Presentation of Media Discourse of Information on Social Issues through the Construction of the *Agenda Setting* and *Framing*

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Abstract. The research underlined the way in which the media content plays a role in the social construction of meaning, with an emphasis on the heroes constructed by the press – positive or negative- on the language strategies, the mediocrity, on the tolerance limit of the assimilation capacity, on the specific functions of the new public space, being at the intersection between the journalistic domain and the cultural domain, taken in a wide sense.Assuming that news and information have no intrinsic value, but framed in a context it gives them coherence and informational value, the research will follow the manner in which the media *shapes* the theme of *social issues* and how this shaping has effect on the public.

To identify the frameworks, the informational content of news is less important than the interpretative comment accompanying them. This aspect is particularly relevant for news dedicated to social issues, given the fact that the framings that are offered become symbolic tools that emphasize certain aspects of events or characters that are talked about.

Keywords: Agenda Setting, News Value, Informational Era

1. General Framework

"Communication contract" between press and readers is not formulated in terms of "equality of parties", although theoretically the public is the "supreme authority", so the possibilities for decision on the materials promoted by the media are practically impossible (Seceleanu, 2009). Press has as primary objective, although undeclared, the exertion of major influences on social life, changing the actions of individuals or groups and trying to create a kind of negative dependence to the products it promotes.

Information is essential, vital, but we are witnessing an informational "boom", directly proportional to the social dynamics in the "century of speed", but also with media inflation and the demand for "thrills" from the consumers of media information (since providing information often exceeds the tolerance limit of our ability to assimilate, we can talk about informational over saturation of society).

The press acts in shaping society, by imposing new principles and rules, by building a scale of values, with the effect of creating new images and social representations, and thus, changing (or at least influencing) the existing collective mentalities.

For source, the information is not exhausted after its broadcast moment, but most times, the simple broadcasting diminishes its value, and multiplying it does not have "quantitative" effects on the source, but repetitive broadcasting can produce a strong suggestibility of receivers; in addition, the idea of "informational saturation" is becoming increasingly invoked in critical contemporary society.

In these circumstances arise, logically and "bound to", some inherent questions. How do the media in general, the press in particular, inform us, what criteria and principles (other than the traditional - as "current", "spatial and temporal proximity", "high interest" to the public) represent the base for selection and hierarchy of information, how are they passed to the public by implementing the various strategies of language?

The press sets, imposes rules of behavior, forms new mentalities among the public. With the help of mass- media, people assimilate prohibitions, requirements and restrictions, values and symbolic representations, the categories of thought specific to a society. Most researchers consider that media

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messages are there to confirm or reinforce the rules of society, even when they present deviant behaviors, or violations of current regulations.

Creating a screening of issues with social impact approached by the media, using four dimensions: volume, frequency of the themes investigated, types of frames, their dynamics and the elements that determine the dynamic, will help identify the effects of media on behavior patterns and the rules of society, which will enable the definition of their problems and causal analysis.

The analysis of the effects of media communication will be addressed by the agenda-setting paradigm and its recent developments related to the effects of framing type (frames of interpretation). The *agenda model* (McCombs, Shaw, 1972) is based on the idea that the public often considers the issues presented by the media important. The *interpretation framework model* (Entman, 2004) assumes that the media message already contains a certain direction of interpretation of objective events objectives. According to this model, media dictates not only what to think, what to talk among us, but also how to think about certain topics. Researches of agenda-setting and framing types are only emerging in our country, most researchers analyzing with predilection political issues, especially those about election campaigns.

2. Objectives and Methodology

Assuming that news and information have no intrinsic value, but framed in a context it gives them coherence and informational value, the research will follow the manner in which the media *shapes* the theme of *social issues* and how this shaping has effect on the public.

To identify the frameworks, the informational content of news is less important than the interpretative comment accompanying them. This aspect is particularly relevant for news dedicated to social issues, given the fact that the framings that are offered become symbolic tools that emphasize certain aspects of events or characters that are talked about.

The theme will be pursued in dynamic, taking into account the interference that occurs with politics and how it can lead to changes in presentation of social issues from the perspective of the election year 2012.

As a method of news study, *content analysis* was used, having as a registration unit the news that contains explicit social or economic issues with social involvement, and as a unit context the news broadcast, a significant dimension being related to identifying the types of frames operated during the news. Analysis framework consisted in the main news editions of the first three generalist channels in terms of audience from Romania - ProTV, Antena 1 and TVR 1 and the first two news channels - Realitatea TV and Antena 3.

The news corpus analyzed consists of 75 news programs, broadcasted between October to December 2011, which contained 215 news that were complying with the selection criteria. These were encoded by eight students of Communication and Political Science Faculty of Andrei Saguna University of Constanta. Fidelity encoder was estimated between 0.66 and 0.82, using Holsti's formula (cited by Wimmer Dominick, 2000: 151), Fidelity = 2M / (N1 + M2), where M is the number of coding decisions on which two coders agree, while N1, respectively N2 represent the number of coding decisions of the first, respectively of the second encoder.

Media content analysis had as a working tool a system of categories (so-called codebook), which included the following dimensions:1. the importance paid by the media (TV channels selected) to social issues in relation to other subjects of the moment; 2. differences between generalist channels and thematic channels, in terms of agenda setting; 3. dominant framing (aimed at identifying the five classic framings found in the literature: responsibility framing, morality, economic, conflict framing and framing related to human size); 4. dominant journalistic style;

The research questions which guided the analysis were the following:

IC1. What are the dominant socio-economic issues in television news?

IC2. What was the importance that the media (TV channels analyzed) paid to social issues in relation to other subjects of the moment?

IC3. What is the visibility of representatives of various political parties in these news?

IC4. What were the dominant framings in the news?

IC5. What is the dominant journalistic style?

3. The Modeling of the Social Issues Topic by Mass-Media

From the seven topics contained in the analysis grid, the topic most frequently being under discussions is that of the economical crisis. This topic has been approached, by itself or together with other topics, in 24,6% from the interventions (Table 1). Other topics to which the news programs have granted a great importance were the level of living and the reduction of salaries and pensions.

It has to be mentioned that, no matter what topic is approached, the economical crisis appeared as an explicit or implicit label, only in 28% of the cases there was a connection with the economical situation at an European level or worldwide level, in the rest of the cases the economical crisis being presented as a problem caused by an internal situation which was badly managed.

Table 1. Topics approached

Topics approached	Topics approached (N)	Topics from total topics (%)
Economical crisis	53	24,6%
Level of living	47	21,8%
Reduction of salaries and pensions	45	20,9%
Unemployment	31	14,4%
Health system	21	9,7%
Education system	10	4,6%
Education system	8	3,7%
Total	**215**	**100%**

An appetite of the televisions for the social news can be seen, but there are two exceptions-TVR1-which is a public television and has a drafting policy which imposes a strict balancing of the approached topics and Antena 1, a general television which is a part of the Intact company from which Antena 3 is also a part, and which manages to balance the share of the news topics, counterbalancing with Antena 3.

Table 2. Distribution appearance of topics concerning UE in the news

Topics approached	ProTV	Antena 1	TVR1	Realitatea TV	Antena 3
Socio-economical topics	68	20	18	58	60
Other topics	73	83	77	64	57
Total	**141**	**103**	**236**	**122**	**117**

In order to see the importance granted to the news, their visibility in the headlines and promos was observed, and as it can be seen in table 3, the chosen way of promotion didn't focus on the promos very much.

Table 3 Percentage of news presented in headlines, promos

News visibility (types of news)	N	%
News presented in headline	33	15.7%
Total news presented in headline	210	100%
News presented in promos	9	9.8%
Total news presented in promos	92	100%

Another indicator of the prominent character of news is given by their place in the structure of the news bulletins. Each news bulletin was divided into three parts, in order to see which is the position of news referring to the UE, having as a landmark two cut points: 33.33 and 66.67. In the first third of the news programs from the TV channels in the sample, there were 27.6% from the analyzed news, and in the first two thirds the percent reached 63.26%. If we analyze only TVR 1, the percent of the news placed in the first third of the news, it reaches to 36.36%, and in the first two thirds to 61.5%. We can say that, although at TVR 1

there are less news dedicated to the socio-economical issues than at Realitatea TV or Antena 3, these are more prominent, because they are placed much more in the first third of the respective program.

In the news analysis we watched the modality by which the political issues use as an opportunity the socio-economical problems, very much stressed in 2011, in order to prepare the election campaign from the 2012 for local and parliamentary elections, using the opportunity to construct the image of a "hero" even by the exaggeration of some situations or by their multiplication.

With respect to the construction of the public agenda by means of the news, some authors (Gans, 1980) sustain that the media agenda is determined by the media, organizational and commercial necessities, which might confuse the public regarding the "real" problems the nation is being confronted with; even if the news editors sustain that they transmit "mirror-images" of the reality, the media covering of the national interest topics could contradict this statement.

Table 4. Politicians number in socio-economical news

	ProTV	Antena1	TVR1	Realitatea TV	Antena3
Politicians number	5	8	4	18	23

It can be noticed that ProTV together with the public channel TVR1, can manage with a neutral approach, without an implication of the political parts, at the opposite side being Realitatea TV and Antena 3.

From the point of view of the political affiliation, the guests were, in the largest number, members of the PSD (23) and PNL (22), parties being in opposition. The governing party PDL had only 8 present guests and not at Antena 3 where the PDL members refused to participate as guests because of the aggressive policy of that channel. UDMR (a party from the governing coalition) also had 5 present guests in the programs.

There are a lot of researches which underline the role of emotions in the evaluations of the political messages (Castells, 2009; Marcus, 2002). Starting from the discoveries in the neuroscience and the cognitive psychology domains, Marcus (2002) prooved the connexion between emotions and thinking in the process of taking political decisions. The research steps from the political communication shows the recurrence of emotions as a central element of the electoral campaigns. Some of these emotions play an important role in the political process: fear and hope. Emotions function as a „detector of relevance". Emotions offer more force to the arguments, not only by making them more convincing, but, more, by the fact that they redirect attention and motivate the passing from thinking to action.Emotions are those which transmit the signal „This is important!" (Castells, 2009:185).

The politicians focused on emotions, exaggerating the fear connected to the crisis, the level of living, pensions, salaries and giving the hope that the new elections are going to modify the present situation.

In order to identify the main predominant framings in news, we used a deductive approach, the coding of framings was exclusively done for the social news. Each question has been coded in a binary way, with „yes" or „no", „yes" representing the presence of the framing in the news, and „no" –its absence.

The fitting of the social and economical topic is given by the model of responsibility, with some conflicting and conspiring themes. The framing of responsibility is dominant, suggesting the identification of solutions and ideas in order to manage the crisis. This framing also suggests in the analyzed news the tendency to „hunt witches", to identify and punish the guilty people. This type of approach can prove to be constructive on a short term, but destructive on a long term, because it is blocking in the paradigm of hunting for the guilty persons.

The economical framing was the most prominent, a fact easily to anticipate, taking into consideration the economical nature of the crisis. The framing of responsibility, that which gives the measure of the seriousness of the media communication means, is very much close to the value of the economical framing. This means that the tendency to frame the crisis realities from the perspective of finding the guilty people and identifying the solutions has become more important.

The framing of the human dimension is less important, which is in a great measure inconsistent with the implementation of the austerity measures.

The framing of the conflict is stressed, the progress of the crisis being accompanied by a conflicting perspective on the events, offered by the internal political disputes.

In order to clarify the dominant journalistic the version through which Coders should type 1 if the journalistic style largely is <u>descriptive</u> – tells what happened in a rather straightforward, descriptive style and focuses on known facts – and 2 if the journalistic style mainly is <u>interpretive</u> – analyzes, evaluates, interprets or explains a situation while also describing aspects of it.

Dominant style	ProTV	Antena 1	TVR 1	Realitatea TV	Antena 3
1. Descriptive	35	21	42	38	12
2. Interpretive	25	48	15	29	53
3. Cannot be determined	40	31	33	33	35
Total	100	100	100	100	100

4. Conclusions

The research underlined the way in which the media content plays a role in the social construction of meaning, with an emphasis on the heroes constructed by the press – positive or negative- on the language strategies, the mediocrity, on the tolerance limit of the assimilation capacity, on the specific functions of the new public space, being at the intersection between the journalistic domain and the cultural domain, taken in a wide sense.

It is obvious that something from the social day-to-day experience of Romanians can be seen in the news speech, the analysis of the type agenda setting and framing.

The research highlight how the media content plays a role in the social construction of significance, focusing on the heroes created by the media - positive or negative - , on language strategies, promoting mediocrity, on the tolerance limit of assimilation capacity, on the specific functions of the new public space, located at the intersection of journalistic field, political field and cultural field, understood in a broad sense.

It is obvious that something from the daily social experience of Romanians transpires in the discourse of news, analysis of framing and setting agenda type permitting to identify the main dominant framings in news and the construction of scales of relevant measurement of the main framing types.

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