council of the Audiovisual (NCA) has imposed a framework of equal air time for all political candidates and parties during the electoral campaigns. However, it still allowed broadcasters a high degree of freedom in complying with this regulation (Beciu, 2006; 2011). Yet, during the debates, moderators have been so concerned with this dimension, that most of the times they failed at providing a platform of constructive dialogue for political candidates (Beciu, 2006; 2011).

This might be one of the reasons why in 2009 none of the television channels, both public and private, wished to organize such political events. Unlike before, instead of multiple debates conducted by different channels, in the last run of the elections the public only saw one, organized by the Institute for Public Policies (Ipp.ro, 2009) and broadcast by the public and private televisions.

As mentioned above, in the last couple of years and particularly in 2009, many accusations of media bias have hovered upon the Romanian media landscape (ActiveWatch, 2009; Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 2012). In this regard, one of the private channels, B1TV, had previously been pointed as favoring the views and image of Traian Băsescu, the incumbent president at that time (ActiveWatch, 2009). In the course of the last presidential campaign, one of the controversies in the Romanian media concerned a video clip created and broadcast by Antena 1 and Antena 3 channels, which were fined soon after the release of this video by the National Council of the Audiovisual (Dordea, 2008; Ziare.com, 2010). This clip, entitled *Alege-ți stăpânii cu grijă* (Be careful how you choose your masters), featured the image of the Romanian electorate as a mass of faceless robots, reaching for the Palace of Parliament in order to elect their president (the video is also available on Youtube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vGQ1_hjSCMNw). Among the flag of the communist Romania and photos of previous presidents with a negative image in the Romanian society (Nicolae Ceaușescu, Ion Iliescu, Emil Constantinescu) the image of Traian Băsescu, a candidate in the 2009 presidential elections, was also presented. Even in 2012 Antena 3 and OTV channels have received penalties from the National Council of the Audiovisual for promoting political candidates before the local elections (Ziare.com, 2012). If we also consider the fact that throughout the years, Antena 3 has revealed its political views through shows such as *Sinteza zilei* (The synthesis of the day) or *În gura presei* (In the press' mouth), we might say that the Romanian landscape is not unfamiliar with media bias and nor to its visual dimension.

Last but not least, a controversial issue in the 2009 debate was that Mircea Geoană, the Social Democrat candidate for presidency, was accused to have visited the owner of Realitatea TV, a television to broadcast the election debate, one night before this televised event. As he admitted his friendship with Sorin Ovidiu Vântu, former peculator of public funds and owner of Realitatea TV, accusations of corruption and bias were tacitly hovering upon the debate setting.

Finally, a particularity of the 2009 presidential debates was represented by the more prominent presence of the candidates' supporters on screen. We argue that this was intended to have certain effects in the candidates' portrayal for the public. Also, beyond the goals of this research, what was noticeable during these debates is the absence of a public illustrating the Romanian electorate. Although this drawback exceeds the boundaries of the current study, it foresees, in a way, its conclusions.

7. Grounding the research: hypotheses, methods and instruments

The central hypothesis to be tested in this analysis is whether Antena 3 or Realitatea TV channels have provided an unequal visual treatment to one of the political candidates. Hence, the presence of visual bias will be understood as a reduced deliberative quality of the Romanian debates. However, the evaluation of this degree of equality demands for a definition of its premises.

For the purposes of this research, the equality of visual portrayal will be understood as providing the following elements: the same camera angles and duration of these angles; an equal overall duration on screen for both of the candidates and their supporters; the same type of synchronization/ non-synchronization with speech. This approach is inspired by Merritt's analysis of the 1984 debates in the United States of America (1986), which employed a high-

ly thorough content analysis of visuals. Thus, the deliberative quality of the Romanian debates is to be explored both qualitatively and quantitatively and will be further detailed.

The method suited for this type of approach and chosen for this study is the visual dispositive analysis, developed by Patrick Charaudeau and Rodolphe Ghiglione (1997/2005). Also known as the semio-discursive analysis of televised content (Beciu, 2011), this method has the advantage of combining quantitative and qualitative data, thus providing a better overall view over its findings. Furthermore, it is considered a particularly relevant tool in illustrating the media imaginary and its potential effects, which is why it has been the subject of research in the French (Charaudeau & Ghiglione, 2005; Soulages, 1999; 2007) and Romanian literature (Beciu, 2003; 2006; 2011).

By drawing on the Foucaultian concept of *dispositif* (1980), this analysis focuses on the contract of communication of a media institution, the set of unwritten rules that define its identity and that become a setting to which different social actors should comply with. One of the principles that guide this method is that through the use of different contracts of communication, the media convey us their own perspective regarding what is communicated through them. Usually, it is deemed that a communication contract represents not only a set of conventions that characterize a certain TV broadcast or a media institution, but also a media landscape. That is why the dispositive analysis generally takes into consideration the extent to which different broadcasts may update the communication contract specific to their format, that of the media outlet they belong (Beciu, 2003; 2006; 2011).

The analysis is three-fold, focusing on the following aspects: the visual devices at play (camera angles and their effects, synchronization/ non-synchronization with speech and action, background elements, overall arrangement of the setting), the thematic and the interactional dimension of the broadcast. However, for the purposes of this research, only the visual aspect of televised debates will be taken into consideration, as previously mentioned. Also, considering the particularities of the Romanian media landscape, as outlined above, the concept of communication contract will be understood as a general tendency towards bias that different media outlets may show. That is why the analysis will try to explore the extent to which the debate in 2009 broadcast by Realitatea TV and Antena 3 might have changed this communication contract.

Furthermore, since this study seeks to employ a thorough content analysis of visuals, similar to Merritt's approach (1986), it leaves out the role of background elements, set disposition and girdles. The choice of this dimension for the empirical study was also justified by the effects that different camera angles have on candidates' portrayal and the public.

In the literature dedicated to the subject, there seems to be a general agreement about the fact that close-ups and extreme close-ups create the sensation of intimacy; medium shots and long shots generate the feeling of a personal and respectively a social relation; dog-eye shots (the camera filming a character from a low angle) create an effect of power, authority; high-angle shots (the camera is higher than the illustrated subject) induce the sensation of vulnerability or weakness (Beciu, 2003; 2006; 2011; Berger 1981; 2010; Charaudeau & Ghiglione, 1997/2005; Grabe & Bucy, 2009; Soulages, 1999; 2007; Stadler & McWilliam, 2010). However, the use of extreme close-ups is considered by some rather a taboo, as it might illustrate a person's inner tension or facial flaws (Fiske, 1987). Thus, *media discourses are visually performative*: at a semiotic level, they generate a certain reality that engage the public's perceptions and attitudes towards political candidates (Beciu, 2003; 2006; 2011; Berger, 1981; 2010).

Although scholars have broadly agreed upon the effects of different camera shots, their understanding of them is different. For instance, this dissimilarity can be observed by com-

paring the work of Charaudeau and Ghiglione (1997/2005) with Stadler and McWilliam's approach (2010). That is why this study opted for an inductive approach, pursuing the visual setting of the debates and naming different shots by comparison with the closest broad category they might fall into (e.g. general acceptance of what a medium shot is). In order to explain how we operationalized these categories, we must first highlight our personal understanding of a shot. In the framework of this research, we will define it as a camera angle that portrays the participants to the 2009 debates, regardless of their role in this broadcast. Thus, any zoom, cut or camera movement will be considered a shot and any slight change will be considered the beginning of another one.

As for the typology of camera angles, we will use the following classification, as observed in the Romanian electoral debates: a close-up represents a shot that illustrates everything from the subject's chest upwards (see Figure 1 below); an extreme close-up displays only his face and facial details, such as eyes, forehead, mouth (see Figure 2); a medium shot pictures the subject from the waist up (see Figure 3); a split-screen represents the simultaneous portrayal of multiple participants in a frame, divided in two or more sections (see Figure 4); a long-shot illustrates the entire human body or from the knees up (see Figure 5); a dog-eye shot shows the subject from a low angle (see Figure 6); an extreme long-shot displays a subject from the distance and sometimes in the background, to the extent where his face is hard to distinguish (see Figures 7 and 8 below); a voyeur shot (or point-of-view) illustrates the scene from a particular subject's viewpoint and the camera is positioned at the side of this character (see Figures 9 and 10); a bird's eye shot shows a part or all of the debate's setting from above (see Figure 11).

Figure 1. Close-up Figure.



2. Extreme close-up.



Figure 3. Medium shot Figure.



4. Split-screen.



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Figure 5. Long shot Figure.



6. Dog-eye (low angle shot).



Figure 7. Extreme long shot (in the background).



Figure 8. Extreme long shot (in the background).



Figure 9. Point-of-view (voyeur shot).



Figure 10. Point-of-view (voyeur shot).



Figure 11. Bird's eye shot (overall establishing shot).



The study uses a content analysis of visual shots (as previously defined) and measures from a quantitative perspective the equality of camera shots, of their duration and the overall time on screen for both of the candidates and their supporters. The analysis was conducted on the 20 minutes of the final electoral debate, broadcast by Antena 3 and Realitatea TV channels. The abovementioned sample represents a random segment of this staged event and was coded by the researcher alone. Its validity was tested through multiple cross tabulations of sub-samples indicating similar results. To reduce as much as possible the number of miscalculations, the presence and the camera portrayal of all participants in the debate were coded, although only the two political candidates and their supporters were the focus of this research. Thus, in a shot, each row in the SPSS sheet measured who was present in the frame (Traian Băsescu, Mircea Geoană, the moderator, Traian Băsescu's supporters, Mircea Geoană's supporters, press representatives), who else was on screen (same categories), what visual angles they received and their duration in the frame. Thus, by coding each of the camera angles specified before, the research focused on the candidates' and their supporters' portrayal in every 10 seconds of the 20 minutes of the debate analyzed.

In the French and American literature on visual studies, the visual capital or presence on screen for different characters has mostly been assessed by means of shot frequencies (for example, Charaudeau, 2005; Kepplinger, 1982; Merritt, 1986; Soulages, 2007; Tiemens, 1978; 2005). However, we argue that it is also important to show for how long different individuals stay in the frame, as this measure actually represents a form of visual capital. Another reason to assess both of these dimensions is that they might have a different weight in the visual grammar of a broadcast. Naturally, none of these measures alone will suffice to prove the existence of a certain bias, which is why our undertaking will try to encompass both of them and test the validity of their results through a qualitative analysis. If results of either shot frequency analysis and those of duration on screen contradict each other, the qualitative analysis will decide which of them can be considered valid. Still, if the findings of both duration on screen and shot frequency analysis converge, even without a strong qualitative support, we will consider that this illustrates a discrete form of bias. Last but not least, the assumption of visual slant will be deemed as true if all of the abovementioned measures converge.

As for what the qualitative analysis envisages, it will explore the effects conveyed by different camera angles for each of the candidates and their supporting groups; and the type of synchronization/ non-synchronization with speech, with its presumed influences.

8. The deliberative quality of the 2009 final presidential debate: a visual perspective

As previous research of the last presidential debate has indicated, this televised event has been indeed broadcast differently by two news channels (Beciu, 2011; Corbu & Boțan, 2010). Antena 3 and Realitatea TV have had different cameras in the debate setting, generating distinct interpretations of the political event that was happening. Thus, instead of a single debate, the public saw two actually, each of them indicating a different visual perspective over the candidates. In what follows, the analysis will detail how they were portrayed and if the media bias hypothesis is confirmed.

8.1. Realitatea TV

From a quantitative perspective, Realitatea TV has provided an overall equal visual coverage of the candidates, slightly more inclined towards providing Mircea Geoană more air time (572 seconds –Traian Băsescu; 602 seconds –Mircea Geoană). However, the frequency of shot rates contradicts this trend: Băsescu- 138; Geoană-135. Furthermore, this channel portrayed the two using almost the same set visualizing techniques, as illustrated in Figures 12 and 13 below, which does not support the hypothesis of bias. The only exception resides in the fact that Băsescu could also be seen in extreme long-shots, as opposed to his opponent, but this does not have important discursive effects.

The two candidates were illustrated mostly through close-ups, medium shots and bird's eyes, which are the usual visual regimes employed by Realitatea TV for political shows. The latter are designed to emphasize the neutrality and omniscience of the media instance, showing the setting of the debate from above and providing an image which would not ordinarily be seen by the human eye. Another visual hall-mark of Realitatea TV in the 2009 debates was the use of split-screens. This type of visual regimes denotes the open confrontation, the distance between the views of both candidates. Also, they create the sensation of objectivity in the debate viewing.

Particularly in the polemical sections, where the candidates discussed issues such as the external policy or the relations between the state institutions, the use of close-ups was more prominent, generating a feeling of intimacy and social relationship. Also, as Tiemens (2005) highlights, close-ups direct the viewer's attention towards the visual detail, accentuating the visual rather than the verbal information; whilst wide-angle shots tend to minimize it, focusing on the larger context within which the action is happening.

Figure 12. Realitatea TV's visual portrayal of Mircea Geoană.

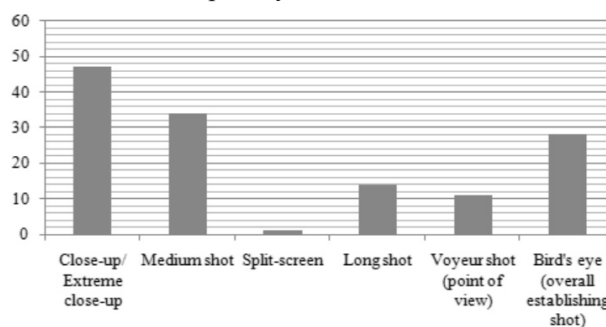
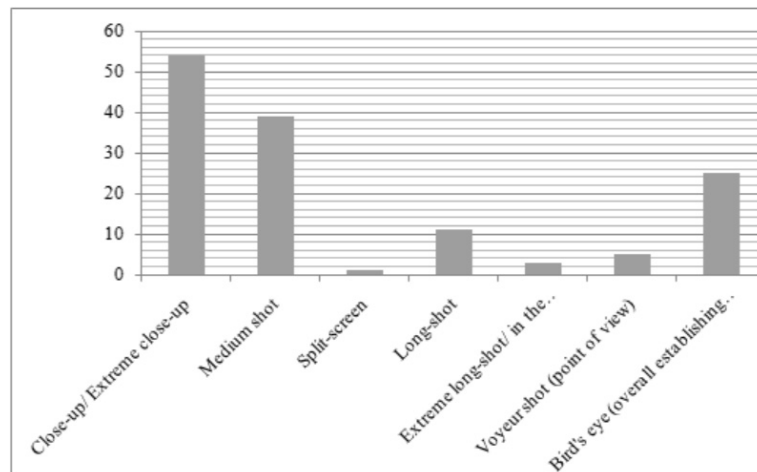


Figure 13. Realitatea TV's visual portrayal of Traian Băsescu.



During the debate, both of the candidates could occasionally be seen in voyeur-shots, facing the moderator, as the cameras were positioned behind them (see Figure 14 below). This usually gives the viewer the sensation of having access to privileged information, or witnessing an event that is not widely accessible. In the case of the analyzed presidential debate, this type of portraying the two political candidates has created the sensation of a sincere positioning towards the press, or of political transparency. However, Traian Băsescu was the only one to benefit of this visual regime alone, although for a short while (see Figure 15 below).

Another imbalance in the visual grammar of the Realitatea TV debate was that during the polemical sections, Băsescu gave the impression of looking directly to the cameras, and, consequently, to the television viewers, whilst Geoană was seen constantly looking at his opponent. Although these visual events did not occur frequently, they created the illusion that one of the candidates was addressing the public, while the other did not, focusing on the rebuttals to his political rival.

Figure 14. Realitatea TV: Point-of-view of both candidates.



Figure 15. Realitatea TV: Point-of-view of Traian Băsescu.



The visual presence of the candidates' supporters played an essential part both in the type of sequencing engaged in this debate and in conveying this impression of the two. We have noticed that throughout the speeches of each political actor, Realitatea TV focused on the opponent's non-verbal reactions. During Traian Băsescu's speech, where he accused his rival of being dependent to a certain political clientage, we could see images from his opponent's side, portraying different displays of boredom and amusement. Likewise, while Mircea Geoană exposed his views about his opponent, the public envisaged the ironic look and smile of Băsescu. Realitatea TV failed to provide a visual synchronization with the candidates' discourses, questioning their credibility in the eyes of the public. However, it did so in an equal manner, thus contributing to a certain form of equal portrayal of the two politicians.

As for how the cameras portrayed the supporters of each candidate, the results of this analysis point to an overall balanced visual treatment: although the family and party colleagues of Traian Băsescu were present on screen more than Geoană's (317 versus 271 seconds); they could mostly be seen in the far background (60 times), while the others were also portrayed by means of medium-shots (17 times). In the visual grammar of a broadcast, medium shots are considered "stronger" than extreme long-shots in that they show the human features in greater detail. The latter are regularly used to highlight the omniscient perspective of the media instance and when they depict a group of people, the focus on individual traits is minimized to the detriment of the group's larger imagery. Hence, this channel balanced the larger quantity of shots provided for Băsescu's group with the closer attention to the features and reactions of Geoană's.

In conclusion, we could say that this channel offered an overall balanced visual treatment to its protagonists. Our analysis of the visual capital of both candidates shows that, if Mircea Geoană benefited of a larger duration on screen, Băsescu had the advantage of a slightly higher number of shots (138 versus 135). Our qualitative analysis has shown that the political candidates have been portrayed through the same visualizing techniques and through non-synchronization with the discourses. However, president Băsescu has been the only one to be shown in voyeur-shots alone, facing the moderator and the press representatives, thus, giving the sensation of a sincere positioning towards the press. In addition, he was also the only candidate conveying the impression of directly addressing the viewers. Although these two examples have been isolated and short lasting in the general grammar of the debate imagery, they might represent a sign of bias.

Furthermore, a more detailed research on Realitatea's previous representations of these politicians is needed in order to confirm whether this hypothesis would stand, as until now no prominent signs of slant have been noticed. Given the fact that this channel has provided the same visualizing regimes for both candidates in the 2009 debate, we will consider that Realitatea TV has generally contributed to a visually deliberative arena. Hence, in the framework of our research, we deem that its visual treatment does not match the overall communication contract of bias in the Romanian media.

8.2. Antena 3

In the case of Antena 3 channel, while the duration on screen for both the candidates was similar to that in the debate at Realitatea TV (549 seconds –Traian Băsescu; 556 seconds –Mircea Geoană), indicating a slightly higher presence on screen for Mircea Geoană, the other data confirm the bias hypothesis as well. Frequencies of shot rates indicate a higher presence on screen for Geoană (207) than Băsescu (201). In previous studies, Tiemens (1978; 2005) has found similar, subtle differences in the quantitative analysis of visuals illustrating political candidates. However, given the importance of fair treatment in presidential debates and the significance of these events in political communication in general, Tiemens has evaluated these differences as a form bias. The results of the abovementioned studies were validated through a qualitative exploring of the broadcasts' visual composition. The following part of our research will try to do the same and to verify whether these differences can be considered subtle.

The most frequent shots to be used in the debate were the close-ups, extreme close-ups and long-shots. As figures 16 and 17 illustrate, Antena 3 provided for a different type of depiction for Băsescu and his counter-candidate, using less close-ups and medium-shots for the first (74 and 26) and more for the latter (79 and 47). In the visual grammar of the 2009 debate this was translated in a greater emphasis on the figure of Mircea Geoană, while his political rival could be seen at the other end of the debate setting, as a mere spectator of the event.

However, it is not only the type of shots that describe a certain media identity, but also the way they are distributed and combined (Tiemens, 2005). Thus, the use of various editing techniques also gives a general idea of how different characters are portrayed. During different moments of the debate, the public could see overall images of the debate setting, followed by gradual zoom-ins on Geoană's figure, leading to his portrayal from generous close-ups; and then images of Băsescu and his supporters in the far background. The quantitative analysis also confirms the downplay of his image, through the more frequent use of extreme long-shots and bird's eyes (see Figures 16 and 17 below). We consider that this type of visual depiction of the debate was meant to emphasize the image of Mircea Geoană, the former Social-Democrat leader, and might have had specific discursive effects.

Unlike in the case of Traian Băsescu, Antena 3 also employed the use of a very controversial visual angle, the dog-eye shot, for depicting the Social-Democrat candidate. We have already mentioned the fact that this type of visual regime might induce feelings of strength and authority, thus introducing a certain power relationship. Throughout the debate, we could see Mircea Geoană portrayed as a tall, imposing political figure; while Traian Băsescu appeared in the background, small and vulnerable (see Figure 18 below).

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Figure 16. Antena 3's visual portrayal of Mircea Geoană

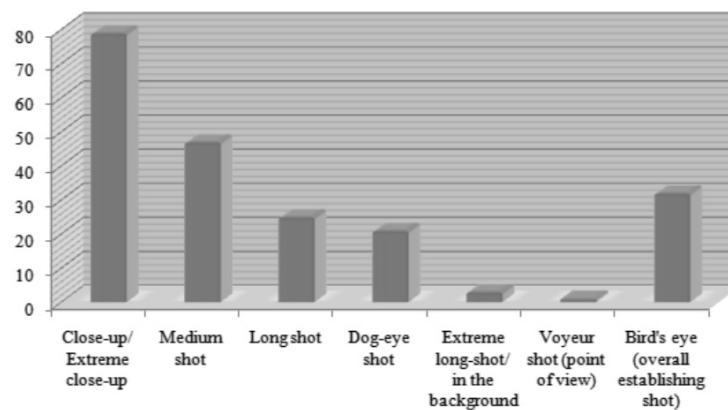


Figure 17. Antena 3's visual portrayal of Traian Băsescu

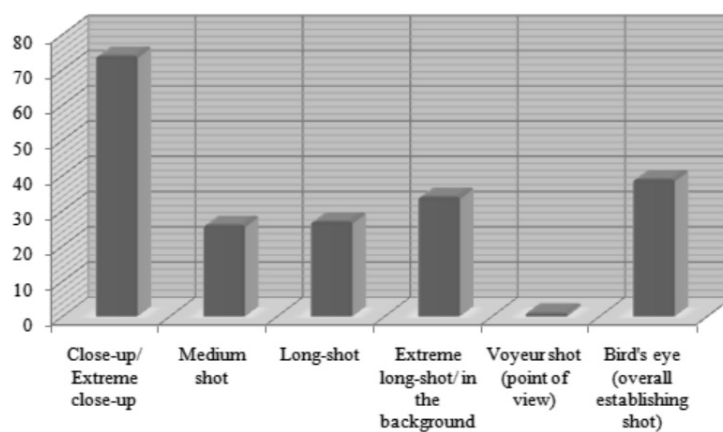


Figure 18. Antena 3's biased portrayal of Mircea Geoană



Furthermore, the differences in portraying the candidates could be observed during each of Traian Băsescu's speeches: his opponent was illustrated in long-shots highlighting his stature; while he was pictured through the use of extreme long-shots and, occasionally, voyeur

shots. Through their “peep-hole” view, voyeur shots (or point-of-views) generally convey the sensation that the viewer gains access to a certain privileged information or perspective of an event. However, the effect of such a visual regime also depends on whether the portrayed subject is talking or not or whether something else is happening in the set. In the case of this debate, Băsescu’s occasional depiction by the use of point-of-views represented a distraction from the discourse. By the way in which these perspectives were linked with the long-shots illustrating Mircea Geoană, the effect of this visual approach was that viewers’ attention might have been directed toward the Social-Democrat leader.

Another particularity of Antena 3’s visual discourse consisted in the use of extreme close-ups for Băsescu and his supporters. As underlined in the methodological part of this paper, extreme close-ups represent a rather taboo practice in the broadcasting industry (Fiske, 1987; Kepplinger, 1982), which often induce feelings of tension or reveal the subject’s facial details and flaws. This was also the case in the final debate broadcast by Antena 3, where images of Băsescu stressed on his wrinkles, strabismus, hollow eyes and baldness. As a result, the public saw the image of an old and tired political leader, by contrast to Geoană’s young look.

The visual slant against the Democrat-Liberal candidate were further confirmed by the high degree of non-synchronization of the images with what was being said. During Băsescu’s discourse about his ideal design of institutional relations, very long, extreme close-ups of Elena Udrea, one of his supporters, were shown. This female politician is a very controversial figure in the Romanian political outlook, accused of corruption and even of having an affair with this candidate. This non-synchronization conveyed the fact that the institutional relations Băsescu was describing referred, in fact, to promoting his personal entourage in the next mandate.

Another example that illustrated this message is that during the same speech the camera also provided numerous extreme close-ups of Elena Băsescu, his younger daughter, and Emil Boc, the current prime-minister. Because of their negative portrayal in the Romanian media and, particularly, in many of Antena 3’s broadcasts, both of these politicians had been discredited in the public eye. While Emil Boc was mostly referred to as president Băsescu’s pawn and often been derided for his small stature, Elena, the younger daughter, has been accused of unrightfully occupying a high position in a local private company (Ziare.com, 2009) and of owing her political career to Traian Băsescu. Last but not least, she was frequently mocked for her blunders when delivering public speeches. By focusing on these political figures during this speech, not only did Antena 3 enforce the idea that Băsescu would promote his personal entourage, but also tended to associate his image with theirs.

However, throughout this candidate’s speech the camera did not focus only on these particular participants, but also on other members from the same party, while being completely distracted from the debate. Thence, this long non-synchronization might have drawn away the viewers’ attention from this candidate’s views and political platform.

As for how the supporting groups were mostly depicted in our sample of the debate, figures 19 and 20 show that if Băsescu’s group had an overall higher visual capital (number of shots) than Geoană’s, the distribution of shots show a different trend in portraying them. While the Social-Democrat Party and family members were mostly depicted by means of close-ups and medium shots, illustrating their stature, the others were represented either through extreme close-ups, emphasizing their facial reactions and flaws, or extreme long-shots, showing them in the background as a shapeless mass of people.

We have outlined in the beginning of this study that extreme close-ups are deemed as a television practice with rather negative effects on how a person is portrayed. Not only do they tend to illustrate various facial details or imperfections, and tend to create the sensation of tension when filming an individual, but they also tend to isolate the subject in the general setting of a broadcast. This was also the case when the camera was illustrating Băsescu's group. The succession of extreme close-ups and extreme long-shots created the illusion that this candidate was supported by isolated individuals, and then a group of people whose faces are not shown and who hardly resemble to a united team. In addition, the duration on screen for both of these groups confirms the bias tendency observed to this point: Băsescu's supporters – 273 sec; Geoană's – 281 sec.

If we also consider the fact that in the course of the debate a tele-voting graph expressing the public's support for Mircea Geoană (indicating an 80% rate for this political actor versus 20% for his opponent) was permanently shown, the visual bias verdict stands in the case of Antena 3's broadcast. The style chosen by this channel in portraying the political candidates in the 2009 debates fits the communication contract of bias in the Romanian media.

Figure 19. Antena 3: Type of shots used for Traian Băsescu's supporters

Shot	Frequency	Percent
Close-up/ Extreme close-up	39	37,1
Long shot	4	3,8
Extreme long-shot/ in the background	37	35,2
Bird's eye	9	8,6
Total	105	100,0

Figure 20. Antena 3: Type of shots used for Mircea Geoană's supporters

Shot	Frequency	Percent
Close-up/ Extreme close-up	42	46,7
Medium shot	27	30,0
Long shot	5	5,6
Extreme long-shot/ in the background	12	13,3
Bird's eye	3	3,3
Total	89	100,0

9. Summary and conclusions

This paper was inspired by the desire to understand how the mediated public sphere can be defined today, in a time when scholars still question its deliberative nature and also its very existence. By exploring which of the elements of the Habermasian concept have passed the test of critical approaches, we concluded that the desideratum of deliberative communication, regardless of its meanings, remains a landmark of democratization. From theories of

democracy to theories of media bias, the present undertaking has tried to generate a personal understanding of the public sphere concept, having in mind the different empirical studies it has been the subject of. By focusing on the increasing role played by the visual in political communication, as underlined by various scholars, we argued that the mediated sphere represents a visual semio-sphere that should provide equal representation to its actors. Thus, we defined deliberative communication as equality of portrayal and the absence of such a trait as visual bias. Nonetheless, this does not preclude the importance of an actual framework of debate in everyday political communication.

The research presented here has shown the extent to which the Romanian mediated public sphere was visually deliberative during the 2009 presidential debates. The findings of the quantitative and qualitative research showed that one of the broadcasters, Realitatea TV, generally complied with this condition, whereas the other did not. The analysis conducted on the debate broadcast by Antena 3 showed prominent signs of visual bias, favoring Mircea Geoană and his supporters over Traian Băsescu and his group. This finding was reinforced by previous opinions expressed about this candidate through different media formats, as illustrated in the section dedicated to the context of the Romanian elections.

By using certain visual regimes like dog-eye shots and long shots in the case of Mircea Geoană, extreme close-ups for Traian Băsescu and his supporters and unequal means of non-synchronization, Antena 3 generated a positive image of the first candidate, as opposed to the latter. During the 2009 final presidential debates, the viewers could sometimes see the imposing image of the Social-Democrat candidate contrasting with the vulnerable one of the Democrat-Liberal leader. Moreover, Băsescu's speech was mostly shadowed by various images of his close supporters with a negative reputation in the Romanian landscape. The focus on these participants during the president's speech was probably meant to associate his image with theirs and might have had that effect on some audiences.

Although the 2009 voting decisions seemed not to have been influenced considerably by this bias, the results of this research raise some deontological issues not only regarding the performance of Antena 3 channel in the campaign, but concerning of the Romanian mediated sphere. First of all, our findings show that the cleavages in the Romanian media are not only becoming more visible, but also more complex, since visuals are the next elements to be used for conveying different political orientations. Secondly, if phenomena of visual slant have been reported in countries like Germany or the U.S., how come no media regulations about this issue have been brought up in Romania, where accusations of bias are so outstanding? The fact that Antena 3 channel has explicitly developed a sphere of subliminal influence through its use of visuals is particularly a sign that such a regulation is needed.

Given that this type of measure has not yet appeared on the agenda of worldwide democratic institutions, although they face different phenomena of bias (see for instance the controversial case of the biased coverage in the Mexican elections in Tuckman, 2012) the following question arises: is there a global trend of media politicization or is visual bias not as common as its other "siblings"? Obviously, further research is needed in order to answer this question properly.

Rezumat: În ultimele 2 decenii de când conceptul de sferă publică a pătruns în dezbaterile academice internaționale, sensurile pe care le-a dobândit s-au schimbat permanent și au fost adaptate unor domenii de activitate variate. În mod deosebit în studiile media, problema pe care încă o ridică constă în măsura în care spațiul public reprezintă un domeniu al comunicării deliberative și al accesului egal, după modelul propus

de Jürgen Habermas. În această direcție, numeroși autori susțin că sfera mediatică a televiziunii nu mai valorizează aceste elemente, astfel ducând la disoluția ei. Totuși, semnificațiile acestui concept au fost revizuite în mod constant, fapt care atrage după sine o evaluare mai atentă a acestei afirmații. Din acest punct de vedere, lucrarea de față își propune să înțeleagă modul în care criteriile inițiale de definire ale spațiului public au fost evaluate în literatura consacrată, pentru a dezvolta o interpretare proprie a acestui concept.

Considerăm că o premisă esențială a unei sfere publice mediatice este aceea a comunicării deliberative, înțeleasă ca reprezentare egală a actorilor politici de către media. Inspirându-se din teoriile partizanatului mediatic, partea empirică a acestui studiu încearcă să răspundă la următoarea întrebare: În ce măsură este sfera publică mediatică una deliberativă? În acest sens, lucrarea are în vedere mijloacele vizuale de portretizare a candidaților politici și a susținătorilor lor în ultima dezbatere prezidențială din România.

Cuvinte-cheie: sferă publică mediatică; favoritism vizual; comunicare deliberativă mediatică; dezbateri prezidențiale în România; analiză semio-pragmatică vizuală.

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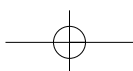
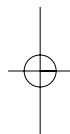
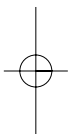
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No consensus on framing? Towards an integrative approach to define frames both as text and visuals

Abstract

With a relatively recent history, the concept of framing has known a flourishing development, being without any doubt one of the key theories in current mass communication research. Although the growing number of studies on the topic of framing, seeking to understand what framing is and how frames manifest themselves in a number of different sites and across a number of domains, there is no consensus regarding the meaning of this powerful concept. With few exceptions, most of the scholars reduce framing only to written words, fully ignoring the visual cues within news stories. This study aims at filling this gap, bringing new theoretical explanations and trying to make some clear conceptual clarifications. Thus, the paper will address the following questions: How have meanings of framings have evaluated across time?; What are the limitations of these definitions?; How do visual cues function as agents of framing? As a theoretical paper, this article explores the integrative approach on framing, urging researchers to start conducting more framing analysis which combine both verbal and visual elements in news coverage.

Key words: integrative approach to framing; verbal framing; visual framing; non-verbal cues

1. Introduction

The academic literature on the topic of framing has known a significant development in the last two decades. Many scholars in sociology (Gitlin, 1980; Goffman, 1974), mass communication (De Vreese, 2005; Entman, 1993; 2003; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Semetko & Boomgaarden, 2007) and public relations (Dan & Ihlen, 2011; Hallahan, 1999) have pointed out that framing is a challenging research topic, and have sought to examine what news frames are and how they can be analyzed within media reports.

Today, almost every volume of major media and communication journals contains at least one paper on media frames and framing effects. According to Thomson Reuters' Web of Science, the increased prominence of the concept is becoming more and more clear (Vliegenthart & van Zoonen, 2011, p. 102).

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Although the growing literature and research on framing shows a great amount of data and information related to this concept, it also outlines a lack of consistency in how authors define and apply the concepts of “frame” and “framing”. The literature review highlights three major approaches: the first one defines frames referring only to the verbal media discourse, the second one takes into account only visual images, and the third perspective, rather a new one, combine text with visuals.

Even if Renita Coleman (2010) tried to synthesize the literature on visual framing, stressing the importance of conducting framing studies on visual, as well as verbal content, she did not provide a clear definition for the visual frame nor did she explain its constituent elements. With few notable exceptions, which bring valuable contributions on complex frames (Dan & Ihlen, 2010, 2011), the majority of the studies that combine both text and visuals (Esser & D’Angelo, 2003; Parry, 2010; Semetko & Boomgaarden, 2007) are still in their infancy. Thus, this study aims at filling this gap, providing some conceptual clarifications and explaining the theoretical underpinnings of the integrative approach to framing.

The paper consists in three parts. First, the concept of framing is discussed from various theoretical perspectives, underscoring the evolution of the meanings attributed to this concept. Second, the specific characteristics of the visual and verbal news frames are described, with a particular focus on images as agents of framing. This leads, finally, to our proposal of an integrative approach to framing, which provides a definition of frames and explain its constituent elements.

The added value of this study consists of bringing new theoretical contributions in the field of framing research literature and explaining the integrative approach on frames. In order to describe this approach, the paper will firstly address the following questions: How have meanings of framings have evaluated across time?; What are the limitations of these definitions?; How do visual cues function as agents of framing? These questions will guide the discussion on framing included in the next sections of this article.

2. The framing theory

2.1. No consensus on framing? A general overview

With a relatively recent history, the concept of framing has become increasingly attractive in the field of media and communication studies, being without any doubt one of the key words in current mass communication research. While a clear-cut definition for framing remains a topic of debate in the literature, scholars have drawn upon the metaphor of a cropping frame around a picture. Thus, the elements within the frame are emphasized upon, while the border highlights and holds together certain aspects of reality (Dan & Ihlen, 2011, p. 4). In this way, a frame “simplifies and condenses the world out there” (Snow & Benford, 1988, p. 137).

Given the concept’s interdisciplinary roots in sociology (Gamson & Modigliani 1987, 1989; Goffman, 1974) and psychology (Kahneman & Tversky 1979; Kahneman 2003), research on framing has been characterized by theoretical and empirical vagueness (Scheufele, 1999). Although in sociology and social psychology the concept of “frame” has been used since the early ‘50s (Bateson, 1955), only in the ‘90s was it introduced in the field of media studies by Robert Entman (1993). Thus, the author referred to framing as a “scattered conceptualization”, with previous studies lacking clear conceptual definitions and applicable op-

erationalizations for this concept. Brosius and Eps (1995) went further and stated that framing was not a generally applicable concept, but only a metaphor that couldn't be translated into research questions.

Given these vague conceptualizations of the concept of framing, we shall critically review the main definitions of the notion of frame proposed by various scholars. The literature on the topic underlines two basic types of definitions: the first type examines framing in very general terms, while the second one specifies exactly what frames do, including references both to its constituent elements, and the type of messages used – verbal or visual. Even if frames “lead a double life” (Kinder & Sanders, 1996), being present both in media discourse and in people's minds, we shall focus here only on “media frames” (Scheufele, 1999).

Consecrated in sociology and later assumed by the field of media and communication studies, frames are characterized by Goffman, in his initial and widely quoted definition, as follows: “I assume that definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principals of organization which govern events – at least social ones – and our subjective involvement in them; frame is the word I use to refer to such of these basic elements as I am able to identify” (Goffman, 1974, p. 10). Put it differently, through the concept of frame, borrowed from Gregory Bateson (1955), Goffman assumes a “schemata of interpretation”, a cognitive structure which guide the perception and the representation of reality, allowing individuals to label various social issues and events. Therefore, at a very simplified level, frames define the meaning and the significance of social events, structuring which parts of reality become more evident in people's minds.

The now classic definition of frames, proposed by the sociologist Todd Gitlin, better situates research on framing within the field of media discourse and audience reception. Thus, in his definition, Gitlin (1980) refers both to visual and verbal framing, stating that media frames are “persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize the discourse, whether verbal or visual” (1980, p. 7). Following this perspective, a frame is a way of organizing the world “both for journalists who report it and, in some important degree for us, who rely on their reports” (Gitlin, 1980, p. 7). In other words, media reports are subjective including not only facts, but also the journalists' interpretations of facts. Hence, through the frames used in media texts, journalists have the ability to change the way in which people form their “pictures of the world” (Lippmann, 1991/1922).

Gamson and Modigliani (1987; 1989) defined “frames” as what latter will be called “emphasis frames”. Thus, according to the two authors, frames are media packages which give meaning to a topic, “central organizing ideas” (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, p. 3). Media frames provide “meaning to an unfolding strip of events” (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, p. 137), suggesting what the controversy is about, why an issue matters, but what is the essence of that issue. Thus, frames are used as “interpretative schema” in different contexts: by audiences to make sense of and to discuss an issue; by journalists to condense complex events into news reports; and by policy-makers to define policy options and reach decisions (Nisbet, 2009; Scheufele, 1999).

Approaching news frames as tools for turning the meaningless and complex issues into discernible ones, Tuchman offered a similar definition to media frames: “the news frame organizes everyday reality and the news frame is part and parcel of everyday reality” (1978, p. 193). Moreover, Tuchman added that, like any frame that delineates a world, the news frame may be considered problematic: the view through a window depends upon whether the window is large or small, has many panes or few, whether the glass is opaque or clear.

A more specific definition for framing is offered by Entman (1993). The author tries to explain how media provide schema of interpretation to the public, and he acknowledges that the most important tools used are selection and salience: "To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating context, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman, 1993, p. 52). In this way, media help communicate why an issue matters, which are its main features, who or what might be responsible for the problems associated with the topic and what should be done in order to solve these problems.

While indeed not agreeing with Entman, Paul D'Angelo (2002) states that there is not, nor should there be, a single paradigm of framing research in the sense of Lakatos (1970). Highlighting that framing is a multiparadigmatic research program, Paul D'Angelo also underlines the three paradigmatic outlooks it comprises – cognitive, constructionist and critical. Therefore, the various theoretical perspectives encourage researchers to explain such a complex process, but also the relationship between frames and framing effects. Likewise, D'Angelo (2002, p. 873) treats frames as "powerful discursive cues that can impact cognition, individual socialization via interpersonal discussions, public opinion formation and group use of media messages to achieve their goals".

Reese (2001) works within the constructionist and critical paradigms, bringing an original perspective to framing. The author suggests that the concept of frame has a provocative openness, being a research program made useful by its theoretical diversity. Reese's definition of frames broadly captures this diversity and bridging quality: frames are "organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world" (2001, p. 11). With a perspective similar to that embraced by Gamsen (1987; 1989) and Tuchman (1978), Reese assumes the frames are "interpretive packages" used in creating understandings of the social world. The author goes further suggesting that framing implies an active process; consequently, he demands that the analysts "should ask how much framing is going on" (2001, p. 13), whether the emphasis is on the 'what' vs. the 'how' when analyzing frames.

Other definitions move beyond the emphasis on framing as active process, marking a new meaning attached to this concept. Hence, in their work, Snow and Benford (1988) treat framing as something social movements do – it is the result of their activities, with their success depending largely on the result of their framing success efforts. The public relations industry is full of these success stories, since framing is one of the main tasks of PR specialists (Hallahan, 1999; Knight, 1999). From the plethora of available interpretations of a certain issue or event, strategic actors are interested in ensuring that their own reading is accepted by the media, the general public and other social actors (Ihlen & Nitz, 2008). This is made possible through their framing expertise (Dan & Ihlen, 2011), namely the public relations practitioners' knowledge and skills in promoting their preferred frames.

Summing up, the literature on framing shows that there is no consensus on the meaning of this concept. Thus, in the most general sense, frames can be conceived of as patterns of interpretation that are used to classify information and process it efficiently. As both a noun and a verb, the word frame suggests an active process and a result. Framing has a selective function; it emphasizes certain aspects of reality and makes others less obvious. In this way, certain attributes are suggested to the audience.

2.2. Visual and verbal news frames

Although relatively recently introduced and acknowledged in the academic debate on news frames as a distinct frame typology, visual and verbal framing were addressed by pioneer framing scholars such as Todd Gitlin (1980). In his definition, the author argues for visual, as well as verbal framing, even if he very briefly mentions this idea, without any other explanations: frames are “persistent patterns of cognition (...) by which symbol-handlers routinely organize the discourse, whether verbal or visual” (1980, p. 7). Thus, according to Gitlin, news frames contain both visual and verbal discourse elements.

Ervin Goffman, the sociologist who was among the first to describe framing theory, also recognized the potential of photographs as tools for framing. In the study on gender frames in advertising images (Goffman, 1979), the author discussed visual framing, even if he did not call it as such. Moreover, Robert Entman, in his early studies on frames, remarked that frames within texts are manifested through “certain keywords, stock phrases”, but also “stereotyped images” (1993, p. 52). Consequently, he recognized image as a framing device: “frame analysis examines the selection and salience of certain aspects of an issue by exploring images, stereotypes, metaphors, actors and messages” (Entman, Matthes, & Pellicano, 2009, p. 180).

As we can see from these examples, fuzzy references to visual and verbal news frames were included as early as in Gitlin (1980) and Goffman (1979)’s studies. A recent and more specific study on visual framing, which underlines that “special qualities of visuals – their iconicity, their indexicality, and especially their syntactic implicitness – make them very effective tools for framing”, is authored by Messaris and Abraham (2001). In *Framing Public Life* (Reese, Gandy & Grant, 2001), the authors examine what make images different from verbal language, using the concepts of verbal and visual framing without a clear operationalization of the two. Therefore, they only outline that the process of verbal framing “takes place through words” (Messaris & Abraham, 2001, p. 224), while visual framing occurs via images, being “more easily taken-for-granted than verbal framing” (Messaris & Abraham, 2001, p. 216).

A valuable work within the growing literature and research on framing, which provides fresh theoretical contributions regarding the conceptual distinctions between visual and verbal news frames, is Renita Coleman’s (2010) study. The author defines “visual” as “the media content that is processed by the eye alone” (Coleman, 2010, p. 236). The visual components of media news include, according to Coleman, photographs and moving images, drawings, facial expressions, body posture, maps, but also graphics. Hence, more specifically, visual framing refers to “the selection of one view, scene, or angle when making the image, cropping, editing or selecting it. When a journalist chooses which photograph or piece of video to use, it is an act of framing” (Coleman, 2010, p. 237).

Furthermore, verbal framing refers to the verbal media content, including “written and spoken words” (Coleman, 2010, p. 236). Therefore, verbal media comprises what actors say when talking about television news, and what language they use when discussing newspaper news. Consequently, selecting certain written components (words, phrases, metaphors) contribute to the creation of a verbal frame.

Other useful definitions of the concept of visual framing are provided by Schwalbe (2006) and Burgin (1982). Hence, according to Schwalbe, visual framing is a “continuous winnowing process. It begins with the choice of events to cover, followed by the selection of what pictures to take, how to take them (angle, perspective, assumptions and biases, cropping, and so forth), and which ones to submit” (2006, p. 269). The author adds that the process of framing does not

stop here, but continues in the newsroom, with journalists' decisions about "which images to publish, what size to make them, and where to position them on the page" (2006, p. 269).

Visual framing, in the sense of Burgin (1982), applies to the compositional qualities of the image. Thus, according to this author, "it is the position of point-of-view, occupied in fact by the camera, which is bestowed upon the spectator. To the point-of-view, the system of representation adds the frame" (Burgin, 1982, p. 146). In other words, the way in which objects are organized within the photograph into a coherent and comprehensive manner sets the frame. Moreover, the scenes, the elements captured within the frame transmit the message that they are the most important.

Most part of the literature on visual news frames is dedicated to the visual framing of war (Griffin, 2004; Parry, 2010; 2011; Schwalbe, Silcock, & Keith, 2008). Research on the topic points out a war master frame, but also some microframes of war visuals, such as: "shock and awe", "conquering troops", "hero" and "victory" (Aday, 2005).

3. Combining visual and verbal news frames

In the previous section of this paper, we have reviewed the most influential approaches to framing and we have discussed how the meaning of visual and verbal news frames has evolved across time. In what follows, we'll highlight the shortcomings of these views.

Initially, scholars have reduced framing to written words, fully ignoring the visual cues within news stories. Definitions that take into account both channels of communication usually treat them separately, focusing, on the one hand, on the verbal message (D'Angelo 2002; Gamson & Modigliani, 1987; Scheufele, 1999), or the visual message, on the other hand (Aday, 2005; Burgin, 1982; Griffin, 2004; Schwalbe, 2006). Most studies on visual news frames are dedicated to the visual framing of war, trying to develop coherent methodologies for visual framing analysis (Fahmy, 2004; 2005). Even if framing analyses are usually conducted only on verbal discourse elements, or on non-verbal cues, there are scholars who emphasize that "it is artificial for research to view one channel of communication in isolation as this can result in an incomplete understanding of any media event" (Coleman, 2010, p. 235). Therefore, visual and verbal messages should be analyzed together because they occur simultaneously in the media and are processed by audiences, at the same time. Although there needs to be more integrative work on framing, including both text and pictures, the literature review highlights only a few studies using such an approach (Dan & Ihlen, 2010, 2011; Esser & D'Angelo, 2003; Parry, 2010; 2011; Semetko & Boomgaarden, 2007). Moreover, with few exceptions (Dan & Ihlen, 2010, 2011), most scholars who combine visual and verbal framing in their research do not fully explain the integrative perspective they use. Although authors provide some details regarding the way in which visuals are coded in the methodological sections of their papers, a theoretical explanation of their approach lacks almost entirely.

Hence, the major limitation of the definitions provided so far by the academic literature on framing resides in rather fuzzy theoretical underpinnings for the concept of combined visual and verbal news frames. Thus, this study aims at filling this gap. However, before discussing the integrative approach to framing, we will first point out on the structural features of visual images, examining how visual communication functions as an agent of framing.

4. Visual and verbal framing devices. Verbal vs. visual language

Nowadays, media reporting has become more filled with visual than verbal elements. Journalists develop ways to communicate by using a lot of pictures within the media news content that they produce. Consequently, visual cues are powerful communication tools; people process a lot of information from visual messages. In this section we will discuss the qualities of images, what makes them powerful agents of framing. Moreover, we will compare verbal language with visual cues.

According to Charles S. Peirce, visual images are iconic signs “of the objects and events that are represented in them” (1991, p. 240). Having a physical connection to the object it refers to, images “are produced by light rays reflected from the external world and recorded physically” (Peirce, 1991, p. 240) on various media. By virtue of this connection, images can be taken as proofs of the reality they record. Thus, the iconicity of images makes it possible to attract people’s attention, by simulating different aspects of the real world.

As Messaris and Abraham (2001) noted, the central feature of visual images, which mainly distinguishes them from words, is their analogical quality. While images “constitute a largely analogical system of communication” (Messaris & Abraham, 2001, p. 216), “the relationship between most words and their meanings is purely a matter of social convention”. Therefore, the analogical quality of images makes them appear “more natural, more closely linked to reality than words are” (Messaris & Abraham, 2001, p. 216). Consequently, due to this characteristic, visual cues function as powerful agents of framing. People treat images as direct copies of reality, and their structural features, such as camera angles and distance, produce changes in viewer’s evaluations regarding different actors, events or objects (Berger, 1981; Grabe, 1996; Messaris, 1997; Moriarty & Popovich, 1991). The implication of this difference between words and pictures as vehicles of framing is that visual images are more persuasive tools within the framing process. They have a double valence: they reflect, but also affect reality.

By contrast with verbal language, images “lack an explicit propositional syntax” (Messaris & Abraham, 2001, p. 218). Hence, picture-based communication is not explicit; it is more open to audience’s interpretation. Unlike verbal language, which has an explicit set of syntactic devices for making propositions, visual syntax does not allow communicators to express causal claims, analogies, or comparisons (Messaris, 1997). When causality or similarity is implied through the structural compositions of visuals and the interrelationships among them, connections are imprecise; they do not form meaningful ideas. Thus, the visual approximations of propositional syntax “cannot come close to the complexity of expression made possible by verbal syntax” (Hawhee & Messaris, 2009, p. 218). Even if spatial or temporal connections can be expressed, visual syntax lacks explicit devices for argumentation; it does not have a clear capacity for abstraction.

Another feature of images that makes them important agents of framing is their indexicality. Messaris and Abraham point out that visual cues, unlike written words, are “treated as direct pointers, as opposed to constructed representations of reality” (2001, p. 217). In other words, because of their indexicality, images are authentic. They have a close relation with reality, an inherent guarantee of authenticity that words lack. This true-to-life quality of visuals makes them powerful tools within the framing process.

Summing up, all these particular features of visual images emphasize that, “in some cases, visual framing may actually matter more than verbal framing” (Coleman, 2010, p. 235). Visual framing is more easily taken-for-granted; in fact, there is a vast body of research show-

ing that nonverbal cues are more important than verbal elements in affecting evaluations (Barrett & Barrington, 2005; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000; Graber, 1987; Palvio, 1991). As Barry noted, “images are a means of communication that runs deeper and is ultimately more powerful than words in its ability to condition attitudes and to form thoughts” (1997, p. 338). Consequently, it may be said that scholars should include more visuals in their research on framing.

5. An integrative approach to framing

This article seeks to organize and synthesize a vast research field, by providing new theoretical explanations of the concept of framing. In the previous sections, we have reviewed the evolution of the meanings attributed to the concept of framing (1), we have outlined the limitations of these definitions (2), we have described the characteristics of visuals compared with words (3), and, finally, we have pointed out how pictures function as framing devices (4). Given this encompassing examination of the concept, we will now discuss our arguments for an integrative approach to framing.

This paper is an attempt to integrate visual and verbal news frames into a single approach, providing some conceptual clarifications. This study involves only the frame-building (de Vreese, 2003) stage within the framing process, as it focuses exclusively on media content. Put it differently, it examines frames in the news, without referring to news production and framing effects. More specifically, this article provides a definition for combined visual and verbal framing, offering comprehensive explanations of the concept. According to the integrative approach, frames are defined as *media packages consisting both of text and visuals*; they use a set of specific attributes, and represent a way of publicly communicating about certain objects, events, or actors. In this way, individuals are oriented towards a certain general, integrative interpretation.

Through the word “package”, we understand a set of organized devices that functions as an identity kit for a frame. Such a package is composed of two kinds of framing devices – words and images –, because the media provide news consumers not only with verbal messages, but with visuals, too. Reducing framing devices only to verbal elements and ignoring non-verbal cues is as inconsistent as analyzing frames exclusively through the images conveyed within news reports. Our approach includes both channels of communication because visual and verbal messages occur together in media and audiences process them simultaneously.

By “visuals” as framing devices, we mean the same thing as Coleman (2010) has previously assumed, namely any “media content that is processed by the eye alone” (2010, p. 236). More specifically, we refer to any pictures, cartoons or graphics included within print or online media content. On the other hand, by “text” we mean the verbal content, namely the written words, the language used by journalists. These two elements give meaning to frames; they structure the media packages, outlining the central idea. Combined visual and verbal frames are also revealed through emphasis, the mode of presentation of different information. Certain aspects and arguments are highlighted, while others are neglected.

Put it differently, the integrative news frames are revealed by a set of specific attributes, namely the use of a particular language (words, speech figures – metaphors, comparisons, etc.) or of certain photographs. Selecting one scene, view, or angle from which is taken the photo represents an act of framing, as well as selecting a verbal expression or metaphor.

The interpretation conveyed by the story, through its verbal and visual elements, is able to affect audiences' perceptions regarding different issues, actors or events. Thus, besides emphasizing a certain organizing idea, news frames also transmit interpretations concerning the objects or actors depicted in news reports. If the information communicated visually is incongruent with the information communicated verbally, viewers tend to believe and remember visual messages over verbal ones (Coleman, 2010).

The integrative approach to framing we discuss in this paper overlaps with the concept of generic frames (de Vreese, Peter & Semetko, 2001; de Vreese, 2005). Therefore, combined visual and verbal news frames are not applicable to a narrow theme, but to a variety of topics, some even over time and across different contexts. They transcend thematic limitations, emphasizing "broader trends or backgrounds of issues" (Entman, Matthes, & Pellicano, 2009, p. 176). Due to their high degree of generalization, combined visual and verbal news frames allow for comparisons between the different frames, even framing practices specific to different countries. On the contrary, issue-specific frames are applicable only to certain topics or news events, investigating them in great specificity. This detailed analysis of a very confined issue makes difficult to generalize and compare.

Given these explanations, we can conclude by further arguing that combined visual and verbal frames designate coherent ways of understanding the world. Furthermore, they are developed using all of the available verbal and visual symbolic resources.

6. Conclusions

As a theoretical paper, this article explores the integrative approach on framing, offering some clarifications regarding this new type of frame, still in its infancy. Reviewing and summarizing a vast body of literature on news framing, this paper further proposes a definition for combined visual and verbal frames. In describing this new type of frame, the article attempts to bring fresh theoretical contributions to the field of framing analysis.

Furthermore, the paper explains how visual cues function as agents of framing, by exploring the characteristics of visuals compared with verbal language. Moreover, stressing that pictures are more powerful than words, the article urges researchers to start conducting more framing analysis that combine both verbal and visual elements.

This paper is an attempt to integrate visual and verbal news frames into a single approach; it also proposes that scholars expand their samples including visual cues, too. The integrative approach on framing, suggested in this article, can be refined by taking into account not only frame-building, but the framing process as a whole. Therefore, de Vreese's model which also includes non-verbal cues can be expanded by exploring both frame-building and frame-setting through visuals. Overall, this paper brings forth a theoretical approach to the combined visual and verbal framing and provides alternative explanations of this complex concept.

Rezumat: Cu o istorie relativ recentă, conceptul de cadraj mediatic a cunoscut o dezvoltare înfloritoare reprezentând, fără îndoială, una dintre teoriile de bază în cercetarea comunicării de masă. Deși numărul studiilor pe tema cadrelor de interpretare este în creștere, urmărind analiza modului în care cadrele se manifestă în diferite domenii, literatura de specialitate subliniază că nu există un consens în ceea ce privește semnificația acestui concept. Cu doar câteva excepții, majoritatea cercetătorilor reduc cadrele doar la cuvinte, ig-

norând în totalitate fotografiile din cadrul știrilor de presă. Studiul de față își propune să reducă acest gol informațional, oferind noi explicații teoretice și clarificări conceptuale. Astfel, lucrarea urmărește să răspundă la următoarele întrebări: Care este evoluția semnificațiilor atribuite conceptului de cadraj mediatic?; Care sunt limitele acestor definiții?; Cum funcționează imaginile ca agenți de framing (cadraj mediatic)? Fiind un articol teoretic, lucrarea de față explorează abordarea integratoare asupra cadrajelor, adresând un îndemn cercetătorilor de a începe să desfășoare analize care combină atât elementele verbale, cât și elementele vizuale din cadrul conținutului mediatic.

Cuvinte-cheie: abordare integratoare asupra cadrajelor mediatice; cadru de interpretare verbal; cadru de interpretare vizual; teoria cadrajelor.

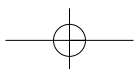
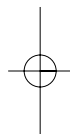
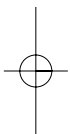
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Book review



Raluca Silvia CIOCHINA*

**Review of *Social Media ROI: Managing and Measuring Social Media Efforts in Your Organization*,
by Olivier Blanchard, Boston: Que Publishing,
2011, 350 pages**

Social media and their impact on organizational strategic communication have become an important part of research in public relations, marketing and management. Whereas social media is genuinely presented as an unstable environment, characterized by constant changes and shifts of directions, these channels of communication still remain a fertile ground for leveraging the relationship between organizations and their publics.

Olivier Blanchard's book called *Social Media ROI: Managing and Measuring Social Media Efforts in Your Organization* is built on the idea of setting out a social media program in order to achieve business objectives and goals. The book appears to be more a justification process ("business justification", as the author calls it) and, at the same time, a pitch for organizations looking to invest in social media, but that are not yet convinced of its value, nor they understand their current success. The structure of the book is actually built up as a guideline for a Social Media Program Manager who would experience difficulties along the way of developing and implementing a social media program into an organization. Although readers may initially link the book title to the specific relation between investment and its return (by numbers, with inferring justifications and methods of achieving them), they will find also clear examples of the way in which social media planning should be approached and integrated inside an organization. By all means, throughout the entire book, the author gives the reader the possibility to explicitly formulate discourses which can enhance and stand for the proper use and acceptance of social media into an organized system. Blanchard's book can be described as a training tool for future social media managers who understand the relevancy of integrating a *social communication* tool into the overall business objectives and goals.

The book is structured in four parts: "Social Media Program Development", "Integration", "Management" and "Measurement". Each part contains chapters with a series of steps and advice for managing the processes behind the strategy the author proposes.

The author's wide experience in brand strategy and marketing is distinguishable throughout the book as it accentuates strategic thinking in terms of employing social media as a communication tool, for a variety of business functions of an organization. As a starting reference point for organizations looking to build and develop their social media presence, Blanchard begins with the importance of becoming a *social company*. With organizations facing difficulties in building Social Media programs by carefully trying to construct planning and strategies, the main point the author tries to convey is the fact that social media can take over the organization as it "does not happen by accident. It is engineered". Reach, attention and influence are key factors which social media programs need to focus on and, unlike most market-

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ing tactics, they cannot be bought. They need a clear investment in *relationship development*, in veritable social interaction, commitment and engagement. Whereas the foundation of any social relationship implies trust, the conversations developed through this means of interaction with the organization's public must lay the basis of creating a true social company.

In fact, the social and *human* nature of social media is carefully inserted in each part of the book; for instance, a chapter is called "The People Principle". This human nature makes social media become either a risk for inexperienced organizations, or an opportunity for the ones looking to integrate and accept change inside their core structure. Although Blanchard understands and accepts the blockages (in terms of usage, leakages of information, loss of control, lack of capability etc) of management or other organizational departments who resent integrating and developing social media programs, he encourages their use as means for the organizational survival.

As social media force changes in the organizational structure, methodology, procedures and culture, the ways in which these changes are managed are the most important. Establishing clarity of "vision, purpose and execution" is essential when creating a social media program that Blanchard defines as "completely integrated communications mechanism that amplifies the impact of every function within an organization by leveraging the power of human networks via social networking platforms" (p. 72). Therefore, Social Media is a contiguous tactic to other public relations and advertising methods, acting as a "force multiplier".

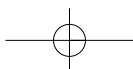
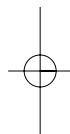
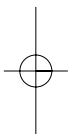
The evolution of two-way communication processes, engagement and relationship development enhanced by social media creates a series of benefits for organizations looking to meet business objectives and goals. Social media can provide or facilitate consumer insights, instant feedback, departmental efficiency, brand awareness, consumer tendencies and so on. However, Blanchard makes the distinction between the control of vertical engagements (one-directional) and lateral engagements (bi-directional), the latter being characterized by earned influence, rather than bought.

In terms of business goals, social media can bring success only if it is aligned with what the organization is planning to achieve, as it is only a means to reach business objectives. In terms of accountability of actions, setting deadlines, timescales and specific targets give relevancy to the development of a social media program in the first place. So this brings the reader to the main reason for reading the book, namely to find out how accountable can be a social media program. What is the revenue brought by social media to an organization? How can it be measured? Unfortunately, the book focuses on this particular aspect only in its final part ("Social Media Program Measurement"). Perhaps the author has a good excuse for this, as it is more important to understand social media, to create a process of building relationships with the publics of the organization, than to jump right into the issue of ROI (return on investment), as a calculated value.

Therefore, returning to the issue of ROI of social media programs, Blanchard emphasizes an economy concept (reinforced throughout the book), called *opportunity cost*. The concept is defined basically by referring to the courses of one action (investment in business activities) chosen instead of another. So, whereas an objective of social media program can be, for example, to build customer loyalty and positive reputation, the improbability of measuring feelings and emotions still remains. Loyalty, in the mentioned example, is built during a long term engagement (as in regular social interactions) and should not face the risk of being developed as a means to an end (as obtaining a clear customer transaction), a fact that would jeopardize the relationship.

The performance measurement in achieving the goals of using social media is what matters the most in adopting the program. Measurement should be done on metrics that directly impacts the program or campaign. While managers and communication practitioners try to identify KPIs (Key performance Indicators) in each activity, Blanchard stresses the importance in identifying the *relevant* measurement, and in leveraging social capital to build awareness by encouraging the community to be part of the process. Therefore, along with the lack of currency of intangible aspects (e.g. relationships, loyalty), the social media manager can use the FRY methodology, by applying frequency strategies (of transactions or interactions), reach and yield (getting people to spend more money per transaction), which can help organizations focus on core objectives and metrics. Otherwise, until a follower/fan has been converted into a transacting customer or has made someone else become a transacting customer, his value cannot be calculated.

The presence of social media in organizations should not be a sine qua non condition for the businesses that do not have clear objectives of using this means of interactive and collaborative communication. The book is actually a guideline with the fundamentals of social media program management, rather than a read on particular tools and measurement techniques. However, Blanchard emphasizes that there is no standard way of managing and measuring social media programs, so each organization should adapt and customize according to the objectives it wants to reach, especially in a continuous changing era, when adaptability and experimentation are keywords in managing reality.



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