EXIGENCIES OF THE CONTEMPORARY PATTERN IN MEDIA COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

As a profession in visible reshaping, journalism is obliged to respect the intrinsic demands of a knowledge society: responsibility towards the traditional partners, internalizing the ethical framework (in any of its 250 versions), cultivating the credibility relationship with the loyal public, adapting to new patterns of media communication. In this respect, it is spoken of a very informed reader – listener – viewer, aware that his time 'is looking good', for he is no longer satisfied with the status of a receiver (not even a critic one), claiming: a privileged position, in which his opinion matters enormously, his participation - a demand of the new century, and even the role of a journalist (invited and willful), building media texts ready to be released.

1. Introduction

As a profession in visible change, journalism is obliged to respect the intrinsic demands of a knowledge society (or, at least, some of them): responsibility towards the traditional partners, internalizing the ethical framework (in any of its 250 versions), cultivating the credibility relationship with the loyal public, adapting to new patterns of media communication. For almost a decade has been known Agnes' plead for the awareness of a recent social need, for the adaptation of journalistic practices to the evolution of technology and for the paradigm of mass communication. Increasingly numerous (but mostly various) press organisations, the accelerated globalisation of information, the advanced level of decryption of the media message that the consumer intends to hold, the improvement of post-digitalisation construction-dissemination techniques in the shown public space, represent pitfalls-opportunities for the professional field in question. Press deontology was born in 1898, as a reaction to the corruption and frequent blackmail in the French publications. The avatars require some suspense, since the 'courts of honour' are refused. In 1918, the National Union of Journalists drafted the Charter of Professional Duties (re-framed 20 years later) as the basis of the Declaration of

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the Rights and Duties of Journalists (adopted in 1971 in Munich by the European Journalists' Unions) [1]. Unfortunately, but hardly surprising, the owners (employers) in the media do not take into account 'union texts' (let us not forget the discrimination between professional and nonprofessional journalists, which induced the absence of supervisory bodies in the 1935 Law regarding the status of the journalist without credential given by the French Parliament, therefore lacking professional responsibility). The deviations from the correct practice of the profession had to become unbearable, after 1990 (the massacre in Timişoara, the false information during the Gulf War, the invented interview with Fidel Castro, etc.), for the Advisory Commission of Human Rights and the Economic and Social Council, between 1995 and 1999, to request a regulating resort! Temporary successes, through rating, are overshadowed by the decrease in credibility rate, up to accusations of non-professionalism in the media people guild [1].

The fear that journalism dies (since the blogosphere invades) is gradually diluted, relieved by news such as: the photo cameras and mobile phones create the new journalists, the websites of non-professionals media become constant sources of news (without further discuss on credibility, neutrality etc.). In this regard, an informed reader-auditor-viewer-user is spoken of, aware that 'his time' looks good, for he is no longer satisfied with the status of a passive receptor (even a critic one), claiming a privileged position (in which his opinion matters, participation is already a requirement of the new mediatic century), experiencing even the role of a journalist (guest and volunteer in the same time). In other words, the consumer-citizen is progressively strengthening his position in the new public space. Following closely the model of participatory democracy specific to the political sphere, the mass media 'operators' generated the 'participatory information' (civic journalism), being content, for now, not to discuss about the lack of deontology in the online environment (which, naturally, leads us to think of questionable credibility, the impossibility of making responsible the densely interactive participants, the - sometimes unjustified – emergency of transmitting the free information), about the inexistence of some validation-ranking criteria for the occasional 'journalists'. Wondering, and rightly so, 'All of us, journalists?', Yves Agnès predicted the multimedia-type press, the polyvalent tendency of the large Western newspapers (print and online), and the strategy of unifying the 'on paper' editorial offices in the virtual environment as well [1, p. 31].

2. The field of research

Accepting, in a 'stingy' definition, that the public space is the place of argumentation and exchange of ideas and that, with the invention of printing, mass media have made this meeting possible (dominating it abundantly with the passing of centuries), it won't, maybe, seem hazardous, in what concerns us, the query generated by a conclusion belonging to Bernard Miège (more and more compassionate with a public space "harassed from all sides, become commercial

for decades" [2]) according to which only apparently the gathering (by juxtaposition) of some 'partial' public spaces, which don't communicate with each other, based on multiple devices, is more united than ever… We venture some comments on the value judgement of one of the most active voices in Communication sciences today, starting from Miège's exhortation itself, from the history of the 'public space phenomenon', interwoven with the classicised communication patterns from the world regarded as modern. It has been the privilege of opinion press (the eighteenth century) to create the place of mediation between the state and the space of private life through the public use of reason (the arguments and the 'duel' of opinions were initially produced in literary salons and cafés), and the journalists and people of writing from the field of literature had enough 'agora' to turn the readers into 'homo politicus', i.e. people of the city (with its most striving problems). The commitment of press employees that they won't be serving any crowned head, party, private interest etc., in order to 'not indent the serene face of truth', together with hunting any mistake committed by the government in contempt for the society, have inclined the balance of symbolic power towards this newly appeared guild, at the same time making it responsible in the relations with its public (the political class, ordinary readers, loyal to the message circulated by the media). Technical and economic transformations, literacy, the need for information, etc. make the model of commercial (mass) press applicable in the whole nineteenth century, with 'goodies' and bad alike: political power promises to be a guarantor of the freedom of the press, advertising separates from the editorial in itself, the journalistic genres are being structured, the separation of literature from journalism (as writing) occurs, but the autonomy of journalists in relation with the editors disappears, the political line of publications is dissimulated through the way of writing and disseminating information, the purely commercial (distant) settlement between newspapers and readers appears clearly. Intended for the mass (for the average human, owner of a culture not necessarily part of the elite, through messages adapted to all tastes and expectations), trade press sets itself up as echo of public opinion – a 'construction' and a 'representation' interposed at the boundary between citizens and informational 'appearances' that express the dominant ideas, agendas.

The establishment of audio-visual mass media in the second half of the twentieth century gave free rein not only to the profit-generating advertising, but also to the development of marketing techniques in social communication (strategies to influence the audience, increasing the mission of the image and the positioning through control upon the media-proposed image, the special emphasis on the entertainment-information binomial – e.g. the talk-show), hence the primacy of the spectacle norms, of the re-presentation, to the detriment of argumentation, of the 'expression'. In the 'Epilogue' to C.G. Christians et al. [3], the idea of freedom of the press appears like a "theoretical treasure of constitutional and rhetorical riches" that journalists corroborate with the rights and privileges adjacent to the profession. What remains sensitive is the matter of the 'fine adjustment' for the correct positioning towards employer's

'monitoring', financial pressure and ignorance of the good use of the term 'thrown into the world'. Two elements are attractive to the reader: on one hand, the lack of concern for the workplace in the field of press; on the other, the warning that "Where governments only tolerate their own press, the reports are pure propaganda for the ruling party and the advertising supports an economic system which increases the richness of the rich and the poverty of the poor. Journalists take bribes. Before a politician's speech, an envelope with appreciation towards the quality of the newspaper is discretely received (…). Political leaders can be criticised, but not directly. In some cases, their words cannot be quoted." [3]

In such circumstances, some questions persist, like: What role do moral values play in a system so retrograde, with poor people, in fragile positions of social power? What is the connection between the call for public service and the argument regarding the respect for the truth and the pressures of the communicator job or of the public relations profession, in a certain part of the world? Clifford G. Christians, Mark Fackler, Kim B. Rotzoll, Kathy McKee describe the mediatic Africa… The misunderstanding appeared in the context of the interrogations could be put differently: Why does it 'sound' of a commonplace, of a situation much too known to us and to this time?

The 70's bring (along with generalised public relations) a new model: the social institutions (from public administration to civil society) are overtaking communication technologies and the techniques of managing the social, giving rise to the necessity of socio-cultural changes, in tandem with the power of creating images, mainly seductive ones. Such strategies can only exercise (and verify) their effects in the radio and television environments. If some conclusions were predictable (following the efficacy of the displayed model): 1) a new model doesn't cancel the previous one, but enhances it through a superior technology; 2) moments of balance in the social 'mentality' change the priorities in the field of communication or they create new forms (others have the gift of surprising for a significant time); 3) communication models interact in the political life (but they don't mask each other), articulating in the public space social logics of the media and the functioning of the political field [4]; 4) each new model in communication determines the expansion (widening) of participants (target groups), while removing their participation from the public scene. Political scientists, experienced journalists, politicians delivered to the virtues of mediation (media coverage) are contradicted by Pierre Moeglin, who attributes to the surveys (part of political marketing) the mission of 'burying' the representative dimension of the elected and of un-masking the journalists accustomed to 'negotiation techniques'. Isabelle Paillart seems to be a naïve (a perfect optimistic) trusting the surveys 'in a continuation of the ideal of reasoning and transparency'. Like Giovanni Sartori (with its well-known theory of 'opinion poll tyranny'), Patrick Champagne warns that "this type of domination (…) is the more powerful as it is located nowhere and everywhere, impersonal and multiplied, accepted and endured. Fragmented and without clearly identifiable dominants…" [5]. B. Miège is circumspect in overbidding

the public space (compared to other systems of organising 'social interaction'), not finding a superiority of it, residing in its relationship with modern techniques of communication. And nor the latter does he guarantee to be advantageous to democracy before an extended review…

Paul Béaud [6] managed to take one step ahead on the path of decrypting the new public space: between social practices and 'the concerted evolution of public space and communication processes' there is a clear connection; mass media and the techniques of public communication have 'socially differentiated' roles, thus the former facilitate consumers participation, 'in an imaginary way, but jointly', to the world events, serving them an universal aliment (the 'content' of media messages) for social interaction, 'allowing' public space to definitively 'insinuate' in the private sphere. T. Gohan-Klas attributes to Eastern-European politicians the conviction that mass media works as a wand ready to influence and reshape the public opinion, all to the peace of the political class in power: "if they control the media, then they have nothing to worry regarding what people think" [7]. This is how they explain the emergence of the biased and highly politicised journalism and press, after 1995. The conflict of ideas between the journalists from opposing media and politicians that 'shepherd' party press was perceived as natural, in an early and vulnerable democracy [8]. Taking into account the functions of mass communication in the postmodern context of de-massification, we don't consider an easily to understand mechanism the interpenetration of public and private spaces, as it appears to French authors. For instance, treating 'Social Mediations in the Conditions of Public Space Evolution', Bernard Floris sees in the detachment of family values, the autonomy-initiative requests at the workplace, the request for schooling-gaining knowledge, etc. factors of reflexivity growth towards the representations system and of 'autonomous internalising of social experiences and knowledge' [9]. The same thinking way can be found at Gilles Lipovetsky, when approaching requests associated to the hyper-consumer society with legitimate needs of identification of the postmodern individual, both in the public-professional field and on private 'territory' [10]. The fact that organisations are up to 'complicities' with the public space is proven by the contamination of the latter with corporate values, and also by the construction, at the workplace level, of a partial public space (logically incorrect wording, in our opinion), where information proposed by specialised services in communication are being discussed. In the same line of thought observed at Floris, Patrice Flichy talks about the tendency to live together, but separately, or even the tendency of the contemporary individual to take refuge in its communicational bubble [11]. This retreat in privacy has as bright side the modern man's introspection regarding its social positioning ('self objectification' took, as an expression, the place of the one introduced by R. Boudon – 'the intellectualisation of private life' [4, p. 175]). In other words, how does he look as a being for those of his time and place? The conscious appropriation of the norms of social affiliation should turn the citizen of the present in a 'figure' hard to manipulate through sophisticated communication strategies. Why don't we notice such a thing? As much as it

seems, the combination of the four 'avatars' of public communication, at the intersection with individualisation (as mark of postmodernity), multiple identity, lack of clarity between margins and centre, superficial and deep, etc. fully contribute to the self non-understanding of the citizen-consumer, to its vulnerability, that is conditioned by rapid changes in all components of social existence. In the context of these 'permutations', the fake face – shown mask – of media communication has as characteristics the binomials: professionalism – non-professionalism, ethics – the absence of the journalistic ethics 'issue', credibility – its loss (up to the topic of auctorial vanity), dialogue – pathologic interactivity, objectivity – (dissimulated) subjectivity.

The debate generated by the expectancies of analysts, but also of communicators (mostly), referring to strictly professional practices of contemporary media (once again, we believe, for the countries in which tens of years of censorship left deep scars), remains constant in the past decades, probably with accents 'legitimated' by the increase in subjectivity, personalisation, spectacular character of messages and 'actors' populating the media. The deviation from professionalism (sometimes slipping to amateurism) originates in the absence of a law of the press, of a code of conduct, of ranking criteria among employees, all under invoking the principle of freedom of the press – interpreted in different manners – but surely craving for a socially recognised professional status.

Under the imperative of searching the truth, press employees (and those who occupy the area of citizen journalism) can avoid rules and mechanisms established since the beginning of mass communication, persuading in unique ways (and untouched by the 'long arm' of responsibility) just as diverse categories of public … 'Yellow'-type publications and audio-visual channels can replace the 'quality' generalist press; the journalist with labour card (and credentials, like in the French space), accountable legally speaking, if needed, is replaced by a 'professional' of the context (of the moment, of the situation), that no court calls to give account, that one doesn't necessarily take seriously because of the deficient style of writing (since the subject under discussion is interesting, topical etc.), who wants the presence in the space of communication regardless of the conditions…

In the perennial question of professional ethics vs. non-ethics, we shall bring into attention the lack of regulation of the on-line environment. Some voices express the opinion that introducing a 'monitoring-punishment' mechanism would deconstruct the idea of citizen journalism, would determine the withdrawal of major investors in the most attractive communication today – with speed, interactivity, anonymity, freedom of speech etc. The counterpart is represented by an important number of participants (of all ages, but mainly young people under 30), forms that are amongst the most efficient in message communication (the blog promoting ideas, mobilising adherents and calling for social activism, creating solidarity – in physical form, in real time – between protesters, activists, NGOs, freelancers, ready to enforce country presidents…), excellent access conditions, gratuity, advertising, immediate, guaranteed

reaction. How much does is still matter the warning of the law against internet piracy, or the one of intellectual property protection in the online environment, even in the USA? Proposed by the music and film industries, supported by a part of the artists, they came to be withdrawn from the Congress as unproductive (January 20, 2012), if they weren't already insufficiently grounded (to send to court individuals who resort to download, to close websites for similar faults, to deny the meaning of the *sharing* technique? Would it be proved that communicational piracy increases or decreases the numbers of jobs in the new media?

Regarding the balance between credibility and non-credibility, we shall bring into attention preoccupations dating from the '50s-'60s, followed by rhythmic research-verifications. The beginning belongs to the team C.I. Hovland – W. Weiss (1951), with the interest of highlighting the influence of credible sources in efficient communication. Counting on honesty and trust (attributes derived from a previous radio experiment), the American investigators brought as variables both trustworthy sources and some less credible ones, obtaining the relationship: the credible source leads to opinion changing in a significant dose. The 'sleeper effect' identified at re-testing does not cancel the validity of the methodology, but brings as novelty the tendency of separating (within weeks) the source from the adjacent opinion. The competence and trust that Hovland and Weiss insisted on entered the evaluation grids developed and implemented by other interested specialists, later (1968); the trust has been translated, in the positive area, as follows: adequate, honest, fair, reliable, and professionalism had meanings such as experience or professional manner. As for objectivity (variable always present in any serious testing), on a scale with 'open' and 'objective' vs. 'closed' and 'subjective', it has been kept constant among the instruments of researchers. The difference between the two moments consists in characterising competence rather as a manner of presentation than as an amount of knowledge held by the communicators, in the second case. The resistance of the 1951 theory (according to which there is a significant difference between the effect of messages generated by credible sources and the effect produced via unreliable sources) was also supported by the team T.D. Cook – B.R. Flay (1978) by advancing the 'absolute sleeper effect' (the outstanding increase in attitude change for the consumers subjected to messages from sources with modest credibility). Applying these working hypotheses and their conclusions, W. Severin – J. Tankard Jr. warned that higher levers of credibility cannot be obtained for all the components of the tested public [12]. It is understood that the elements of the psycho-demographic profile of subjects operate, hence the answers are different for non-identical ages, education, profession, financial level, expectations and so on. What is the danger of losing the credibility of media sources in informing citizens? The recourse to sources competing with the press, the cooling of the journalist-consumer partnership, the accentuation of manipulation in the absence of the 'watchdog of democracy', the waste of public opinion authority in matters of general interest, the increasing advantage of political class… Located at the bottom of the positioning between media and

consumers of mediatic message, dialogue gradually fell under the sign of collapse, even though, with the emergence of bidirectional-symmetric communication, in the beginning of the twentieth century, the idea of the mutual advantage in mass communication and in the field of public relations seemed to be definitively consolidated [13].

3. Conclusions

In our opinion, in the fine fabric of this novelty in modern communication, the asymmetry traditionally known in the field of written press and advertising, from their beginnings, when specialised communicators were proposing agenda for discussion, new ideas, products of all sorts, expecting the adequate reaction from the target audience, has been preserved. Keeping in touch with readers through weekly entries, the editorial phone, the text message from the viewer, the radio intervention on given topics etc. does not satisfy the exigency of the dialogue in question. We gladly accept that the interactivity advanced by the new media is coming close to the claims of dialogue, even though experts would invoke, towards the successful 'art of conversation', equal exposure to the message, language skills, the mastery of questions and superiority of comments, the efficacy of punctual answers etc. How far can the interactivity of postmodern communication media get? We call this interaction 'bizarre', if the public is, simultaneously, spectator and actor (up to *reality television*); if the first and the last word are confiscated by the public; if the answers of the viewers to the questions of moderators in *debate* programmes become barometer of opinion (even 'spontaneous tele-visual sociology'); if you can no longer answer the appellation 'journalist' outside the 'mission' of inquiring assiduously (up to abuse, making) the consumer overnight become 'star' and you are forced to 'talk' to him; if, from a demanding partner, critical towards the media discourse, the contemporary individual changes into an omniscient-omnipotent who pushes his opinion by force in the public space and considers legitimate the participation in everything…

From 'gathering facts' to 'confronting opinions', the journalist answers for an anomaly (some authors consider): the failure of objectivity up to 'legitimate' subjectivity. Occurred 'thanks' to the dictatorship of actuality in the mediatic field, subjectivity has acquired the status of professional norm, easily gathering freedom of expression, personal style, different approach angle, the rush of being the first on the information market etc. Under the pretext that 'it is entitled' to reveal, to dramatise and to amplify routine incidents and events, speeches and figures, the press of the moment pretty well by-passes sometimes the truth, sometimes correctness, 'lying' in the warm shelter of personalisation, individualisation, exclusivity.

To a single interrogation we do not venture to propose a possible answer: who exults at the performance of such a model of media communication?

Acknowledgement

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