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JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATION IN MUREȘ COUNTY PRESS.
CASE STUDY:
***STEAUA ROȘIE* DAILY NEWSPAPER**
ABSTRACT

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Communication appears to us as a vital phenomenon; it is present in all areas, thriving on the power of words and social contact. However, its inherent negative effects cannot be denied. Communication can be honest, but it can also be flawed, pursuing certain interests. The impact of such flawed communication is major, the lies and distortion of reality can reach significant heights and an end opposed to its purpose. Instead of conveying information and serving the interests of citizens, mass communication comes to deny reality and instead to impose a false one because “language sometimes serves to lie, to mask the reality, to persuade others for dishonest purposes, to manipulate to the detriment of the masses. Through this, the language of communication, derived from the very needs of the social contact, a tool capable of strengthening social relations, can also serve to deny its beneficial purpose and lead to extreme negative effects, the dissolution of true social contact, as well as distrust of communication and therefore distrust in "words"”. The essence of communication is produced by the exchange of information. This process is achieved through an amazing tool, namely language, a constant of life. It is an element of vital importance, a trait specific only to humans. Naturally acquired, this cognitive skill, the ability to use language is a human characteristic because of a number of reasons: it gives the human species an enormous advantage over other species, as language is a quick and easy way to pass on knowledge from one generation to the next.

For a conceptual delimitation, we must mention that there is a clear difference between language and speech. The totality of linguistics means such as phonetic, lexical and grammatical means, with a hierarchical organization according to rules. Unlike speech, which presents itself as a system of communication through sounds, language appears as a functional means of communication. The pillar of resistance on which the entire psychic scaffolding of man is built and makes it possible to transmit and master the main informational content, the style, the level of culture or socialization.

Most of the time, depending on various conditions, language is subject to everyday requirements. The pressure of the political ideology can be huge; its burden can be hard to bear. Ideological subordination involves recoding the message and altering the form and background for the transmission of the intended ideas. Any communication is an ideology that transmits information in the form desired by the sender; nuances and ideology load the communication content, giving it a mantle of the desired color. The power of the media can't be denied or minimized. The impact of words is overwhelming, whether the outcome is good or bad. In this

context, a major role is played by the people who generate, edit, and present the message, mainly the journalists. They have an important and sensitive task of being credible, honest, convincing and persuasive; moreover, their role is to inform, but also to form the public opinion, enjoying the trust and prestige gained.

A difficult process but of great importance is represented by the selection of the most relevant pieces of information from the list of daily news, those assumed to attract the public's interest. Likewise, journalists might choose and promote certain news or events to the detriment of others. The selection of news is not always a free process, as journalists work in businesses with a certain political orientation.

The choice of the news that will appear in the pages of the newspaper is a process that involves several aspects, both subjective, related to the ideas, experience and opinions of the journalist, and objective, related to external circumstances. Sometimes, the readers are placed in the second place, favoring editorial policy. The main vector in media communication is the journalist.

The distortion of journalistic discourse can reach incredible heights when it comes to propaganda. As it develops and reaches impressive margins of influence, the press can become a dreadful tool of manipulation.

The notion of propaganda emerged after the development of journalism and was seen as an extremely effective method for rapidly spreading a certain ideology. The information transmitted through the media is often a way of ideological persuasion, especially in a context of rapid development and political regimes eager for ideological manipulation. Thus, the perverted mission of directly interested political and economic factors can turn an instrument of progress into a means of imposing power and authority. An undeniable process, propaganda increasingly accompanies communication. Paradoxically, it sprang out of the very democratic process of debating ideas. It is not an invention of totalitarian regimes, but they have perfected it and brought it to unimaginable heights.

In any democracy, the press exposes the debate of ideas, the ideology of the parties involved in the political struggle, while in totalitarian regimes, the press becomes an instrument of exclusive presentation of the ideology of power, eliminating the debate and the competition and thus "propaganda eliminates any possibility of a democratic regime." From all these considerations, the status of subordinating the press to totalitarian regimes is clear. The

communist regime excelled in this field. The press showed interest in such regimes only in terms of their subordination and use. In such context, nothing of the established characters is out of date, the press is just the instrument of power, used in the personal interest, a factor of “disclosure” of the errors produced by the social and political decision.

Totalitarian regimes have used several levers to control and effectively use the press. Among the most effective and most frequently used are: ideology, manipulation and persuasion, propaganda and the so-called wooden language.

In any regime ideology represents the theoretical foundation necessary to legitimize one in front of those to whom it is addressed. One cannot imagine access to power without an ideology, irrespective on how deficient it may be. The ideology is elaborated by the group's strategists and then detailed, communicated and appropriated by the followers, only later being disseminated in the public space.

Another extremely important element, practically inherent in a dictatorial regime, is the institution of censorship. Censorship is necessary for these totalitarian regimes, to ensure the dissemination only of information that does not contradict the official line in the public space, thus aiming at the elimination of any information or dissonant ideas.

In the communist states, censorship played a central role. All power was concentrated in the hands of a single structure, the single party; there were no opposition parties and therefore no press to present other ideas. Practically, the only voice that was heard was the official one. The role of censorship was to establish the ideology that should be propagated and that should also prevent or sanction possible deviations, aiming to reshape the thinking of the population.

The construction of new social classes and the attainment of social conformity in the socialist states led to the inclusion of the media in the arsenal of propaganda tools; the mass media thus became the official channel through which the communist parties guided and communicated with the masses.

During the communist period, the ideological function of the media and its journalists, the need to present events as they should not be not as they were in fact, led to a very selective function of protection that was closely and exclusively linked to the values embraced by the Communist Party. Romanians received very limited predigested information, lacking in authenticity, meant to convince, reassure, encourage, distract and disguise. Events and ideas were ignored, distorted or invented every day. The only authentic information found in

newspapers was the obituaries and sports news or, occasionally, some reports from the international press, if and when it suited the regime's policy.

It is known that the press is a ubiquitous reality; it has already become a part of everyday life. Regardless of how we relate to it, whether we use it to find out the latest news, analysis, reports, or whether we simply go through it to relax, we can no longer conceive its absence.

The press is often nicknamed 'the fourth power in the state', a phrase that clearly shows both its role and the power it holds. The role derives from its ability to spread information on a large scale, reaching the most varied social categories, but also from its ability to influence public opinion and to sanction possible deviations from the norm of the influential people. The press has the power to even determine the public reaction to certain actions of power and to mobilize the masses, a power, which if used honestly, would be a powerful instrument of democratic regulation of society. In totalitarian regimes, the control over the press becomes evident, not even appearances are preserved, and everything is raw and visible. Control over the press becomes so strong that it permeates the journalistic discourse at all levels. Thus, even the most trivial news can send subliminal messages in the direction desired by those in power. Introducing a political message in the news is an extremely insidious recipe, the recurring stereotypes thus becoming impregnated in the collective mind.

In the Stalinist period, especially until 1965, the role of the press was paramount because it highlighted the great victories of socialism and played a strong propaganda role, building confidence in the newly formed socialist society. Journalists would go to factories and agricultural units and underline the achievements of the regime without criticism. In 1965, with the arrival of the new leader, the role of the press changed substantially. Nicolae Ceaușescu, viewed as a reformer of society, managed to trigger noticeable changes in all existing fields. With the new status, Romanian socialism can be characterized as socialism of Romanian origin. To develop all areas, Romanian society received a strong and reforming impulse. The press entered a modernization program, and as a result, the press became a very useful factor for mobilizing the country's energy and resources to achieve the development program.

Steaua roșie was not just a means of information or entertainment. In fact, it was another lens through which the reality could be highlighted, a channel for disseminating the political line and the party ideology, a means of cultural and social formation. As time went on, *Steaua roșie* lost its own dignity, voluntarily bowing to the needs and misinformation imposed by the political

power. Graphics and imagination have thus become tools that led to self-characterization and being visible in an increasingly crowded market from a competitive perspective.

The extreme limitation of the recurrent topics of the daily *Steaua roșie* in the first years of its existence is another relevant aspect of the socialist press that lacked variation. This is only one aspect of the uniformity and control of information in a dictatorial state. Over time, the exaggerated personality cult becomes unmatched in other Soviet Bloc countries.

Power has always been one of man's most ardent desires. Power over politics begins with power over the word. It comes to life from a desire to make verbal manifestations more efficient, being outlined by the semantics of the language, which has in view the reconstruction of reality by redefining certain facts presented in order to gain the sympathy or adhesion of the audience.

The relationship between language and power has always been very close, a bilateral relationship that can sometimes change the course of people's history. It is also a relationship based on interdependence, on referential uniqueness, on the close connection between the two terms, perhaps also due to the fact that the finality of one (in our case - power) is achieved through the utility, mirroring, brilliance and dedication of the other (in our case - language). By the power of its meaning, the word is endowed with a significant evaluative character and thus fulfills a double role: both servant and traitor. It can exalt, it can make any lie plausible, it can create iconic images by ruthlessly blurring current events, but at the same time it can be poisonous, destructive. Often, the word can be perceived only as an instrument of spreading the truth, being revealed by the multiple desires of language. Journalistic expression combines both the candor of the literary style and the exigency of the scientific one, borrowing both the expressive marks of literature and the terminology of the specialized language, harmoniously intertwining them to obtain a perfect article. At other times, however, the exacerbated use of terminology and twisted language betrays the in-depth ignorance of the subject proposed for debate. In a written article, we find a very important role in balance. An extra word or a missing word can often change the meaning of the entire sentence. Certain overused terms may shape the subjective attitude of the event. Otherwise, missing words may leave room for interpretation, emphasizing disinterest or insufficient information. That is why, in the profession of a journalist, the epistemic curiosity must always be kept active, objective, permanent. This is the only way to achieve success.

The triad that underlies the arcade of communist political or ideological language can be summed up in the interweaving of different keywords into a slogan representative for the ideology that imposes a certain doctrine. Language stands out as an instrument communicating events and a form of manifestation, strongly dominated by an obvious symbolic substratum. Due to its explanatory nature, the word is decoded so that it can be understood by all who read it.

During communism, the eclecticism of the totalitarian language characterized the discursive typologies. Degradation of grammar rules and the use of an exacerbated wooden language prevail, exemplified by mobilizing and triumphalist messages, and by the intrusion of politics in all subjects.

Ideological discourse turns out to be a text with empty referential content in which the pauperization of vocabulary prevails. The written political language thus becomes only a series of signs subject to certain rules, which can be interpreted by the relationship of interdependence between the three levels, namely the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic. Making an enviable speech meant paying more attention to both the linguistic component, that aimed at the literal meaning and the rhetorical component, which favored the interpretation of the previous statement through the entire processing of information with all specific stages. The text was first selected, filtered and edited and then framed in appropriate journalistic genres and styles.

The moralizing character of the communist discourse transpires through the frequent monotonous sequences of words, the exploitation of synonymous series that designate a cumbersome and impersonal style outlined both by cliché and rigidity. Long, complicated, meaningless but correct sentences are based on the schematics made at the level of verbal construction. All the elements mentioned above reunite and confirm the protean nature of the language with a strongly biased attitude, built for the purpose of indoctrination, propaganda and support of a biased attitude toward ideology.

The communist article was built on strong ideological language that used linguistic protocols of distancing to stand out. Unlike the first years of the appearance of the local newspaper, years in which journalism was only a conjectural activity, during the relative liberalization, a qualitative leap allowed the combination of discursive-argumentative strategies that favored lexical accessibility. The form imperfections were revised and the elaborated interpretive skills increased new discursive phenomena, which were to be the basis for the mythization of the leader in the following years. Morphemes gradually acquired an informative

role which outlined statements that would fit into the assent of the epistemological filter of public opinion. The political language of this period favored the introduction of new terms and various argumentative strategies dominated. The heterogeneity of the readers made the topic of the articles vary and aimed simple, attractive content, accessible to all social classes eager for information. The message of the written articles was sometimes retrospective, sometimes a forward-looking view of the situation. The imposition of the ideological discourse, however, was often marred by the artificial character rendered by the avoidance of concrete words and excessive metaphors. The press was dominated by an authoritarian theory that did not tolerate betrayal, but at the same time we can mention the influence of a Soviet theory that involves a complex phenomenon of metamorphosis of the press into a partner of ideological education. During this period, the written press was both a way of educating, magnifying or monopolizing and controlling information. The press has slowly become a weapon of power, and journalism was perceived as a profession and not just a hobby.

The media has an absolutely remarkable power, allowing it access to the most varied categories of people. Its impact does not go unnoticed, leading to various and not necessarily desirable consequences. Journalism becomes fragile when it is opposed by political or economic power that has the possibility to easily restrict the freedom of speech.

The power of the media can neither be denied nor minimized. The impact of words is overwhelming whether good or bad things happen. According to political scientist Walter Lippmann, "News and the truth is not the same thing." He argues for the existence of a strong connection between the media and public opinion, a connection based on the dose of subjectivity of each of us, which generates a different perception of reality, filtered through the lens of our own sensitivity or stereotypes.

CHAPTER I illustrates CONCEPTUAL BOUNDARIES regarding COMMUNICATION AND JOURNALISM. It incorporates the theoretical aspects and the conceptual delimitation of communication and illustrates both the types of communication in their role of conceptual framework and the evolution of communication from minimalism to complexity. At the same time, I tried to emphasize the influence of the media and the importance of quality journalism, but also the distortion of discourse through certain means of enslavement and control.

CHAPTER II outlines the research methodology. It begins by setting out the context and objectives of the research. The hypothesis of the paper is also mentioned, as well as the epistemological and methodological positioning. The final part reveals the operationalization of the hypothetical constructs by drawing the analysis, the interpretation of the research and, at the same time, the results.

CHAPTER III is entitled THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE AGE. Through this first part, a general to specific approach was intended. First, a twentieth century Europe situated under the specter of totalitarianism was introduced. Then, the circumstances of the rise of communist power in Romania was reproduced, and also some general considerations regarding the history, status and characteristics of the Mureş press in this communist regime was outlined.

CHAPTER IV bears the name of the daily paper that is in fact the object of research: STEAUA ROŞIE. This part is entirely dedicated to the Mureş newspaper. As a researcher, I had tried to make an analysis of the newspaper from several points of view. After a few considerations about the publication, I presented its topics. I later compiled a subchapter that includes all the changes that took place during the communist period. I have detailed here both the general functions of the daily paper and an analysis of the communist article whose characteristics were influenced by the wooden language used in propaganda style, and by the changing spelling and graphic appearance. Finally, the collaborators of the different journalistic genres that stood out through their remarkable activities are mentioned.

CHAPTER V is identified as the following: PROLET CULTISM, DESTINATION AND MATURITY. It is a consistent part of the paper and includes a periodization of the three stages specific to Romanian communism. The progressive illustration of the situation in the economy and agriculture, the relationship between the cohabiting nations, the changes in party life and the forms of propaganda, as well as the position of women in different periods of communism are all detailed topics discussed in an accessible language. The themes can be found in each subchapter of the specified periods, precisely to illustrate the changes and the time frame specific to the implementation of these new decisions meant to outline the exacerbated ideological faith and regime changes that took place during the appearance of the local daily paper *Steaua roşie* between 1952 and 1989. The changes are degraded into a new form of power, thus triggering a

new cult of personality whose ascending path will culminate in self-destruction, due to the exaggerated ambition imposed in the development of the economy, agriculture and culture under the sign of socialist Romania.

CHAPTER VI is a complex chapter. STEAUA ROȘIE IN MEMORIAM. PROJECTION IN THE COLLECTIVE MENTALITY seems to me the most representative part because it illustrates the rhetoric of the interview in the form of public confessions and it is anchored in contemporary reality. It practically consists of a series of 10 interviews with personalities who played a decisive role in the local press and whose experience sometimes exceeds 60 years in the field of journalism. These are based on a set of common questions and meetings with prominent representatives of the daily *Steaua roșie*. We are talking about those who lived and outlined at the same time the profile of the new man, illustrating the realities of the Mureș community in the pages of the newspaper. In order for the picture be as complete as possible, I tried to represent each section: socio-political, economic, cultural, party life. Thus, I illustrate the story of the lives of several hardliners.

- **Ioan Cismaș** relates the experience of the press who lived during the communist period, demystifying at the same time the subject of the *coexisting nationalities*. His interview is an exceptional fresco of the sensitive episode of incandescent days in March. Today, after more than 60 years of editorial activity, he is the head of department and the head of the socio-political profile.
- **Ioan Husar** is currently the president of the company and editor-in-chief of the newspaper. In his revelations, he talks about the progress highlighted at the local level, about the *industrialization of the city, the fast-paced celebration of festivals* dedicated to the communist regime, while making a remarkable picture of the positioning of the daily *Steaua roșie* (now rebranded *Free Word*), about the evolution of the team over time, the effects of the post-December crisis and about the distinctions and awards obtained by the paper.
- Political life is introduced to us by the testimony of Mr. **Nistor Man**, a professor, a former political prisoner, whose amazing memories reveal the *cruelty and atrocities of the Security*. Born in 1929, the professor tells the shocking story of a young man who, from the age of 14, was thrown into the cruel clutches of communist reality. He was

convicted thrice: for desire, speech and thought. He got his first five years in prison because of his *desire* to initiate an anti-communist group, the next two years for his *speech* and inappropriate behavior in prison, and the maximum sentence of 22 years in prison, due to a false confession regarding certain *thoughts*, projects and future plans that he was supposed to have made during his detention. All the stories are shocking, worthy of being included in a series that would outline the occult of communism.

- **Răzvan Ducan**, a professional, a collaborator who debuted in of the pages of the daily *Steaua roșie* in 1985. In his interview he presents the communist experience, but also the *extraordinary relationship he had with some collaborators*. He is noted for being an extraordinary poet, exemplifying this in a poem-entitled *Iisusa*. It is dedicated to the lack of value of women during the communist period. He answer all questions by taking a serious part in shaping the picture.
- The famous writer, **Martha Izsak**, is the daughter of editor Ștefan Izsak, who has published numerous articles on various cultural topics. She talks about her *memoirs in the editorial office*, reminding Atanasie Popa, Lazăr Lădariu and other people from the editorial staff. She also emphasizes the newspaper's relations with collaborating emigrants.
- **Zeno Fodor** makes an extraordinary evocation of the communist period from the cultural perspective of the theater, and the thematic rubric that he has continuously written for decades. In his interview, he mentions interesting aspects regarding the *ensorship of some plays at the local level*, but also the drastic measures of the *Securitate* (Department of State Security) against the children whose parents were in observation. The biographical accents make their presence felt and successfully crown a very pleasant meeting.
- Writer **Nicolae Băciuț** conducts a complex interview that abounds in truths seen through the lens of a a man of culture. He outlines a *complex portrait of Nicolae Ceaușescu highlighting the period of his cult* and the way in which a simple citizen participates in shaping these chimeras. In a unique and imposing style, he manages to capture the attention during the answers he offers, emphasizing the desire to know, recite, and listen to it in the reader's soul.

- **Mariana Cristescu**, head of the Culture and Art Department, plays an important role in the management of the newspaper *Cuvântul liber* where she publishes an editorial every Wednesday. The way in which a successful young woman from the capital city chooses to come to a city in the province and manages to go from the radio to the newspaper is interesting and captivating. Various topics are addressed, including the *position of the women in Mureș during the communist period*. Mariana Cristescu is today *the only Romanian female who has been reconfirmed as the Noble Lady of the Teutonic Order of Romania*, an honorary title that allows her to be included in the Teutonic Academy.
- **Lazăr Lădariu**, “After graduating from college, became a journalist at the *Steaua roșie* and *Cuvântul liber*, the latter he led as editor-in-chief for almost a quarter of a century, making him and his editorial staff, an attractive and competitive daily paper. *He has made a name for himself as a poet, journalist and writer* throughout his dozens of published volumes. He was a parliamentarian, defending with competence, love and faith, the interests of the Romanian nation from the highest forum of the native land.”
- **Boros Ștefan Tety** and his wife Iona Sajgo (Ileana Boros in the pages of *Steaua roșie* newspaper) present with amusement and ease the story of her debut in the pages of *Steaua roșie* at the beginning of 1970. The report also includes interesting aspects related to certain censored awards and banned competitions in the field of graphics, and also achievements, appreciations from the post-December period as well as some future plans.

The interviews share the personal experiences of those invited, leaving vivid testimonies that bring to the readers of the thesis striking details about unknown events that could not be written in the newspaper. They include details about censored performances, canceled awards, innocent and convicted people, sentences executed because of faulty security principles, published books, unshared wishes or unspoken regrets. This important part of the paper, dedicated to interviews with former collaborators of the *Steaua roșie* newspaper, is meant to outline a living history of the publication, of the work done by the team, of the atmosphere of that time and of the editorial office. These discussions paint a complex picture and offer a different perspective on the work done in preparation for the publication of this newspaper. They include some defining aspects for the context of the publication, what the institution meant in the days of communism, providing data on the illusory past reality, language, information content,

management, human resources, financing, market positioning, relationships with other newspapers, awards and distinctions obtained.

With the collapse of the communist regime in Romania, following the Revolution of December 1989, *Steaua roșie* loses its *raison d'être* and ceases to exist, becoming a new one, *Cuvântul liber (Free Word)*, which proposes and assumes the clear delimitation of the past and proclaims itself to be a democratic daily paper, dedicated to the interests of the people and determined not to be enslaved to politics. To achieve a clear image of the realities during the communist period in Romania, with reference to Mureș County, we also resorted to general sources, referring to abstract notions or to the historical reality of the moment. The most important role is played by the articles published in *Steaua roșie*, the reference newspaper of the respective periods in Mureș County.

Keywords: written word, power, daily newspaper, Mureș, ideology, communication.

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