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Mass Media and the Internet Challenges – Romanian Experience

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Abstract

The analysis of the available databases allowed us to evaluate the evolution of the media, after the challenges engendered by the expansion of the Internet and the economic crisis that started in 2008. In our study, we present media in terms of quantity; we also deal with some traps generated by official statistics, the paradoxes of recent years (the apparent reducing of the media supply although statistics show its growth etc.). Here I used the research and statistical reports achieved by the Romanian Audit Bureau of Circulations / the National Readership Survey, the National Legal Deposit / Romania's National Library, the National Audio-visual Council, the Ministry of Communications.

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In recent years, in various milieus, the bells are rung for traditional media, the prophecies are written on the end of culture; agony of journalism is announced. All fears are generated by the Internet, by the technologies that seem to have escaped an imaginary control. In this study, we show the status quo, relying on figures. In other words, whether or not to worry, judging the evolution of Romanian media strictly quantitatively.

Romania has a post-communist, post-transition, post-accession, post-crisis, post-digitization, etc. media system; hence the range of successive or simultaneous changes that have abused it and forced it to get mature. It was predictable that the expansion of the Internet would bring about deep structural changes in the media supply. According to the NAARC (ANCOM, NARC - National Authority for Administration and Regulation in Communications / ANCOM – Autoritatea Națională pentru Administrație și Reglementare în Comunicații, 2013) statistics, in recent years there has been a surprising dynamic spread of the Internet (Electronic communications market in Romania. ANCOM, 2013), which means that the penetration of the Internet connections reached 37.4% in

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2012 (per 100 inhabitants). Some analysts (*Capital*, 26 August, 2013)¹ recently estimated that about 53 % of Romania's population has Internet access.

Table 1. Indicator: Penetration rate of Internet access per 100 inhabitants (%). Source: ANCOM, 2013

Year	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
%	0.06	0.49	1.75	5.04	9.05	11.65	13.12	15.6	22.2	37.4

If this indicator has followed an upward trend in terms of Internet providers, we notice the reduction of the number of competitors that may be explained by the concentration process, ie by the merging of small companies with larger ones.

Table 2. The number of Internet providers. Source: ANCOM, 2013.

Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Companies	981	1,412	1,338	1,100	1,066	973	985	896

The change of the technologies for collecting, processing and disseminating information was concomitant with the international economic crisis, which has severely affected domestic markets, a visible fact in the official statistics. For example, the media will benefit from dwindling advertising allowances, which led to the resizing of newsrooms both in the private and public sectors.

Table 3. Advertising expenditures (in millions of Euros). Source: www.paginamedia.ro/cifre-utile/, 25/ 09/ 2013.

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Total, d.c.	178	215	275	368	486	593	339	308
TV	88	113	158	229	310	383	222	209
Print	58	62	66	71	79	87	37	27
Radio	12	14	17	23	30	38	25	23

As one can see, after the 2008 maximum, the values are significantly reduced, the most severe cuts in benefits being recorded by advertising expenditures in print press. Here is the context in which some publications cease production, others change their frequency or remain in the *on line* format.

Table 4. Evolution of the population of "newspapers, magazines and other periodicals." Source: ISSN National Center / National Legal deposit – Romania's National Library (As of 09/02/2013).

Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Total of periodicals	2,400	2,690	2,626	2,665	2,772	2,780

The expansion of the Internet and the economic crisis have influenced the evolution of the press, yet, when analyzed quantitatively, we find that the number of periodicals has not been decreasing, but increasing to 2.780 units in 2012. There is a significant reduction in the number of dailies, from 80 in 2007 to 51 in 2010 and 53 in 2012, in the whole country. It is worth mentioning that these values include all media supports (print, CD Rom and *on-line*) and exclusively refer to the titles registered in the Legal Deposit. On September 27, 2013, the ISSN National Centre

¹ See recent investigations by GfK Romania, according to which in January 2013 the Internet penetrated 61% of the urban environment and 33% of the rural environment .

data base had 25,205 assigned codes, including codes that correspond to 17,380 periodicals in the Legal Deposit; other 3,886 codes are "non-validated periodicals", in the sense that the publications that received them did not enter the Legal Deposit. Other categories of publications are recorded in CD-ROM format, where the situation is the following: 510 codes have been assigned to periodicals that entered the Legal Deposit; 429, those not yet registered. Finally, the number of ISSN codes² assigned to online publications has reached the figure of 1,819. The above mentioned data concern "the entire population" of serial publications published in Romania from 1990 until the end of 2012.

How do we interpret these figures? On the one hand, they signify the multiplication of the offer - thousands of schools produce magazines, many of them obtain an ISSN, and therefore appear in the specialized statistics. The explanation is that teachers are evaluated on the basis of some criteria that include the editing of publications. As for the commercial sector, publishers know that having an ISSN ensure a VAT reduction of 9%, according to the Tax Code, regardless of the quality of the publication and its circulation. Actually, the content and the distribution of periodicals are not likely to make the ISSN managers refuse a request, except for advertising support.

1. Who are the "enemies" / "rescuers" of the press?

A recent research conducted by the company "National Readership Survey Focus" (January 2012 - February 2013), in urban areas³ shows that 67% of the total population are Internet users⁴. Among them, 1,647 million belong to the 14-24 age group (25 % of urban Internet users have ages between 14 and 24). In other words, only 4% of those aged 14 to 24 do not use the Internet).

From the social and demographic points of view, Romanian users are mainly teenagers and young adults (between 14 and 44), married or in consensual agreement more than the normal distribution within the population. They are educated, enterprising individuals or employees with management functions or they have higher education, higher incomes; some of them – pupils and students – have no incomes at all.⁵

What kind of behavior do the users adopt? 73 % use the Internet daily; 30 % spend more than six hours per day on the Internet; 31 % access the Internet from mobile phones / smartphones too.

Most of them are interested in health, education, entertainment and jobs. For instance, 37% read newspapers online at least once a week, 33 % read magazines web sites. The news on line is read at least once a week by over 40 % of the urban users. In the same zone of common uses, we mention seeking information by means of search engines and e-mailing - more than 60% weekly.

The interest in the media is variable: 19% of the Internet users access the sites of nationally circulated newspapers several times a week (using a PC / laptop / tablet); 4.5 % of the users visit the sites of the national dailies (using a phone and / or a smartphone) a few times a week. 30% of the respondents, Internet users, stated that they read both the print edition and the websites of national newspapers.

If we want to see the "photo-fit" of the most fervent Internet user in urban areas, we could rely on the following data: 25 - 44 years of age (40.9 %), married (56.3 %), with high school and college studies (39.9 %), unemployed (46.2 %), living in Transylvania (21.4 %), with incomes between 1 and 200 euro (37.3 %).

2. Romanian press in figures

Two specifications are to be made about the interpretation of the data in this study - 1. a magazine title can be counted two to three times if it appears in: print format, *on line* and on CD ROM (the same title receives three ISSN

² The ISSN code allows for the unique identification of the title of a serial publication, at the international level. It is a standardized numerical code consisting of two groups of 4 numbers separated by a hyphen and preceded by the acronym ISSN. The eighth digit is the check digit of the code. It can be a number or X. The ISSN code is significant in itself; it does not contain information on the origin or the content of the publication. The ISSN code has no legal value and does not provide exclusivity on the title to which it was assigned.

³ 9,704,416 people, according to the National Statistics Institute report (July, 1, 2010).

⁴ 6.5 million people.

⁵ Interview with Arina Ureche, director general of the Romanian Audit Bureau of Circulation, October 1, 2013.

codes if it appears on the three types of support). Therefore it is appropriate that the above values should be considered with caution and, especially, should not be added to one another. 2. Universal Decimal Classification⁶ is an international taxonomic convention, which is used to classify all the contents of books, newspapers, magazines etc. and which has a tree architecture (branching off from class to sub-class, sub-sub-class, etc.).

To make some observations about the evolution of Romanian press while the economic crisis has become ever rougher, I processed the database of the ISSN National Centre in the year 2009. Making the hierarchy of the entire population of serials published that year, I observed that most of them belonged to class 3.37, "Education. Teaching. Leisure", which includes 643 units. In this category, they integrated scientific and educational journals, from periodicals of the university annals type to journals of classes in secondary schools (most of them contain literature produced by the pupils themselves). Here, we do not discuss the share and the quality of educational media, since we are dealing with a single statistical unit: the title of the publication.

On the second place, with 157 units, we find the "religion" class, made up of older or newer publications, whether scientific or Parish Community - type (their tendency is to grow).

Third place is held by the "Civilization. Culture" class, in which one can find 150 literary magazines (the so-called "cultural magazines", according to some uninspired classifications) and event publications, publications of literary associative forms. Moreover, literature holds the first place within the total periodical production, because the domain is dissipated in other classes too (see "Education", "Literature", "Linguistics").

The fourth place, with 134 units, includes the periodicals belonging to the field "Applied Sciences - Medicine". They are scientific papers, statistics, newsletters, publications devoted to diseases or groups of diseases and others. In the fifth place, with 125 periodical titles, we find the "Technique. Engineering" class and, with 124 titles, the areas of "Law. Legislation. Jurisprudence". This significant share of the periodical class grouped under "Law ..." is explained by the large number of law faculties and by frequent legislative changes. As for the "Technology" class, in addition to the periodicals edited by the engineering faculties, the cited database also contains many publications of research meetings, such as the works of conferences, scientific sessions, etc..

Place VI is occupied by the "Literature" class, with 99 titles and place VII, by "Local Monographs", a press class which includes periodicals issued at local, county and regional levels, weekly, monthly, etc. (98 titles). Next, there are the following places: VIII - "Linguistics", with 78 titles, place XIX - "History", with 76 titles, place X, "Mathematics", 74 titles, etc. It is worth noting that the 66 titles found under the "Newspapers" class rank eleventh and include newspapers published in Bucharest or in the counties.

Likewise, we remark that the subclass 070 "Journalism", there are eight titles – the Journalism Series of the "Spiru Haret" University Annals, the Yearbook of Sălaj Press, the Romanian media guide, the Journal of Media Research, the National Journal – collection edition, Romanian Journal of Press History, Romanian Journal of Journalism and Communication Studies and Research in the history of the press. There are just eight titles in the context of about 20 existing journalism faculties, departments and majors, of numerous existing foundations, associations, etc. that deal with journalism (at least according to their statutes) means too little.

3. The Audiovisual

According to the National Register of licenses⁷, on September 20, 2013, there were 4,145 active licenses for broadcasting and retransmission, which are owned by 1,086 companies. That is 574 licenses and approvals for land radio broadcasting; 200 for terrestrial television; 31 for satellite radio; 105 for satellite television; 5 for cable radio; 358 for cable television and 2,872 for cable retransmission. One should not understand that there are over four thousand emitting entities, because one station can hold multiple licenses in multiple places, where the same program is broadcast (coverage can be local, national and international).

⁶ UDC includes the following categories: 0. General, 1. Philosophy, Psychology, 2. Religion, 3. Sociology, social sciences, politics, economics, etc.. 4. Vacant (unused), 5. Mathematics, natural sciences, astronomy, ecology, chemistry and so on, 6. Applied Sciences, 7. Art and Culture, 8. Languages and Linguistics, 9. Geography, History and so on.

⁷ <http://www.cna.ro/IMG/pdf/Statistica.pdf> – accessed on September, 28, 2013.

Regarding the ownership structure of audiovisual companies, the consulted database indicates investors from Bermuda, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Curacao, Switzerland, France, Germany, Luxembourg, UK, Netherlands, Sweden, Turkey, Hungary, together with local stakeholders.

The Internet has enabled the establishment of media groups more flexible than the previous ones, with audiences often exceeding national boundaries.

4. Final Considerations

The recent years have brought a paradigm shift in journalism, almost all the dimensions of this profession being affected to a lesser or greater extent. Actually, the free access to the Internet, in the context of press release journalism generalization led to the loss of the journalist's prestige as professional mediator - anyone can access public information flows, the websites of various institutions.

Likewise, anyone can become a producer of information - text, image, video, with several media outlets encouraging this type of production. Here it is difficult to set ethical and professional standards as new journalism, jointly owned and accomplice has less and less in common with traditional journalism. *Online* journalism has brought covert sources, some disinhibiting - see escort posts accompanying most contents conveyed, often violent, vulgar, difficult to control. The fact of hiding your identity as receiver / transmitter / commentator of public messages generated new moral problems. The Internet provides, for the first time in human history, infinite audience - wherever there may be connection, contents may be received, a reality that should produce some concern.

As for the domestic market, it is also the Internet that solves what profile companies have not done in the last 23 years - media penetration in rural areas. Even if the electronic endowment is low, the fact that schools, libraries, administrative units, etc., are equipped with computers and Internet connections would be likely to give us hope. However, at this moment, the battle continues to be fought for the urban audiences.

Anybody's access to the digital agora, without a professional filter intended to guarantee competence, skill, etc., makes the level of trust in many digital media be reduced. This is true in the context in which the boundary between public and private space is increasingly permissive, the possibilities of claiming redress measures in case you are wronged are disappearing, and so on.

The traditional economic model was also abandoned because of the communication technologies – while printing, buying paper, distributing had the largest share in the total expenditures five to six years ago, now, media dissemination is inexpensive and is made over endless geographical spaces. The big challenge on this competitive market is the news content and it is more dramatic than before the advent of the Internet.

The above mentioned developments will also influence journalism education, which is in a position to adapt to new challenges. And here I call for caution when prophecies are made about the end of journalism. Channels need contents. And the Internet is a new medium, more dynamic, more penetrating, atypical if compared to the previous ones, but it is still a channel.

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