

BABES-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY, CLUJ-NAPOCA
FACULTY OF POLITICAL, ADMINISTRATIVE
AND COMMUNICATION SCIENCES
PH.D. SCHOOL COMMUNICATION PR AND ADVERTISING

SELF-PERCEIVED ROLES OF ONLINE JOURNALISTS IN ROMANIA

- Summary -

Ph.D. Candidate:

Elena-Laura Popescu

Ph.D. Supervisor:

Prof. Delia Cristina Bălaș (Balaban) Ph.D.

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Self-Perceived Roles of online journalists in Romania

In the span of three decades, global communication has changed in ways that nobody could predict, engaging transformations at the level of the global economy, politics, diplomatic relations, communities, mentalities, morality, social conflict, social inequalities, and warfare. Among all the professions in society, historically journalists have had a key role to play as the official disseminators of information and establishers of truth, leaders of opinion, shapers of the narratives in society, and ultimately as shapers of mentalities. The unprecedented technological changes have reshaped society into a digital network, breaking and replacing all the traditional mechanisms journalism based its authority and privileges, turning the profession into just one of the many ways a myriad of actors are able now to communicate, leveling all forms of content into a giant net of information that needs to be navigated and deciphered. The new creators and disseminators of content come with new motivations and interests, using information not just as a more or less accurate reflection of reality, but also as disruption and source of profit. With their double status of employer and servant of the public interest, journalists have always lived with the tension between their different types of loyalty - in order to be able to do their job, they had to build a close relation to the truth and an honesty to their sources and audience; and it was precisely their reputation and trustworthiness always at risk of being hijacked by their own media owners, by lobbyists, politicians and advertisers for its high value of trustworthiness. Journalism as a profession has always had nuanced meanings and implied significant differences in practice in different countries and regions of the globe, as well as different standards of freedom and acceptable risks. Therefore, the response of journalism to the impact of the digital has been widely different in the different countries and media traditions. Romania is a country with a very young tradition of free press and with a complicated geopolitical context. As a country from the former Eastern-European communist bloc, it is today perceived as one of the most corrupt countries in Europe, but also as one of the flourishing hubs of high technology in Europe, and as a country where the speed of the Internet has been high from the beginning. In the span of two decades, on the background of an economic depression, the printed press almost disappeared, in a brutal shift to online. Placed at a geopolitical border between democratic and non-democratic systems,

Romania has always played an important part in how one or another system has historically become dominant in the region, and, in the past 30 years, Romanian journalism has produced uneven, but occasionally seminal pieces with influences on the entire region. Due to the online approach and the economic crisis of 2008-2009, journalists in Romania have lost their visibility, saw their salaries decreased, and have been forced to accept a day-to-day fragile working condition. Many of them have had to make a choice between allowing their reputation to be hijacked and keep their jobs, or changing the profession entirely, and so it only comes natural to ask what are the motivations of those who have decided to keep going, and what are their tactics they hope to win with. In spite of the harshness and the effervescence of the context of Romanian journalism, the existing academic research on the profession, on the shifting role-perception and self-esteem of Romanian journalists in the past two decades is scarce, with even fewer studies that target online journalists, despite the fact that in Romania online journalism has basically replaced print media, and today it is almost impossible not to refer to online journalists in any conversation about Romanian journalists. Not even the current population of online journalists is known in Romania, and the existing audit institutions focus more on Internet traffic than on profiling online media outlets by content, position, and business models. Therefore the current research is attempting to cover a small part of the existing gap, by addressing the following identified needs: identify the particularities of Romanian online journalism against the global trends in digital media, investigate the role perception, self-esteem and ethics of Romanian online journalists, and finally identify new possible steps in the research on the journalism profession in Romania.

The research questions that the present study answered were:

RQ1. What is the image and what are the self-perceived roles of Romanian journalists working mainly online?

RQ2. Are there online specific emergent roles which Romanian journalists find important?

RQ3. Do the traditional roles remain significant in online journalism in Romania?

The thesis comprises six chapters with additional conclusions and references.

The first chapter attempts a historical analysis of the general definitions of journalism, focusing on existing literature about the Western liberal media tradition. The chapter explores the beginnings of journalism in the US and Europe, with a brief presentation of the historical events that led to the birth of newspapers, the establishment of the freedom of press, and the evolution from commercial news to quality journalism and to what are perceived today as the traditional

definitions of journalism norms and values. It analyzes philosophical perspectives on democracy and the public of authors like John Dewey, Walter Lipmann, Jürgen Habermas, Peter Drucker, sociological perspectives from authors like John Thompson and Manuel Castells, quoting historians like Daniel Boorstin, James Beniger and Irvin Fang, and theoreticians of journalism like Bill Kovach, Tom Rosenstiel, Jay Rosen, Davis Merritt, David Mindich and others, in an attempt to identify the norms, the values and the boundaries of the profession as they were defined and researched before the technology revolution of the digital era.

The second chapter explores the existing theories on new media and its current trends by authors and researchers like Henry Jenkins, Jeff Jarvis, Robert Samuels, Ben Bagdikian, Linda Stone, Jim Hall, Bruce Williams, Michael Delli Carpini and others. The chapter analyzes changes in media distribution patterns and consumption, in the relation of journalists with their public as well as with their sources, in business models and media ownership, as well as in the narrative structures and aesthetics of journalism, attempting to establish the theoretical focus of the current study on the specific challenges journalists are facing in the digital era.

The third chapter focuses on the existing theories about journalism as a profession, and the theoretical perspectives and research on journalism roles, starting from the general theories of professionalization by authors like Émile Durkheim, Talcott Parson, Harold L. Wilensky, Amitai Etzioni and Harold L. Wilensky, and exploring the evolution of theories and research on journalism roles from Kaarle Nordenstreng, Denis McQuail, Wolfgang Donsbach, Michael Schudson and others, to Lars Willnat Weaver, G. Cleveland Wilhoit, Thomas Hanitzsch and Tim P. Vos. It also briefly presents the local context of online journalism in Romania. The aim of the chapter is to create a theoretical background and explain the motivation for basing the current study on the methods and finding of the Worlds of Journalism Study, the largest scale comparative research on role perception of journalism to date.

The chapter goes through the evolution of theoretical perspectives on journalism roles, summarizing the main views on normative roles, functional roles, cognitive roles, practiced roles and self-perceived roles. The normative theories, concerning the ideal functions of the press in relation to the larger perspective of a ‘good society’ (Benson 2008), were born and gained momentum in the United States after the end of World War II, with the 1947 Hutchins report of the Commission on Freedom of the Press, which recognized the increasing influence of the mass media agencies over the public opinion. The report emphasized that democracy depends on the

unobstructed flow of meaningful and accurate information and on a responsible press that makes room for a diversity of viewpoints (Standaert, 2021). Among the early theories regarding the functions of the press, the bestselling book by authors Seaton Siebert, Theodore Peterson and Wilbur Schramm, *Four Theories of the Press*, proved seminal to the normative field, in spite of encountering vast critique and being contested to its core. Some of its claims still have an influence on modern media theories: Siebert et. al formulated their classic four theories of the relation of the press to society and government, starting from the premise that journalism roles have to be put in the perspective of the cultural, political and economic context in which the respective press developed, as “the press always takes on the form and coloration of the social and political structures within which it”, (1956: 1). The authors envisioned four types of societies that shaped the forms and principles of the press. The main thesis of the seminal *Four Theories of the Press*, that journalism is shaped by the context of its political and social context, still stands today, but the perspectives themselves have received much criticism in time. An unwanted outcome of its major influence on media theories is that it has created a biased view of the non-democratic press theories, all seen as negative by the Western press and communication research (Benson, 2008). At the same time, it was not doubled by any significant critical analysis of the ownership and funding mechanisms specific to capitalism (Baker 2002; McQuail 2005). The media researchers of the 40s and 50s became increasingly aware of and interested in the functions of mass communication, the focus shifting from ideal journalism roles in society to the actual impact of the messages of the media on the society, to how they serve their audience. To study such impact, theorists applied the sociological theory of functionalism to mass communication. Functionalism or the functional perspective is one of the major theoretical frameworks in sociology, based on Emile Durkheim’s body of work. Durkheim was interested in the mechanisms that made a society form and hold together, in how a society can remain relatively stable. He studied shared beliefs, values, behaviours and perspectives that constitute the feeling that people are part of the group and led to solidarity - their common interest to collaborate in maintaining the group. He first introduced the concept of “collective consciousness” in his 1983 “the Division of Labor in Society” and later included it in his other books, defining it as “the totality of beliefs and sentiments common to the average members of society”. Other important theorists of functionalism are Talcott Parsons, Herbert Spencer, and Robert K. Merton. According to Merton, the functions of mass communication can be either manifest (they are intended, and their impact easily observed) or

latent (unintended, and their impact, not easy to notice). In the 50s, sociologist Charles Wright Mills (1959:16) applied functionalism to mass communication, by adding to the previous three functions of mass media identified by Harold Lasswell a fourth one. They are known as the “classic four functions of the media”: environment surveillance, correlation of the parts of society in responding to the environment, cultural transmission, entertainment. However, while the normative perspective on journalism roles, which dominated the research for a long time, is limited by its resort to ideal roles that are imposed on journalists, the functionalist perspective is limited in failing to account for the interactions of the audience with mass communication and how the society constructs meaning from media messages. Starting with Bernard Cohen in 1963, a series of scholars began to look at journalism roles as the elements of a discourse shared among journalists who form a discursive community with a collective set of selected internalized values that are both activated by their members in specific context of their work and shared as professional identity (Aldridge & Evetts, 2003) and as an overall standard used to assess the daily practices of journalism (Russo, 1998). Normative roles do not automatically translate into cognitive or discursive roles, but as a result of a learning process during occupational socialization through formal education or simply through vocational training within the newsrooms (Singer, 2004; Tandoc & Takahashi, 2014). From this perspective, journalistic roles are not created at the macro level of the society and democracy, but at the level of the practice community, where the goals, the myths and the specific tales of the profession are preserved and passed on from veterans to newbies (Gravengaard & Rimestad, 2014). Inside this community the professional identity is reinvigorated and continued through rituals of solidarity and shared interpretations and narratives of key moments in journalism (Zelizer, 1993). Tomas Hanitzsch (2017) sees the cognitive roles of journalists as internalized mechanisms that capture individual aspirations and private ambitions in relation to their profession, as values that ultimately pertain to the subconscious mind. The research on practiced journalism roles is more recent (Tandoc, Hellmueller, & Vos, 2013; Carpenter, Boehmer, & Fico, 2016, Mellado & Van Dalen, 2014), as researchers started to turn their attention to how normative and cognitive roles are enacted in practice. Practiced journalism roles have, like cognitive and normative roles, a discursive dimension, to which a new dimension is added: a behavioural one. Thomas Hanitzsch (2017) describes them as the practical position journalists take in the discursive construction of the identity of the profession. Journalism cognitive roles, and the normative roles behind them, as role orientations, translate into practiced roles, as role

performance, through a process of role enactment. The views on the degree of alignment of role performance with role orientations are diverse among scholars. Journalism cognitive roles, and the normative roles behind them, as role orientations, translate into practiced roles, as role performance, through a process of role enactment. The views on the degree of alignment of role performance with role orientations are diverse among scholars. Some authors find that there is a tendency among journalists to have consistency between the cognitive role they embrace and their practiced roles (Tandoc, Hellmueller, & Vos, 2013), while others argue that a correspondence is hard to find, as the constraints of their professional context such as a limited editorial freedom rarely allows them to fully enact their cognitive roles (Reich & Hanitzsch, 2013), and that in fact a gap exists between role performance and role orientation (Mellado & Van Dalen, 2014). The most used method in the research on practiced roles has been to extract the roles based on cognitive roles theory from news content (van Dalen, de Vreese, & Albæk, 2012, Skovsgaard et al., 2013, Mellado & Van Dalen, 2014) with the goal of verifying the degree of correlation between cognitive roles and enacted roles. The findings have varied from strong correlation in comparative studies on European countries such as Denmark, Spain, Germany, and UK (van Dalen, de Vreese, & Albæk, 2012) to significant differences between cognitive and practiced roles in Chile and United States (Tandoc, Hellmueller, & Vos, 2013). Thomas Hanitzsch (2017) argues that the goal of such studies should be to focus on the strength of the correlation in various contexts, rather than to find a correspondence between orientation and performance. As for the theoretical roles resulting from the research into role performance, Esser (2008) identified the journalistic intervention, referring to the degree of interpretation of facts by journalists. Mellado (2015) also proposed three dimensions for role performance: presence of the journalistic voice, power relations, and audience approach. The new roles are like the ones proposed earlier by Thomas Hanitzsch (2007) of interventionism, power distance and market orientation. There is a last, distinctive dimension of research into journalistic roles, from the perspective of the journalists' own perceptions on their performed roles. They result from reflections and recollections of journalists and must be differentiated from the actual practiced roles, as they are ultimately a reinterpretation by journalists themselves of their practiced roles against their normative expectations and cognitive aspirations, through a process of role reflection (Hanitzsch, 2019). Through reflection, journalistic practices are put into a coherent narrative, to which a new dimension is added, that of a discursive relationship of journalists with their audience (Hanitzsch, 2017). A common research method into

self-perceived roles is to ask journalists how much they think they put their cognitive roles into practice. As in case of the relation between practiced and cognitive roles, the research findings regarding the relation between practiced roles and self-perceived roles vary widely, some studies reporting a correlation (Culbertson, 1983), others identifying a gap between how important some cognitive roles are seen by journalists and their enactment in practice (Ramaprasad and Rahman, 2006, Weischenberg, Löffelholz, & Scholl, 1993). In the role reflection process, author Thomas Hanitzsch (2017) identifies on one hand a realignment to a standard, collectively shared set of journalistic roles, which can hide the gap between role performance and role reflection in narrated roles research and has the effect of reinforcing established norms, and, on the other hand, the potential of challenging those norms and the consensus in the journalists' community of practice, by advocating new roles resulting from practice. So narrated roles are a reflection of practiced roles, which in their turn are an enactment of cognitive roles, themselves being an internalization of normative roles. Thomas Hanitzsch's (Hanitzsch et. al, 2011) unification of the four categories of journalistic roles is crucial, since the separate research into each category has produced various, disparate, partially overlapping theoretical sets of roles that were lacking clarity. Hanitzsch and Vos (2016) proposed a larger systematization of journalistic roles by correcting the Western theoretical bias and by adding the long-neglected domain of everyday life to the political one, thus recuperating a large part of the scope of everyday journalism. Only for clarity, they have designed two separate catalogues of journalism roles, based on the domain they cover: political or everyday life. The first catalogue of 18 politically oriented specific roles addressed the domain of political life, in which journalists must contribute to society by providing the information citizens need to be able to take part in the political life and to be self-governing and free. The 18 roles are mapped to six, higher-level functions of journalism: the informational-instructive – referring to the informative role of journalists, of bringing information to citizens that is relevant for them to participate in the political life, through a process of “transmission, (re-)packaging and storytelling”; the analytical-deliberative – referring to roles that imply “a direct intervention in a political discourse”, to engage the public and to empower citizens; the critical-monitorial - traditionally seen as the core norm of Western journalism, based on the theory of the “Fourth Estate”, referring to the role of journalists to voice criticism and to hold accountable the political institutions in power; the advocative-radical – denoting roles of participation in the political life, as opposed to just being observers. The authors refer to a participation in the discursive realm,

when journalists act as advocates for certain causes, as missionaries who promote certain values or as adversaries of the structures in power; the developmental-educative – referring to a participation of journalists beyond the discursive realm in the real world, when they contribute to the education of the public, to promoting social change; the collaborative-facilitative – referring to roles of supporting the government by promoting the official narrative. A second catalogue of roles is systematized by the two authors to reflect a neglected part of the journalists' work and identity, that of providing advice and guidance to readers in their everyday life through consumer news, roles which have increased in importance with the fundamental shift in collective guidance in a context in which the social institutions have been losing their authority and normative power, leaving room to journalism to cover those roles (Hanusch & Hanitzsch, 2013). Hanitzsch and Vos (2016) propose a set of seven additional roles mapped on the needs of the domain of everyday life. The seven newly identified roles are mapped to three major needs of everyday life: consumption, identity, and emotion.

The end of the third chapter focuses on the Romanian research context of online journalism, briefly presenting the specific context of the local press in its short transition from a Stalinist model before 1989 to a transitional liberal model in the past 30 years. The Soviet model imposed at the end of the 40s deviated the Romanian press from the French model it embraced at the beginning of the 20th century, turning it into a pure propaganda with long-term ideological effects and authoritarian mentalities. After 1989, most of the journalism schools in Romania adopted the US model (Mogoş, Meza, 2013). The number of newspapers exploded, rather mirroring in tone and quality the yellow press than any European standards of quality, and the first private televisions appeared in the 90s. At the end of the 90s and the beginning of the 2000s, the rise of the Internet marked a turning point in the diversification and expansion and of the media landscape and by 2005 the newsrooms were seeing the benefits that Internet was providing: the reducing costs of news production and dissemination and a new and growing appeal for young consumers (Dragomir, Thompson, 2010). The digitization of the media was sped up by the economic crisis of 2008 and at the beginning of the second decade, most Romanian media had online editions, some them having migrated exclusively to online content to cut their costs. In terms of quality, Dragomir and Thompson show, the online editions propagate the same sensationalism, scandal-driven content, triviality, and editorial agendas of media owners, and they even note a declining in quality towards “herd journalism”. However, new blogs and independent, digitally born news outlets appeared and

developed, bringing a diversification to the media contents, pressuring the traditional media to cover more topics to survive on the competitive market. User-generated content appeared “mainly as comments on popular news websites and on independent forums” (Dragomir, Thompson, 2010), but it was limited mainly to comments used by bloggers to increase their advertising revenues. By 2010, there were around 200 Romanian blogs summing over 10,000 unique visitors monthly, but most of them did not provide political content and did not cover serious issues (Coman et al., 2011). The conclusions of a qualitative research conducted on the professional culture and professional practices of journalists by Natalia Vasilendiuc and Peter Gross (2012) emphasize how the Internet created more problems to the media professionalization process by “(1) delaying the establishment of a bona fide definition of news in the eyes of Romanian audiences, (2) making it easier for journalists to continue their less-than-professional practices, and (3) by increasing the array of money-making vehicles to the detriment of increasing the platforms for socially responsible media”. The two researchers targeted two generations of journalists, those who started their professional activities in the 1990s and those who became journalists in the 2000s. For the older generation, they found, the criteria of selecting and disseminating information and establishing the newsworthiness were a combination of personal “flair and intuition” and editorial policies, leading to a personalized nature of journalistic practices, and the editorial constraints and sometimes personal interest makes the public interest a secondary goal in the journalistic work. From their own testimonies, the journalists as gatekeepers see themselves more like owners of information “than responsible stakeholders in the quality and integrity of the news and information product” (Vasilendiuc, Gross, 2012) and they distribute information with the purpose of generating conflicts. The authors also note a monopolization of information resources paralleled by precarious processes of information verification and a common practice of text appropriation and plagiarism by journalists who copy and publish press releases as if they were written by them, while both practices - providing unreliable or misleading information, and plagiarism - going unpunished. They identify the dominating element of the ‘90s generation discourse: its members generally came from different professions and embraced journalism as a vocation, they relied on talent and were trained as journalists in the editorial office. In contrast, the 2000s generation are young journalists who have received a formal, Western-style education, who declare their adherence to the professional values of objectivity, fairness, credibility, honesty, and truth. They see themselves as watchdogs, educators of the public, opinion leaders, promoters of social change defenders of

civic freedoms and rights, supporters of social change. In practice, however, journalists from the same generation became the so-called “Google reporters” and “copy-and-paste and office-bound journalists” (Vasilendiuc, Gross 2012). The authors argue that while the 2000s generation has a formal education in the “ideal” model of journalism, they have not been able to put the corresponding roles into practice. As part of the cause, they refer to Nicolae Tudorel’s (2008) argument that the young generation of educated journalists could not exert enough pressure on the older generation of media managers that still dominate the Romanian press, imposing an authoritarian model of constraining editorial policies. Those managers promote journalists not on professional merits but on personal interests, undermining professionalization. As another part of the cause, Vasilendiuc and Gross point to the heterogeneous nature of the Romanian journalists, a professional group with most of its members non-associated professionally, made up of individuals who are insecure and vulnerable. While they struggle to resist editorial constraints and to define the current status of the profession, “they hide, pro forma, behind journalistic patterns associated with Anglo-Saxon professional standards reflected in various professional codes, studied at Faculties of Journalism or presented by Western experienced professionals” (Vasilendiuc, Gross 2012). Romania has been included in the most ample comparative research to date, *Worlds of Journalism Study*, and the findings of the second wave, conducted between 2011 and 2016, show a further feminization and professionalization of the profession, the majority of the interviewed sample being young women with university degree, a general rejuvenation of the guild coming with a high degree of inexperience (Coman et al, 2016). Of the entire sample, only 22.6 percent were employed in online media, showing still a large employment in traditional formats such as print and televisions (public and private). The profession value seen as the most important was objectivity, the declaration that they must report events exactly as they happened being strongly shared by the respondents. The researchers also found a good level of awareness, at least at a declarative level, among Romanian journalists, of their duty to serve their public and to assume a social role in the community. Among other important values were promoting tolerance and cultural diversity, supporting national development and social change, and allowing people to express their views. The importance to assume the role of watchdogs was lower, only half of the interviewees expressing it as a strong value. There was a high level of agreement on the importance of adhering to codes of professional ethics, however a quarter of the respondents considered that ethics was a matter of personal judgment. However, the respondents admitted that in practice ethics can be

partially abandoned when working on an important story, but only 22.2% agreed to the employment of controversial methods. In that, the researchers identified a gap between declarative and daily practices. In terms of editorial freedom, the findings of the 2016 research study contrasted with those of Vasilendiuc and Gross' 2012 qualitative research, as, at least at a declarative level, almost 80% of the respondents affirmed they had complete freedom in selecting their stories and more than half participated in editorial coordination activities. Coman et. all reported that the editorial policy remains a significant factor of influence for Romanian journalists, but access to information and ethics are rated as the most important ones. Also, according to their findings, while technology has an increasing impact on information gathering, most of the respondents are negatively impacted by it, as they must work more hours and have less time to verify their stories. Their perception is reported, with a high degree of uncertainty, that the credibility of the press is weakening. A constant find of the second wave of the study concludes that "the influence of western ways of practicing journalism has been and remains minimal". The findings of the second wave of the Worlds of Journalism Study (<https://worldsofjournalism.org/>) are particularly relevant for the current research, which attempts to apply bases its methodology on its questionnaire, but focuses on a cohort of online journalists, and adds a dimension of journalistic roles imposed by employees on journalists.

The fourth chapter comprises the methodology of the current study that includes a survey and expert interviews, and the findings of each research dimension are presented in chapter fifth and sixth respectively. Research on journalism education, organizational models, business models, ethics, and content analysis are all relevant ways to build the necessary dimensions to answer the question of what remains at the core of the profession in online journalism. However, given the limited resources of this study, the research was focused on role perception and it was performed on two dimensions: a quantitative research through the dissemination of a survey applied to the Romanian online journalists, and a qualitative research through semi-structured interviews conducted with Romanian media experts. While there is an obvious subjective limitation to the findings in this approach, profiling the Romanian online journalists can contribute to the limited data existing for digital journalism and can be a good start for larger-scaled studies on Romanian digital journalism. The wider ongoing international research effort conducted by German researcher Prof. Dr. Thomas Hanitzsch and his teams of contributors from the Worlds of Journalism Study (<https://worldsofjournalism.org/>), comprising country reports and aggregated

data about current self-perceived roles and journalism ethics constituted the foundation of the current study. The measurements of the variables in the survey were inspired by the Worlds of Journalism Study survey and adapted to the purpose of the present research. The current methodological context took into account the aim to perform a local analysis and to restrict the respondent population to active online journalists, to add an employer-employee dimension to the questionnaire, and to introduce more specific social media questions due to the increasing relevance of this field. The questionnaire consisted of 39 items, grouped on the following key variables: socio-demographic backgrounds, ethical orientations, perceived influences, journalistic roles, employer perspective on journalistic roles, and social media use. As a second method, expert interviews were applied. They were conducted online in January 2020 and in April 2021 respectively (the gap occurring due to the COVID-19 pandemic disruption) and six media experts agreed to participate: Raluca Radu, Associate Professor PhD and the Director of the Journalism Department at the Faculty of Journalism and Communication Studies, University of Bucharest; Minodora Sălcudean, Associate Professor PhD in the Department of Journalism of “Lucian Blaga” University in Sibiu; Natalia Vasilendiuc, Associate Professor PhD in the Department of Journalism at the University of Bucharest; Ioana Avădani, founder and Chairman of the Center for Independent Journalism in Bucharest; Andreea Mogoș, Associate Professor PhD in the Department of Journalism and Digital Media of the “Babes-Bolyai” University in Cluj-Napoca, and Radu Meza, Associate Professor, PhD in the Department of Journalism and Digital Media of the “Babes-Bolyai” University in Cluj-Napoca. A list of questions was sent by e-mail and the interviews were conducted via Zoom and Skype. The semi-structured interviews included ten open questions focused on the following topics: the particularities of the transition to online journalism in Romania, changes in role perceptions and the self-esteem of online journalists in Romania, the evolution of journalism ethics in the Romanian online, the challenges occurring in the relation of employer-employee faced by Romanian online journalists, as well as present trends and emergent journalism roles in new media. To serve the purpose of the present research, an analysis of the interviews was performed as a thematical analysis.

The main challenge in disseminating the questionnaire and collecting the answers was the lack of reliable data on the population of online journalists to be included in the study. When the research started, the Romanian National Institute of Statistics had no gathered data on the journalism population in its whole, let alone the population of online journalists, while BRAT (the

Romanian Joint Industry Committee for Print and Internet) provided collected data on online media outlets only regarding their audience, traffic data and socio-demographic profiles. The second wave of the Worlds of Journalism Study (2012-2016) included 340 Romanian respondents from all media formats, a number which was used as a point of reference as to what would be the relevant size of the population sample. Facebook was the social media application of choice in Romania in 2018 (<http://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats/all/romania>), and so it was used to identify and get into contact with respondents, in a partial snowball sampling model. Partial, because the author started from the active online journalists in her personal network and navigated towards their networks and to subsequent networks with the purpose of collecting more contacts, but, once identified, all journalists were contacted directly and presented the questionnaire and the goal of the research. In gathering data from Facebook, 214 journalists were identified, and between June and November 2018, they were contacted and invited three times on the Facebook Messenger to participate in the survey. There were 150 respondents willing to participate in the survey, 29 of whom had no relevant online experience, and 27 of whom had exited the profession. The survey was applied to 150 professionals working in online journalism in Romania. The survey was distributed online via a link to the questionnaire: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1VvzfTCPByNBXGXeZXf_N8I04DOdB-t-lZKrPq_QhlpQ/prefill. 102 online journalists provided valid answers. No personal data was collected in the survey or during the conversations with the respondents on Facebook. All journalists who responded to the questionnaire had to be active online journalists. As at the time of disseminating the questionnaire there was no reliable local data regarding the population of journalists working exclusively online, a relevant question was included in the questionnaire: as a prerequisite for being invited to answer the questionnaire they were asked if they currently produce online journalist content with a given regularity in any form of employment - as full time or part time employees, or as freelancers. They were not required to work for online publications exclusively. The 102 answers came from journalists working or collaborating with 19 online media outlets and one news aggregator. The large majority of the 19 online publications have a national distribution. One last category was added for freelancing journalists or journalists that had their own blogs. Half of the media outlets the respondents were working for at the time of the research were native digital publications, while Adevarul.ro, Ziuaveche.ro, Opiniastudenteasca.ro, Revistaartesimeserii.ro are the online versions of traditional print outlets, Mediafax.ro is the news

website of the Mediafax news agency, and Romania-actualitati.ro and Santateatv.ro are online versions of the national radio, and a specialized TV outlet respectively. In terms of profile, the sample is diverse, with less than half of the respondents being generalists, the other three most significant segments being investigative journalism, feature stories and cultural content, opinion journalists being one of the less represented professional categories. 50% of the respondent journalists declared they produce exclusive online content, while the largest category of journalists, who also produced traditional media formats, had a previous experience in print media. In terms of experience, a large majority of the respondents had at least five years of journalistic experience, which is quite inexperienced in terms of the length of a journalist's career, but not too short in the online context, and the largest three professional groups were reporters, editors and editors-in-chief, with 13 other respondents having other various coordinating roles within their media organizations. The sample was dominated by female journalists, 58 respondents being women. The largest age segment of the sample was 30-39 years old professionals. As for their education, 93% of the respondents have a bachelor's degree, but only a third of them have graduated from a journalism school, while 41% have a degree in any type of communication. The data seems to be consistent more with the vocational mentality of the 1990s generation of journalists than with the formally educated 2000s generation. 78% declared they have traditional journalism experience, 15% having a combined experience of at least two of the three traditional media - print, TV, and Radio. 57% have a print media background, 19% worked in television, while 8% worked in radio before becoming online journalists. Only 11 respondents declared themselves members of a local, national or international journalism organization or professional association, an indication of a very low representation in Romania of professional organisations who protect and support the profession. Over 70% of the respondents declared they had a full-time, permanent job contract with their employers, the second largest category being the freelancers (but small in comparison), their collaboration being based on temporary job contracts or other forms of employment. Over 65% were working for one media website only, with 18% working for two, 9% working for three separate online media outlets, and 8% for more than three. The findings suggest that while the work of online journalists in Romania is generally regulated through permanent work contracts, the financial compensations are small compared to other professions for the same years of experience, as the wages of 60% of the respondents were under 800 euro. As a reference, the 2018 average net wage in Romania was 565 euro (<https://www.reinisfischer.com/average-salary->

[european-union-2018](#)). 28 respondents refused to answer when asked about their current income from online journalism activities. 40 online journalists had other jobs, ten working in a form of communication that are traditionally separated on ethical grounds from journalism communication, such as copywriting, PR and marketing. In terms of job satisfaction and, from a larger perspective, happiness with one's chosen profession, 41% of the respondents declared they had at least once quit a previous job, however only 22% declared they had ever thought to change their profession, indicating a strong attachment to the profession in spite of temporary dissatisfaction for a certain job.

The fifth chapter presents the findings of the quantitative research, grouped on the main variables. Among the respondents, a strong motivation to serve the public interest was identified as the main motivation to choose the profession and a general disinterest in the financial aspect of the job, which is validated by their strong attachment to it in spite of the generally modest income. The findings are in line with the conclusions of the Worlds of Journalism Study (2016) (<https://worldsofjournalism.org/>). The three most important factors declared to influence them as professionals were the deontology of the profession (90.2%), the access to information (69%), and their own opinions and beliefs (65,7%). The specific online influences coming from the audience, deadlines, and traffic were discarded by most respondents. The majority feel free from influences from their employers and they feel they have autonomy over the content they produce within their current newsrooms. The study finds there is a strong general correlation at a discursive level between the online journalists' own ambitions and aspirations and the values of the newsrooms and employers for which they work, and that online journalists do not feel their freedom is restricted by editorial policies. Almost all journalists perceived the ethical principles of the profession as being very important or important for them, regardless of how flexible they would be in particular circumstances or if they perceived themselves or not as entrepreneurs, suggesting a strong understanding of the fundamentals of the profession at least in theory. The view of online journalists on ethical practices are more nuanced, however, but overall, the perception of the ethical dimension of the profession was strong among the Romanian online journalists that participated in the survey. The findings suggest that online journalists tend to declare a strong attachment to the ethics of the profession when they are regarded as an abstract monolith that gives them prestige as professional communicators, but that they have a significantly more flexible attitude in applying particular ethical practices in their activity. In terms of social media networks

preferences, Facebook was found to heavily dominate the online media landscape in Romania, both as information source and distribution channel, while Twitter is only marginal. The comparative sizes of the individual networks that online journalists have already developed suggests that Facebook will continue to dominate as the main social media communication tool for journalists in Romania. As for the journalistic roles, from the six needs identified by Thomas Hanitzsch and Tim Vos for the political life, the two most important for the online Romanian journalists were the informative-instructive and the critical-monitorial. Online journalists in Romania favour informative and monitorial roles over participative roles. The most important value for the respondents was objectivity, to present things as they are, in line with the findings of Worlds of Journalism Study (2016) (<https://worldsofjournalism.org/>). Among the online journalists interviewed, 92% found objectivity important or very important. In online journalism, exposing corruption is also a dominating value, 93% with 93% of the respondents finding it important or very important, along with monitoring the actions of the politicians (87%), indicating an increase in importance in comparison with the findings of Worlds of Journalism Study (2016) that only half of the respondents found the watch dog role important, or suggesting a bigger focus of the online media landscape on the problem of corruption. The current study finds that while objectivity remained dominant, exposing corruption has become equally important in 2018, a fact that can be correlated to the political turmoil and street movements that increased between 2016 and 2018. Fighting corruption is perceived as one of the main duties of Romanian online journalists. Romanian online journalists perceive themselves free of religious and racial bias, tolerant, inclusive, and supportive of vulnerable groups, confirming the findings of Worlds of Journalism Study (2016) (<https://worldsofjournalism.org/>). However there is a reduced interest in developmental roles such as supporting social change or mediating conflicts in society, which, when correlated with the media experts' view that the online media landscape in Romania is marked by an aggressive, polarized discourse, might indicate a degradation of the journalistic act as well as a lack of perceived accountability of the digital media in relation to the public. The third most important perceived role for Romanian online journalists is to be storytellers, telling relevant stories being important for 87% of the respondents, and 70% finding important to tell interesting stories. 57% of the respondents also find it important to tell captivating stories, suggesting there is a growing entertainer role online. Among the new roles identified there is a growing awareness in the discourse of the journalists of the importance of the storytelling and of the practices to create

media for profit, and the findings suggest that the growing of the role is being driven by newsrooms and media owners. However, the responses suggest that online journalists in Romania are not yet aware or are not willing to admit the hybridization between the informative-instructive and the entertainer roles. At a discursive level, online journalists in Romania share the main values and norms as the overall population of Romanian journalists, being consistent with the findings of pre-existent studies such as the second wave of the research (2012-2016) conducted within The Worlds of Journalism Study (<https://worldsofjournalism.org/>), as well as other smaller-scaled research conducted by local researchers (Vasilensiuc & Gross, 2012). It brings confirmation that online journalists in Romania have a solid knowledge of the traditional normative values of the liberal press, which they strongly embrace at a discursive level. The similarity of conclusions with previous research conducted on Romanian journalists could be a confirmation of the media experts' view that there is not enough differentiation at the level of media education, roles and practices between traditional and digital media formats, and, as a consequence there is a limited awareness of the importance of the roles that are emerging online due to the new technological opportunities offered by multimedia and by social media platforms.

Chapter six presents the opinions of the media experts regarding the specific context of Romanian online journalism, journalistic roles, the situation of professionalization in Romanian online journalism, the relation employer-employee, and present and future trends of online journalism in Romania. Asked to describe the specifics of the transition from traditional media formats to online media in Romania, the respondents discussed the abrupt transition from print media to online media based on a general business model of free content that led to the rapid decline of the print and to a de-professionalization of journalism in Romania. In general agreement, the respondents identified a gradual and significant de-professionalization of journalism as a result of the switch to online in the past two decades, primarily caused by the change of pace in the production of journalism content, with effects on the quality of the content, the relation of the journalists with their sources (to an extent that journalists work without sources) and their relation with their public, as well as of erosion of the traditional mechanisms to different the weight of information, such as the concepts of breaking news and exclusivity. Being required to produce up to ten distinct pieces of news a day and to have up to 100 posts on their social media networks a day, journalists have become office workers who spend a lot of time on social networks, such as Facebook and Instagram, some of them being required to create stories around declarations taken

from stars. As a result, “copy-paste journalism” or “Google journalism” as a type of journalism with no sources and of low quality has flourished. Another identified change with a ripple effect on journalism was the initial business model that was adopted and then shaped online media in Romania. Replacing circulation, the Internet traffic became the key measurement of the online success of a media publication, and the traffic measurements have become transparent as the progress of technology allowed journalists to access traffic data for each published story. Finding which type of story generates more traffic has influenced the type of content created. The experts also identified positive changes with the digitalization of the media: the digitally native publications have created jobs for a new generation of journalists with a much better understanding of the digital potential and of the needs of the online audience, the gender structure of online journalists have changed towards a strong feminization of the profession, and, as the audience for and consumption of online journalism content has increased, the real good professionals have renewed opportunities to shine switching from a national to an international profile. Asked to identify the major changes on how online journalists perform their activities today in Romania in comparison to 20 years ago, the respondents identified the following major factors of impact on the journalism profession in Romania: the economic crisis of 2008-2009, the heavy migration towards online formats, and the social media networks engulfing the online content production and its consumption patterns. The 2008-2009 economic crisis has been identified as the event that caused structural changes of the newsrooms independently from the technological shift. Due to the crisis, newsrooms shrunk dramatically in order to survive, the scarcity of resources making it harder and harder for journalists to do field work unless absolutely necessary, creating major differences between how TV journalists, who could not work without images, and the rest of journalists worked. Consequently, online journalists have become less and less used to doing interviews and discussing with their sources. The experts identified the main consequences of pace in the deterioration of the relation of journalists with their sources, from the long-term human aspect of the relation based on respect and trust, to the “copy-paste” journalism in which sources are no longer quoted or to the complete disregard from journalists of the impact that the published information can have on their sources. However, in this respect a positive outcome was seen in the fact that the Internet has made readily available valuable and diverse sources stimulating a good quality of information fact-checking that can be done with little resources. A recurrent theme in the responses was that journalism has changed at the level of mentalities: once social media erased

any hierarchies of values for online content, and journalism was forced to democratically compete with any other type of content produced in huge amounts, it was forced to turn towards a “perpetual breaking news” mentality and the adoption of clickbait as a general mechanism to attract audience on social media, practices embraced even by the quality media. All experts agreed on journalism becoming quantitative, a state reflected in a general practice of disseminating information to which it no longer applies criteria of selection according to quality standards. The respondents also identified positive changes brought by the technological breakthrough to the profession, the most important being that journalists have been brought close to their public, which has become critical to the media content available and is even gradually taking over the task to verify the journalistic content, reflecting an upward trend in the development of the critical thinking around journalism. In turn, journalists are no longer verifying only the information they produce, but also other information published online, thus extending and perfecting their verification skills. The medium has brought new opportunities for journalists around the world to team up and create impactful pieces of journalism together, without having to travel and in the absence of substantial resources. Large investigation projects have become possible within functional journalism networks that have been consolidating as a reaction to fake news, to counterbalance the wave of disinformation online. A third significant improvement was identified in the visual quality of the media formats. There was a consensus among the respondents that at the level of discourse, the role perception has not changed with the transition to online journalism in Romania as classic models and methods inspired from the West continue to be invoked. The strong awareness of the traditional journalism norms, principles and values is a result of the young generations of journalists having in their majority a formal education in universities. However, at the level of the profession, with the decrease of the number and activity of professional associations in Romania, only a few newsrooms have managed to maintain codes of conduct as part of a newsroom culture, which impacts the young graduates who justify a lack of interest in applying the professional values by the need to “be flexible” and obey their bosses. The experts agreed that with the increasing pressure from the new forms of competition online, journalists and newsrooms have either got closer to the political power or have embraced “the waves of self-expression of the network public”. The respondents identified three major ways in which media digitalization in Romania has impacted the journalism ethics: through a lack of legal regulations for the online media, at the level of role perception, and at the level of role performance of online journalists in Romania. In terms of

regulations, the particularity of the Romanian online media is the complete lack of laws and press regulation mechanisms, while such regulations and mechanisms still exist for television. When asked to analyze how the relation with their employers shape the roles and ethics of online journalists in Romania, the respondents shared the common view that the employer-employee related problems are general in Romania, affecting the profession overall. The respondents share a common perspective on the main characteristics of the employer-employee relation in Romanian journalism: the profession is marked by an unbalanced relation which in the past 30 years since the beginning of the transition has always heavily favoured the employer regardless of the party in power and of the public political discourse. Journalists have increasingly worked in an insecure environment, with precarious salaries, only a minority being employed under permanent work contracts, and even those journalists being at a constant risk of layoffs. The most common practice in newsrooms for new hires or inexperienced journalists is to demand unpaid work trials periods. Another shared view was that in today's journalism in Romania, a common practice is to have copyright contracts instead of permanent or temporary working contracts, which shifts the responsibility to pay social contributions such as the mandatory state health insurance and the pension from employers to employees. In assessing the degree to which the journalism formal education in Romania has adapted to the specific demands of digitalization, the respondents had distinctive views. On one hand, the journalism departments in the universities across the country have significantly developed and multiplied since the 1990s, and the students get today a solid education on the principles and ethics of journalism based on the Western liberal tradition of the press. On the other hand, the journalism curricula are not aligned and there is an admitted reactive instead of proactive attitude of the journalism schools to the transformations online, instead of the academic medium being the driving force towards progress and innovation in digital journalism. Asked if any of the traditional roles have become irrelevant in the current context of Romanian online journalism, all respondents agreed that all traditional roles remain relevant, that some of them are becoming more important than in the past, while other are eroding, and while the general opinion was that they will not disappear entirely, there was an agreement that efforts must be made to maintain them. Among the traditional roles that have an increased relevance today in online journalism in Romania, all respondents pointed to the informative need - the roles of information gathering, filtering and verification, as well as the role of agent of the public interest must remain central to the profession in spite of the increased production rhythm, as the public appetite for

documentation and context is increasing in the context of the fake news assault. In the category of eroding roles, the respondents placed the information gatekeeper, a role that has been taken over by aggregators and algorithms. Consequently, the privileged position of journalists as communicators with the authority to speak to the public has weakened and journalists must find new ways to consolidate their epistemological authority. While the informative role remains vital to the re-professionalization of journalism, the respondents identified in agreement a hybridization between the informative and entertainer roles, a hybridization which poses a threat to the foundation of journalism. They agreed that objectivity is eroding as well, as a consequence of the production pace as well as of the online formats: a piece of news is published quickly incorporating a single perspective; then, another piece of news is published from another, possibly opposite perspective, but the fact that the two pieces of news are distinct restricts the practice of objectivity online. The lack of objectivity is also seen as an effect of economic pressure, of the pressure to attract the audience. The respondents identified two types of emerging roles in Romanian online journalism: by technology enriching the profession, new roles emerge expanding the traditional scope of journalism; by the pressure the attention economy puts on journalists to produce large volumes that are only partially consumed, new roles emerge that diminish the values of the profession, potentially leading to an exile of quality journalism to a niche. In the first category, the respondents agreed that the specifics of social media can stimulate civic and developmental journalism. The social media networks give individual journalism a role that was previously played by newsrooms - the opportunity to become community leaders, in the wider sense of physical or virtual communities that can be theme communities or geographical ones. They can also become, due to the visibility that the social media networks can give to individual voices, more popular than the publication they work for, shifting the balance in the dual status of the journalist - as employee and as opinion leader in the public space - by gaining a new role, that of individual exponent of a media publication or of a way of thinking reflected on a media publication. With the growth of data journalism and as a reaction both to fake news and lack of information verification, respondents agreed that the fact-checking role will take center stage as a means for the profession to preserve its reputation, accompanied by a type of story-telling that will bring depth, relevant context, and relevant connections around current events. At a wider scale, outside their own media production, a possible emerging role of attention broker was identified to replace the information gatekeeper role in reconsolidating the epistemological knowledge of the profession. In the second

category, all respondents agreed on the growing importance of the entertainer role in online media. The trend was seen as a paradoxical return of online journalists to proto-journalism and its creators of content, accompanied by a turn to performative tactics to grab attention. By taking online the role of creators of information, online journalists risk to make it difficult for the public to spot the sources of fake news. Another identified emergent role for online journalists is that of promoters. Journalists are required to produce promotional materials for their work or for their employer in social media, a task that is becoming a necessary part of the general package of duties of the work online, that can deform the journalistic activity. While journalism roles remain relevant, maybe the most significant changes in journalism will be related to the formats in which information will be published. As the native digital media is gaining a footing with a new generation of journalists who understand the online specifics without the filter of traditional media, the media content that will be produced will be much easier for the public to digest and will satisfy growing emotional needs. There was a consensus among experts that there are major differences between online journalism in Romania and the ones practiced in countries of journalism liberal traditions, and moreover they pointed out that there are notable differences also between countries in the Eastern European region. The main areas identified were the organization structure of the newsrooms and their financial resources, the consumption patterns, the dominating business models, and the extent to which the press tradition and culture were established at the beginning of online journalism. A major difference was identified in consumption patterns and consumption mentalities between Romania and the countries with established liberal press traditions. At the deeper level of online journalism culture, a major difference was seen regarding the main motivation of online journalists in Romania in comparison with the ones in the countries with solid liberal press traditions. Asked to identify what are the possible directions for the future roles in online journalism, the respondents agreed on an increased importance of the informative role, either through an effort to return to the traditional value of objectivity or through expanding the competencies of verification by taking over the fact checking task. The media experts saw the strengthening of the informative role both as a vital mechanism to counterbalance the devastating effects of the fake news growing phenomenon, and as a condition for the survival of the profession, a mechanism of re-professionalization, of regaining the esoteric knowledge, a way to prove journalists can bring extra value to the information that no other communicator on the Internet can bring. Returning to their status of professional communicators and servants of the public interest was described as a

necessary step to regain the trust of the public who needs opinion makers and collective mentality shapers. The return to opinion journalism as in-depth-analysis journalism was also presented as an important part of the online journalist's profile as information curator and guide of the public. As a way to revitalize the profession and rebuild its identity through norms, values and culture, journalists will have to inform the public through journalism manifestos about the values that differentiate them as communicators from any other communicators on the Internet. Nonetheless, the respondents agreed that the profession faces unprecedented challenges and the future holds a lot of uncertainty, because the battle for trust online has become very public, and journalism will not necessarily win it, but as the public will gradually understand the toxic effects of fake news, they will turn to reliable sources of information. A new domain in which journalism will possibly expand was identified in trying to address the need to satisfy the complex emotional contexts that form around the big events in society. In order to find a balance between emotion and information, as the importance of satisfying the emotional needs of the public will grow in the journalistic messages, and to counterbalance the outrage widely spread online and the conflict-charged media content, the demand for constructive journalism will probably grow in the future, with specific initiatives already supported by the more powerful and established newsrooms in the West, in a trend to offer solutions instead of stirring conflicts. From a wider perspective, the journalistic roles are seen to become more and more diverse, given the very diverse contexts journalists work in - in different cultures but also inside a media system. The professional identity of journalists will probably be more and more questioned, beyond the academic realm, as the *raison d'être* of journalism in society is changing.

The thesis includes an additional chapter of conclusions, limitations, and recommendations. The findings of the survey suggest that Romanian online journalists have a solid theoretical background that is aligned with the norms and values of Western liberal media traditions, based on which they perceive themselves motivated in their profession by their role as public servants and mainly influenced in their work by the deontology of the profession. There is a generally declared disinterest in the financial benefits of the job, which, when correlated with a strong declared commitment to the ethical principles of the profession and to a rigorous discipline of verification, indicates a high degree of idealization of the profession at the level of role perception. Romanian online journalists declare themselves mainly independent of external pressures, satisfied with their professional choices, and aligned to the principles and practices of the

newsrooms in which they work, and in general autonomous in the editorial decisions they make. They declare objectivity as the core value of their day to day work, in which they perceive themselves mainly as watchdogs, storytellers, and detached observers. Their strongest attachment at the discursive level is to the set of cognitive roles that are traditionally the core of Western liberal media values, the informative-instructive and the critical-monitorial. Also, they perceive important to be tolerant, inclusive, supportive of vulnerable groups and they do not see themselves influenced by racial or religious bias. From the perspective of digital media specific roles, the findings suggest an insufficient awareness of them, such as providing internal and external links that is specific to the digital collective approach and contextualization of the act of journalism. The entertainer role is rejected at the level of discourse, but its more subtle values, such as attention grabbing through captivating storytelling, are largely embraced among Romanian online journalists. There is a reduced perceived importance of the mobilizer, adversarial roles, and developmental roles, and the importance of the role to mediate conflicts in society. The current research finds that the population of online journalists in Romania is young, predominantly feminine, and rather inexperienced and that the main drive for choosing the profession is vocational. The respondents have a good theoretical understanding of the norms and values specific to Western liberal media tradition. The majority, over 70%, had a permanent work contract at the time they participated in the research and more than half earned under 800 Euro a month, compared to an average net salary in Romania of 565 Euro. 40% had parallel jobs, 10% in communication domains that are traditionally separated from journalism, such as marketing and PR. There was a strong attachment to the profession in the sample, 78% declaring that they had never considered changing their profession, despite a higher temporary dissatisfaction for the job. The media experts' shared view that one of the main pressures online journalists in Romania are facing today is the pressure of the deadline seems invalidated by the answers of the journalists. This leads to two distinctive hypotheses to be explored in future research: either online journalists in Romania refuse to acknowledge or they are not aware they work under the pressure of time in a way it affects their work, or, that given the fact that more than half of the sample consisted of journalists working in native digital publications, a new business model of collective journalism can be identified in which online journalists do not feel the pressure of time as much as the ones working in commercial news websites. The media experts' view that the majority of online journalists work in highly unregulated work conditions, without permanent working contracts,

which was confirmed by the media experts, seems invalid for the chosen sample, leading to a new hypothesis that there are new business models online that are growing and offering more stable working conditions for online journalists in Romania, with better business models that ameliorate the working conditions of online journalists in Romania and encourage the production of quality content. The media experts also identified a possible new approach from new native digital media businesses in Romania that are successful in their business strategies and in recapturing the trust and the attention of the public.

The digitalization of our society and the evolution of online journalism is happening at an unprecedented pace when compared with any previous media revolutions, a reality even more acute for the Romanian digital landscape, making hard for any research to draw firm conclusions and make hard predictions on future directions in the field. The number of Romanian journalists working online at the time the present study started is most probably significantly different from when the present paper was finalized. Nonetheless, the findings of the present study are relevant in filling relevant gaps in the local research on online journalism, and in formulating new research hypothesis for future research, as it brings a thorough theoretical analysis of digital journalism, of the Romanian context, and as it focuses on surveying online journalists in Romania. Therefore, a dedicated research on the native digital media outlets in Romania could be useful in identifying if there are consistent new directions in Romanian online journalism regarding business models, the production of quality content, and in restoring the status and authority of online journalists as professional and ethical communicators. Since the current study, some of the native digital media publications mentioned here have become more successful and have gained recognition in Romania, and so the advantages of such research would be that it could identify the entire population, and it could produce complex profiling with limited resources, such as adding a role performance dimension to the research. Another possible direction that could stem from the findings of the current research would be to conduct a study focused on role performance for the same population sample or a similar one, that includes journalists that are working online, in order to validate the roles and values of Romanian online journalists in Romania. The limits of the current research reside in the missing data regarding the target population when the study was conducted, as well as in reduced resources that restricted the research to role perception. In the absence of data regarding the existing population of online journalists in Romania, a relevant sample size and composition could not be calculated, and the size of the sample is small, thus

making it difficult to apply the findings to the general population of online journalists in Romania. The most the current study can hope to achieve is to identify common themes and patterns that can be applied in subsequent larger-scale studies on the online population of journalists in Romania. Given that it used a questionnaire with closed-ended questions, the inherent bias of the approach must be considered, as the respondents were given to choose between existing options of answers. The current research is limited to role perception, bringing no data on actual role performance and, in the absence of other role performance studies for the same population target to use as reference, in order to validate or invalidate if the journalistic roles in Romania are consistent with the conclusions of this study, further research is recommended on role performance through content analysis, a type of research that requires a different level of resources. Another limit is identified in the accidental composition of the sample, which combined native and non-native publications, as well as journalists with preponderant traditional press experience and journalists with preponderant digital media experience, not following a clear research purpose, but rather, due to the lack of data and options, by including all online journalists that agreed to participate. Also, due to the lack of resources and the remote communication imposed by the pandemic, in the sample of media experts most of the respondents are academics, and not practitioners of the profession, leading to an unbalanced expert view on the profession. Another significant limit is given by the gap between conducting the survey (2018) and interviewing the experts (2020 and 2021), which is particularly relevant for the research on digital journalism, given the fast pace of changes occurring online. Therefore, to validate the results and conclusions of the current study, a subsequent study should be conducted to synchronize role perception and media experts view regarding online journalism in Romania.

The value of the current study lies in the fact that it focuses on the profession of journalism in the context of digital media, contributing both to the existing research on the journalism profession in Romania and to the emergent research on the specifics of the Romanian digital media landscape. The research on the profession itself, the status of journalists in a given country, their self-esteem, and the values and norms they embrace, is essential in the current context of major changes in which journalism has become fragile and the work mobility has dramatically increased, not only between media publications, but also through a growing number of exits from the profession. Moreover, due to the political context of the country, it is vital to understand the challenges the journalism is facing as a profession in Romania, in order to understand the

vulnerabilities that the Western liberal media values are facing in the region. The current research aims at opening a conversation about the specifics of the online journalism profession in Romania and it can bring value to subsequent studies focused on online content analysis, and, more importantly, to future research that targets native digital media publications in Romania, aiming to explore the journalism roles they stimulate, the business models they propose and the impact they have on re-establishing the trust and the importance of journalism in the digital era in Romania.