THE ROLE OF THE PRESS RELEASE FOR JOURNALISTS. EDITING DILEMMA

Victoria BULICANU,
PhD, Assoc. Prof.
Moldova State University
ORCID: 0000-0003-3358-5554
e-mail: victoria.bulicanu@usm.md

Abstract: *The official sources of information represent some of the most credible sources for the process of informing that is done by journalists. Their importance and credibility is being ensured by the officialdom of the people invested with a certain decision-making function and who have influence on the population's life, but also by the authority of the institutions that express in the eyes public intransigence and determination in applying the legal framework in any state. The article below tries to offer several of the rules that should be used by journalists in the process of editing a press release, which usually contains a lot of advertising information, making the editing process for journalists a complicated one, or, at least, not so simple. Regarding this fact, there is a strong opinion that today we still have not so many bibliographical sources about these rules that indicate on the lack of enough researches made by specialists in mass-media or by practitioners themselves.*

Keywords: *press release, public institution, legal framework, editing rules, web site, communicator, quote, news, private life.*

ROLUL COMUNICATULUI DE PRESĂ PENTRU JURNALIȘTI. DILEMA DE EDITARE

Rezumat: *Sursele oficiale de informare reprezintă unele dintre cele mai credibile surse pentru procesul de informare realizat de jurnaliști. Importanța și credibilitatea acestora este asigurată de statutul persoanelor investite cu capacitatea de decizie și care au o anumită influență asupra vieții populației, dar și de autoritatea instituțiilor care exprimă în ochii intransigenței publice hotărâre în aplicarea cadrului legal într-un stat. Articolul de mai jos încearcă să prezinte câteva dintre regulile de bază care ar trebui să fie folosite de jurnaliști în procesul de redactare a unui comunicat de presă venit din partea instituțiilor publice și private, care, de obicei, conține multe informații publicitare, făcând procesul de redactare pentru jurnaliști unul nu chiar atât de simplu. Din păcate, astăzi nu avem atât de multe surse bibliografice care să ne prezinte aceste reguli de redactare foarte clare, iar materialul de mai jos va încerca să compenseze lipsa unor astfel de cercetări în domeniu.*

Cuvinte-cheie: *comunicat de presă, instituție publică, cadru legal, reguli de editare, site web, comunicator, citat, știri, viață privată.*

INTRODUCTION

Extremely many aspects have been written and discussed about the press release as a communication tool of public and private institutions with the mass media, regarding its usefulness, content, editing aspects, public interest of the information distributed, its evaluation etc. The researcher G. David talks about the press release as „a pro-active form of disseminating information, in which the initiative belongs to its possessor, unlike the interview, in which the possessor of the information has a reactive attitude, responding to someone else's initiative” [3, p. 61]. Following the bibliographic sources on the subject of the material, we can affirm with certainty that there are extremely many researches that would be useful, first of all, to communicators, spokespersons, public relations specialists, that provide sufficient information regarding the writing and distributing of a qualitative press release and its content for the purpose of attracting the attention of the media, as for its content to be subsequently distributed as informative material. In order to make a decision regarding the publication of an informative material based on a press release, journalists, first of all, will try to evaluate the importance of a press release, received at the editorial address, or, as it is used lately, on the direct e-mail of the journalist. The criteria for evaluating the importance of a press release always refer to the novelty of the information, the interest that this information could arouse among the public of the press institution and, last but not least, the quality of the text writing. However, journalists usually request that the text should be written as close as possible to the style of journalistic information materials, but not advertising style, as it is very common among communicators. The press release advertising style carries the risk that this text will be ignored by journalists precisely because the editorial office does not provide advertising services through information materials. For such advertising purposes there is a special service within any newsroom, but for which, as we know very well, applicants must pay. The poor quality of writing press releases or the lack of new elements causes newsrooms to give up publishing information from the source, some studies indicating that „only a tenth of press releases end up being published” [1, p. 84].

However, there are much fewer works that would be particularly useful to journalists in order to provide recommendations regarding the transformation of a press release into an informative material and the rules that should follow a journalist in the process of making news, based on a press release.

CONTENT

It should be noted that the experience, as well as the attitude, the situations adopted by journalists in the process of working with press releases, leads us to the idea that some rules could be declared generally valid for the activity of transforming a press release.

Usually, a press release which would contain many promotional elements would not be accepted for publication, unless it is edited very strictly by the journalist and transformed into an informative material with the elimination of the promotional information.

The websites of public institutions today also contain, most of the time, a special column entitled *Press Releases*, created, let's face it, mostly for journalists, who could find out more about the activities within the institutions, which had place or will take place and even decide whether journalists will participate in a specific event announced by the institution in the press release - invitation on the same website or decide that the presence of journalists is not necessary. At the same time, we must mention that copying entirely the press release from the website of the public institution (that's where the journalists' attention is most often directed) is extremely unprofessional and dangerous even, in the conditions where fine elements of partisanship always appear in the press releases, which will directly or indirectly contribute to the creation of a favorable image for the institution that distributes it. As an example, we will refer to a press release published on the website of the Government of the Republic of Moldova on January 25, 2022, with the title *Organizarea ședinței comune a executivelor de la Chișinău și București, discutată la Guvern.*, from which a journalist would have difficulties to extract strictly information of public interest, because it is impregnated with promotional elements and is biased by laudatory quotes and highly personalized information. The only quote provided in the press release is the following: "Thank you for the constant support given to our country and I express my confidence that the numerous bilateral projects will continue to materialize, with a major impact for the people. We have infrastructure projects, but let's not forget the social ones too - in the field of education, health, culture, which are highly appreciated by the citizens", mentioned Dumitru Udrea” [4]. We know very well that usually quotes are extremely useful to journalists, in order to use them as references to sources of information, in addition to the basic information source - the press release itself, or this example of quote brings almost no information of public interest (approved decisions, projects discussed, the financial value of bilateral projects, project implementation costs, implementation deadlines, etc.) and, in this way, the informative material edited on the basis of this press release can be widowed by the much-needed information of public interest. The second source mentioned in the press release is Mircea Abrudean, the representative of the Government of Romania, about whom in the mentioned press release it is said that he „expressed the openness of the Romanian side to support projects aimed at improving the quality of people's lives, which will bring the Republic Moldova closer to the European Union. It is important that the projects we will finance are truly strategic, with an impact on the citizens of the Republic of Moldova and reflect the basic priorities and that the governmental teams of our countries remain in direct contact, for the successful achievement of the agreed objectives” [Ibidem]. The quote likewise contains strong laudatory notes and, just like the first quote, contains superficial information. We find that this press release would be on the borderline between

an informative text and an advertising one, rather. The intention of the Government's communicator is understandable, but at the same time, the fact that the published text lacks the journalist's information of public interest creates the risk that this press release will not turn into a news item, given that the journalist does not have the necessary information, but at the same time, we recognize that the event would deserve attention from the media, precisely due to the fact that joint meetings of the Government institutions of two neighboring states do not take place every day, and the increased interest of the media in this event is understandable. At the same time, we understand that the meeting could have been held, most likely, behind closed doors, the access of journalists being usually prohibited for such discussions, or allowed only at the beginning of the meeting, in order to take photos of the meeting, as then the journalists should be asked to leave the meeting, being informed that a press release will be issued by the government institution - host of the meeting, based on which the journalists will be informed about the discussions held during the meeting. The results and expectations of the media are not always justified, judging by the quality of the press release provided from this event, or we understand that such important meetings can take place every day, and the quality of the information provided will suffer every time, if kept the same clichéd way of writing press releases, intended not only for the public, but also for those who should extract information of public interest, i.e. the media directly. Finally, we will have superficial information in the press as well, the public often being disappointed in the work of journalists, who are almost forced to provide such incomplete material, in the absence of other information, which could be used in an informative material about such important events. Unfortunately, most of the time, journalists, being already used to such a superficial presentation of information in press releases, no longer try to address press communicators to draw their attention to the quality of their work, because they understand too well that they could face hostile reactions, fueling even more the tensions existing today between representatives of the media and communicators. In this sense, journalists, already aware of such a situation in this process of institutional interaction, have tried over time to identify some rules, mostly unwritten, for the transformation of a press release into an informative material, which approaches the rigors necessary to present the information in an objective, equidistant and exhaustive manner, as far as possible.

Thus, following the above, we could identify some simple rules to be followed by the media representatives in order to a qualitative transformation of a press release into news. These rules refer to the following:

- the source of the information will always be cited in the news, i.e. the press release of the issuing institution, in easy-to-remember formulas, for example: „According to the press release, issued by the General Prosecutor's Office...” or „... The information is presented in the press release issued by the Legislature”;

- the journalist will exclude/ignore the information in the press release, which directly or indirectly advertises the institution issuing the press release. These should not be found in the journalistic material. Words that are marked too much by partisanship must be replaced with more neutral ones. For example, the sentence in the press release presented to reporters by a political party „The Socialists refused to promulgate the scandalous document and returned it to the Parliament”, must be written by excluding the word „scandalous”, to avoid inoculating certain attitudes among the public by the institution about what the media will make a news out of this release. In this case, the media risks accusations of partisanship;
- highly personalized information will be disregarded, which usually aims to obtain an affective reaction from the public and a favorable attitude towards the personality presented in the press release;
- the presentation of private life details in the press material based on the press release will be avoided;
- in the process of using the information from the press releases of law enforcement institutions, the presumption of innocence will be respected. In the absence of a final judicial decision, such terms as „corrupt”, „criminals”, „murderers” etc. will not be used;
- the identity of children in difficult situations will be protected, in order to avoid traumatic consequences for them in the future;
- in case of the presentation in the press releases of statements aimed at other people, the right to reply will be offered to them, especially if the statements were used in a negative context;
- the journalistic material will be given a different title than that of the press release, if it does not correspond to journalistic standards, but, above all, if the media institution considers its activity distinctive from that of the institutional communicators [2, p. 29-30].

CONCLUSIONS

The multitude of types of press releases should not complicate the work of journalists in the process of extracting information of public interest from them, but should facilitate their activity by: (1) introducing precisely named sources of information into the text of the release; (2) presenting the answers to the questions of the information materials (Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?); (3) careful editing of the text, using the journalistic narrative style, but not an advertising one. If a press release succeeds in satisfying the journalistic requirements for presenting the information, it will be taken over by the mass media without too many changes, which will be an advantage for the institution that released the document.

There should be said that journalists have a very difficult task of presenting qualitative, impartial and equidistant information to the public, which, in the absence of careful documentation by the, cannot always be considered true. Time pressure creates even more obstacles in providing verified information. In this sense, journalists agree to ignore most press releases, if they really do not have a major impact on the public and are of little or no interest at all. In order to avoid professional conflicts, over time, media representatives and communicators of the institutions have tried to create professional partnerships that are limited not only to the acceptance of journalists to publish information from press releases issued by the same communicators, but also to obtaining information within institutions, through communicators, at the request of journalists, who do not always focus on the positive aspects of the institutions' activity, as they usually appear in press releases. This is the most sensitive moment in the process of connecting journalists with communication specialists that our days is not so easy to take care of, considering the numerous disagreements between these two professional entities. Most of the disagreements are based, inclusively, on the details of using press release as an instrument for informing citizens by journalists.

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