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APPROACHES REGARDING THE BLOGGING PHENOMENON IN PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

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The media industry has always been in step with the times and advances in technology and must continuously expand its possibilities and working tools. Currently, journalists tend to assimilate new information processing programs, to have text drafting and layout skills, to apply interactive methods in their contents. Although blogs are becoming more and more popular year by year and partially perform more media functions, still, in a professional sense, blogging activity cannot be considered journalism in the true sense of the word. It is worth mentioning that both the traditional professional activities and those carried out by the journalist on the professional blog have as their purpose the formation and influencing of public opinion, but also of the public agenda and, in this context, must be carried out responsibly, following certain rules and complying with certain requirements, including standards of objectivity.
Keywords: *media, Internet, journalist, blogging, editorial policy, citizen journalism, professional ethics.*

ABORDĂRI PRIVIND FENOMENUL BLOGGINGULUI ÎN JURNALISMUL PROFESIONIST

Industria mediatică s-a aflat întotdeauna în pas cu timpul și progresele în domeniul tehnologiilor și trebuie să își extindă continuu posibilitățile și instrumentele de lucru. Actualmente jurnaliștii tind să asimileze programe noi de prelucrare a informațiilor, să dețină abilități de redactare și machetare a textului, să aplice metode interactive în conținuturile lor. Cu toate că blogurile devin, din an în an, tot mai populare și realizează parțial mai multe funcții mediatice, totuși, în sens profesional, activitatea pe blog nu poate fi considerată jurnalism în adevăratul sens al cuvântului. Menționăm faptul că atât jurnalismul profesionist, tradițional, cât și cel civic sau de alternativă au ca finalitate a activității formarea și influențarea opiniei publice, dar și a agendei publice și, în acest context, trebuie să se realizeze responsabil, urmând anumite reguli și respectând anumite exigențe, inclusiv standardele de obiectivitate.
Cuvinte-cheie: *mass-media, jurnalist, Internet, blogging, politică editorială, jurnalism cetățenesc, etică profesională.*

INTRODUCTION

With the emergence and rapid development of the Internet, the traditional mass media had to adapt to a new informational reality and „assimilate new technologies for the production and transmission of content” [1, p. 17]. One of these is the phenomenon of blogging, a serious competitor of traditional media at first. The transition to digital media configured the decentralization of information and the transformation of content into a good with more or less subjective value. As an alternative form of journalism, or “new journalism”, or “civic journalism” as it is labeled, the blog can be owned by anyone (with or without journalism studies), including media institutions and professional journalists. Unlike the employed journalist, a blogger is free in all respects – he does not depend on anyone, he does not have an editor and a boss to dictate to him, to “wrinkle” his content, he does not take into account the fact that what he posts it must fit into the general concept of the publication or program, it is not pressed by time and a deadline. It primarily provides reactions, so it is anchored in subjectivity, which factual opinion journalism also contains, and here lies the point of tangency. In this scientific study we propose to investigate the specifics of the development and manifestations of the phenomenon of alternative journalism in the media space of the Republic of Moldova, as the object of the research being the journalists' blogs, analyzed under thematic and discursive aspects. In order to achieve this goal, it is necessary to outline several primary objectives, namely: the analysis of the concept from a historiographical aspect; researching the structure and particularities of blogs managed by journalists; investigating the theme and the discursive strategies used in structuring the contents. The present scientific approach starts from the hypothesis that the phenomenon of blogging as a form of communication and network interaction

helps journalists to meet the new requirements regarding the informational-communicative activity, primarily on the aspect of operativeness, transparency, openness, dialogue and ensuring feed-back from the audience.

CONTEXT

The term ,,blog" was invented two decades ago, in the initial version ,,weblog", by John Berger, the author of the first personal diary on the Internet. Thus, the verb ,,to blog" is also configured (trans. to post, or keep a blog). Already at that time, information consumers had begun to show interest and to give preference to short news, but not impersonal, but with an author's imprint. The phenomenon developed rapidly in the following decades, so that today this figure reaches over one billion. The blog managed to give people the opportunity ,,to share the experiences and events of their personal life with the whole world" [2, p. 108].

The specialized literature attests to many attempts to define the term, and most of them point to the fact that the blog is a web page, on which constantly renewed contents (posts) are published on a specific subject or on various subjects. Posts or entries (what is published) are represented by texts necessarily accompanied by a title and the date of publication. Viewed with reluctance at the beginning, the blog later even leads to an ,,information reformation", as the renowned researcher in the field Hiu Hewitt states [3, p. 117]. We subscribe to the mentioned, or blogs influence the very essence of traditional journalism, which, primarily, emphasizes the facts, while a blog contains the author's opinions about these facts, opinions that he shares for free. We have to admit, in the new reality, the effects of the event are more discussed than the event itself. And that's what blogs are for. What is a blog? A blog is a site, or a variant of a site, on which various content (text, video, images, multimedia files) is added regularly by a person or a group of people (a team), because blogs can also individual, but also collective.

In this sense, the publications in the field contain numerous typologies of the blog, more or less exhaustive, and what places the blog in one category or another is the theme, and at the present time there are no topics that have not been addressed within blogs. Blogs are varied in form and content, and in order to somehow systematize this field, attempts have also been made to arrange them by category. Well, the sociologist Diana-Maria Cișmaru is undertaking an exercise of typology of blogs, to which we subscribe. Thus, the author identifies the following types of blogs:

1. The personal blog, which represents the author's personality and interests. A subtype of the personal blog is the narrative blog, also called an online diary (the author reports on his daily experiences); In the ,,philosophy of life" blog, the author's activities are not exposed, the focus being on posts of a philosophical nature, including his own creation. The ,,personal commentary" blog is characterized by interpretation and analysis exercises, including the description of personal experiences; The ,,commentary on public life" blog contains posts in which the author presents his own vision of something that caught his attention (a post, a report, a news, an incident, an event, etc.); The takeover blog (contents of interest to the author are taken and placed on the personal blog).
2. The professional blog (the author primarily presents himself as a professional in the field, the author's products, events he participates in, his social status are presented);
3. The ,,hobby" blog (everything that is important or appears new in a field of interest for the author);
4. The ,,niche" blog (specialized in narrow fields, which do not have much coverage in the mass media);
5. The professional collective blog (used for promotion in virtual space);
6. The blog with a religious character [4].

At the same time, the basic components of the blog structure are the avatar (image of the author), the user survey (which contains general data about the blog author and readers), the blog archive (where the posts are stored chronologically) and which can be accessed by users, the tag cloud (functional design element that attracts the visitors' eyes, highlights the author's personality and briefly describes the content of the posts), categories (the posts are systematized, to find all the posts on a certain topic more easily) and, last but not least, the blogroll (the list of blogs constantly visited by the administrator). New content added to the blog is called posts and these posts are displayed in reverse chronological order [5, p. 29], meaning the last post added is always at the top and is the first content that a person entering the blog sees. Each post is accompanied by a publication date, and those who read it have the opportunity to leave comments, and this fact characterizes the blog as a medium of active, instant communication. A post must be as interesting,

informative and original as possible, both in terms of the topic covered, and in terms of exposure, the angle of approach (by the way, important in journalism as well), but the purpose of a post is not to inform, but to collect comments, to coagulate groups that share the author's opinion or not.

This is why, the role of the blog has been reconfigured during its development, because nowadays a blogger does not primarily aim to share his experiences, opinions and emotions simply, but to share those experiences, opinions and emotions that will help him achieve a symbolic status, very palpable, argued by the popularity of the posts and the ability to gather as many comments and as many followers as possible. According to researcher Cristian Manafu, ,,the blog can be a tool to draw attention to the person and increase his personal brand" [6]. The blog administrator becomes much more visible in the public space and, consequently, more popular. This popularity gives him a symbolic degree as a specialist in the field he writes about and is referenced. This is in the conditions where the blogosphere is a relevant source for collecting public opinion, the particularities of culture, social trends, so that blogs are even referred to in scientific research. Currently, blogs address different fields: politics, education, health, business, fashion, cooking, beauty, parenting, travel, etc.

Keeping pace with time and technological progress, the media industry is also expanding its vision and working tools. Currently, journalists tend to assimilate new information processing programs, to have text drafting and layout skills, to apply interactive methods in their contents, to become as visible as possible in the public space. Although blogs are becoming more and more popular year by year and partially perform more media functions, still, in a professional sense, blogging activity cannot be considered journalism in the true sense of the word.

A journalist can also be a blogger, but not every blogger can do professional journalism, if they do not have studies in the field. An analysis of the system of blogs in the Republic of Moldova configures the following picture: there are bloggers who have no training in the field of journalism, bloggers with studies in journalism, but who do not practice, i.e. do not appear as employees of media institutions, and practicing journalists who hold a blog. Here it is appropriate to specify that the difference between a blog and mass media lies primarily in the intended purpose – the mass media carries out a social mission, while the blog is created to satisfy the interests of the author and, unlike the press, blogs do not are legally regulated. However, UN specialists responsible for promoting respect for the right to opinion and free expression include bloggers in the category of online journalists, civic journalists, without professional training, but who enjoy equal protection [7].

Of course, the role of bloggers is undeniable, because they draw attention to phenomena and events that remain unnoticed by the mass media, but over time, many of them have turned into highly politicized platforms, with insults and unverified content, taken over later by the media institutions, thus engaged in the process of large-scale disinformation, or the contents of the blogs do not fall under the journalist's Code of Ethics, unlike the materials provided by the mass media. And this is an escape, because being an important part of the social environment, they also create and influence public opinion, reflect and coagulate new needs for information consumers, blogs have the claim to compete with the traditional press. Many readers believe that information on blogs can be as credible, and in some cases, even more credible than that provided by traditional media. However, a blog should not necessarily be considered a source of information, as in the informative genre, but rather a resource that provides reactions, similar to the opinion genres in traditional journalism. Unlike the journalist, the blogger does not have the obligation to document himself, to be equidistant, to be impartial, so he has the freedom to place in the public space any type of information that he considers important, current and of interest. Currently, many journalists have created blogs that they manage for professional purposes. It is worth specifying that a professional journalist who respects the demands of the profession is at the same time a responsible blogger, even if here he is not obliged to comply with the editorial policy. In the opinion of Ioana Avadani, the director of the Center for Independent Journalism in Romania, if, being a journalist, you also manage a blog, you are the master of your own editorial policy, you are not constrained by any commercial considerations and you can thus write for niches however narrow, if you find them relevant, you are happy of almost instant feed-back and you can get to know your community of reader-participants" [6]. So what good is a blog to the journalist? Primarily, the blog is an effective and fast influencing tool. Through the posted contents, the journalist-blogger shares with the pu-

blic his vision, his position and his attitude towards what is reported, and loyal readers who sympathize with this journalist will perceive the information he provides as more truthful in relation to what others write.

Another positive aspect emerges from the fact that blogs are interactive [8, p. 71], they offer the opportunity to create a public conversation of proportions, in which the author dialogues with the visitors and the visitors dialogue with each other, regardless of spatial and temporal proximity, and what is being discussed can be tracked and analyzed in real time. Anonymous comments are generally frowned upon, so bloggers usually don't accept them. Besides the fact that they can leave comments in the footer of the post, readers can also add notes (own text), if the blog administrator allows them. In some cases access is unlimited, while some administrators restrict access to add text to members only. Here comes another asset – blogs can be used for research. Currently there are many servers that allow us to receive notifications, by keywords, about the publication of materials that are in our sphere of interest, we visit, read, comment, access hyperlinks and in this way quantify all newly appeared information, and all this allow the journalist to collect data about people interested in the topics covered in his posts.

Using the blog as a working tool, journalists can provide operative content of public interest, get instant reactions, collect data, document themselves, build a professional identity, while exercising their work with objectivity, transparency and social responsibility. For the journalist, the blog is the "kitchen" where contents are prepared in two directions, on the one hand, he can post current and interesting information public, and on the other hand, it can address topics that are not current, but which may become important and current in the near future. In this sense, the social role of the journalist expands, because he can more than reflect the social reality, he can anticipate processes, he can dictate trends, so he can participate in the process of creating a new reality [9, p. 86]. Here the author's self can manifest itself freely, because the resources for realizing the creative potential are practically inexhaustible, as well as the room for maneuver: he can watch, tell stories, interview, philosophize, describe, ironize, be lyrical, to analyze, to contrast, so it can manifest itself more fully than in the media institution where it operates.

In addition, the contents that they place on the blog can have more personality and style by using multimedia resources: images, audio and video files, photos, diagrams, tables, slides, tags, links to other resources on the Internet, emoticons, podcasts and video podcasts, live broadcasts, personalized presentations, etc. The reality shows that the blog has become an effective personal branding tool, including for journalists, but in the following we want to address an aspect, it would seem unexpected, of the activity domestic journalists on their blogs, because it sets up a question mark about what kind of journalism they do (if they do) – professional or citizen? As some of them state, what they post on the blog is not necessarily (and should be) journalistic content, noting that they did not create the blog for usefulness in professional work, but to have a space to express their ideas, share their emotions and announce their achievements and successes. However, currently the popularity of blogs has decreased compared to the situation that took place a few years ago, when many journalists had a personal blog. Over time, some of these blogs have been abandoned, and others have turned into platforms for custom promotion of goods and services.

The blogs of journalists Valeriu Saharneanu, Angela Aramă and Ștefan Secăreanu have a totally different format. The posts mostly represent comments and opinion articles, own opinions about the social-political reality in the Republic of Moldova and in the region. The contents are both objective and deeply subjective, but it is worth mentioning that the authors still do not deviate from the journalistic language of expression. Few categories, no added information, the focus is on the articles that appear.

In what follows, we want to refer to the personal blog of the journalist Dragostina Vicol, employed at the magazine Oastea Moldovei from the Republic of Moldova. In terms of structure and content it is a very consistent blog with constantly updated information and in this sense it is an exemplary blog. Although the author qualifies it as a personal blog, it is more of a professional, specialized blog, or all the posts address topics related to the military. The blog sums up several categories:

1. Act with impact (materials are published in this category in which the author explains and interprets the legal acts entered into force and the impact they have on employees in the military system);

2. Army and society (events within the national army are mirrored and creations and memories of military and ex-military are exhibited);

3. Without uniform (contains posts-interviews, in which the author discovers talents among the military and talks about their passions);

4. Parallels with 5 stars (short news about national and international events connected to the life of the army are placed in this category);

5. Pulse of the army (contains short posts in news format that reflect the daily life of the army);

6. Military bridges (articles in which the author talks about the collaborative activities of the National Army of Moldova with the armies of other states);

7. Curiosities about units (the author presents interesting information about the formation and development of military units);

8. Miscellaneous (curiosities about the national army, expressions with military origins, types of military honors, the procedure for conferring military ranks, life stories of local soldiers, etc) [10].

All the above-mentioned categories contain materials made in compliance with journalistic rigors, the author emphasizes a variety of genres: news, interviews, portrait interviews, portrait reports, even curiosities are presented in a journalistic manner. At the same time, it is worth mentioning that the information is up-to-date, useful and of public interest.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, even if some representatives of traditional media see a threat in this phenomenon, we believe that blogging should be perceived rather as a development, a transformation, a capitalization of traditional journalism, because it brings with it opportunities for more attractive presentation of the contents, of public loyalty, of increasing the degree of interactivity and increasing the feed-back from the information consumers. A journalistic content can be presented differently, it is important that it is a content of value, drawn up according to some rules, because, in time, the only differentiator is the quality of the information.

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