Revista Românească pentru Educație Multidimensională
ISSN: 2066-7329 | e-ISSN: 2067-9270
Covered in: Web of Science (WOS); EBSCO; ERIH+; Google Scholar; Index Copernicus; Ideas RePeC; Econpapers; Socionet; CEEOL; Ulrich ProQuest; Cabell, Journalseek; Scipio; Philpapers; SHERPA/RoMEO repositories; KVK; WorldCat; CrossRef; CrossCheck

2024, Volume 16, Issue 3, pages: 47-63 | https://doi.org/10.18662/rrem/16.3/882
Submitted: May 16th, 2024| *Accepted for publication:* June 6th, 2024

Information Gathering for Online News Publications: A Multidimensional Issue for Media Professionals and Educators

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Abstract: *The purpose of this study is to reveal some current issues concerning the gap between the education and practice of Romanian online news reporting, especially regarding the activity of information gathering, critical event reporting and fulfilling the role of exposing reality in an objective manner. Several observations from previous studies showed a discrepancy between the educational standards of journalism schools in the matter of news documentation and the reality on the ground. We tried to see what skills the faculties of future journalists must train in order to ensure a return of the media to a more critical attitude, necessary for a democratic society, starting from the qualitative analysis of several local and national media platforms in Romania. Our main interest was the degree to which reporters that publish news on online media platforms use filed documentation, interviews and other news gathering techniques in their activity, compared to simply publish institutional PR briefings or third-part articles. The conclusions of our research are that the vast majority of news is based solely on curated information and lacks not only a critical approach, but also the personal input of reporters.*

Keywords: *media skills; educational standards; news publications; information gathering; online media.*

How to cite: Szabo, L. V., Bader, S., & Sîrb, C. (2024). Information gathering for online news publications: a multidimensional issue for media professionals and educators. *Revista Românească pentru Educație Multidimensională, 16*(3), 47-63. https://doi.org/10.18662/rrem/16.3/882

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Introduction

Ever since the early years of digital media development, specialised literature has emphasised the inherent changes in expectations and behavioural patterns, both among consumers and media content producers. (Wall, 2014; Milojevic et al., 2016; Loosen, 2015). In order to further explore this topic, we underwent a randomised study on some of the main Romanian online journalism platforms that aimed to assess the degree to which basic competences of information gathering and critical thinking that journalism faculties prioritise are still relevant as far as online journalism practice is concerned.

Therefore, we believed that several necessary questions arise regarding the professional training of journalism specialists:

1. What skills should universities impart to future journalists in order to ensure a return towards a more active attitude, which is so necessary for a democratic society?
2. What is a feasible compromise between media resource availability (time, personnel, money) and ensuring a minimum quality of the press? Specifically, when is it appropriate and when is it not appropriate to publish press materials without prior independent research? Can certain criteria be formulated in order to facilitate journalists' activities in this regard?

The answers to the two questions stated above are obviously difficult to provide in a very clear manner. But this problematic nature does not make them any less necessary. Before proceeding with our answers, it must be mentioned that we will exclusively refer to journalists in online media, and not to the journalism profession in general. Moreover, our research itself has been limited to such content within our study.

In the spirit of McLuhan's ideas, the evolution of media content has followed the direction set by the medium (McLuhan, 2011): journalists have produced more content, faster, and more superficially, trying to keep pace with the demands of new formats and the continuous flow of digital platforms. However, according to the analysis presented above, the effects on content are among the most unfavourable. But because the medium cannot be ignored or changed, identifying a compromise solution becomes necessary; a middle path delimited by educators in this field.

Therefore, we will attempt to formulate a possible answer to the question: (1) What skills should universities impart to future journalists to ensure a return towards a more offensive attitude, which is so necessary for a democratic society?

Specialised literature divides different skills into several important categories: *normative* - addressing the social/cultural/ideological role, *institutional* - addressing their role as part of a media institution, and *performative* (practical) - addressing current activities in newsrooms (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017). The results of our study highlight that normative competencies are most neglected by journalistic practice, with the mention that the effects extend to performative ones as well. Specifically, the decreasing importance of the ideological dimension of journalistic activity, both personally and societally, influences everyday journalistic practice. Thus, as long as journalists no longer perceive their activity as one of regulating institutional transparency and safeguarding the public interest, they do not make efforts to ensure that the published materials are rigorously and thoroughly documented. Technical competencies, which view the journalist as a "node" in an information network rather than as a primary content producer, must be supplemented with attributes concerning quality.

Thus, the journalist not only *collects* information from social media, but should ensure that it is done *critically*; he does not only *mediate* information from institutions, but *verifies* the information on the ground and sends it to audiences *supplemented* or *cleansed* of promotional or propagandistic details; he does not only *compile* materials from social media users, but *verifies* and *validates* them.

This way, online print media could transcend the status of a mere information aggregator and successfully return to a critical and proactive position within society. Details, statistics, quotes, journalist observations, and expert conclusions are what makes the finished journalistic material authentic and credible. In addition to these, it is obvious that journalists must constantly adapt to each particular situation, as well as to the types of sources and the individual-psychological characteristics of the interlocutor. Reduced resource availability (time, money, personnel) may diminish the quality of journalistic practice, so media institutions and journalists in particular are forced to adopt different behaviours (mobility, flexibility) for different situations.

One of the competencies that is not emphasised enough in journalists' training is *journalistic discernment*, which roughly means perceiving, judging, and deciding appropriately in each journalistic product which method and attitude are suitable, respectively using an appropriate approach for each type of news. For example, in institutional news - source verification; in social events - verification of reporting sources and, if possible, field documentation; in investigations - approaching individuals and domains that can provide significant information for the investigation,

etc. Journalistic discernment also implicitly refers to the degree of intervention of the journalist in the finished product. In neutral news, the degree of intervention is minimal and consists only of verifying the accuracy of sources. In investigative journalism, the degree of involvement is high and requires a whole arsenal of investigative competencies and skills. In opinion journalism, the degree of personalization is maximum as it comments on facticity without requiring objectivity. In the conditions where the abundance and pace of informational flow are very high in the digital world, adopting the first degree of involvement (e.g., transmitting a press release as is) can be justified, although not always beneficial, as it can easily propagate false news or disinformation. On the other hand, the survival of a publication solely on this type of product leads to the degradation of journalistic quality through unprocessed repetitions.

With that being said, it seems necessary to return to the formation of fundamental competencies and values of journalistic practice. From a technological perspective, the younger generations of journalists are very well prepared; digital performance is at an optimal level, both in local and national press. However, from a professional standpoint, there is a clear need for human, individual imprint in everything related to the collection, selection, and transmission of information to the public.

But how much of these standards can we find in actual journalism?

When the Media Misses the Event

When working on their news, journalists use institutional or corporate briefings as a constant source of information. More often than it would be recommended, these briefings are taken as they are and published before an event takes place, assuring both public awareness and media exposure for the organiser. Sometimes, even when journalistic products are produced after the event, the content is created without the journalist having attended the event.

It is not hard to understand this kind of professional approach: it ensures a good collaboration between companies and media organisations, both media and technological convergence are thus achieved (Szabo, 2021). However, in this particular professional environment, informational efficiency is not the only value that should be promoted. In the absence of on-site research, journalistic content loses its value, the public is not fully informed, misinformation is prone to occur, leading to a lack of informational convergence (Laughey, 2009).

Communication errors exist worldwide, including in established media organisations. An interesting and amusing case occurred in mid-June

2022. At that time, four leaders of the European Union arrived in Kyiv, having discussions with the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky. Three of them came together: Emmanuel Macron, the President of France, Olaf Scholz, the Chancellor of Germany, and Mario Draghi, the Prime Minister of Italy. Klaus Iohannis, the President of Romania, joined the three at the meeting with Zelensky, but his presence posed difficulties for reporters and media organisations. Even in the difficult situation represented by the war in Ukraine, communication about such meetings should be efficient. This did not happen; President Iohannis was omitted from the journalistic products of major publications such as *The New York Times, Le Figaro, El Pais*, or *The Guardian*, the latter effectively cutting him out of the group photo, as they had no information about him and did not consider him worthy of media attention (Şerban, 2022). Although it was an official, high-level event, the public relations services of the hosts and guests did not function correctly, showing that communication blunders can be present even in these situations, which should not pose problems for experienced professionals. Without reporters and correspondents on the ground and relying merely on PR briefings and event coverage by the local press, major media organisations found themselves in a delicate situation. In this embarrassing situation, the responsibility lies not only on the journalists and the media organisations they represent, but also on public relations offices of the Presidencies of Ukraine and Romania. As the host country and the main organiser of the meetings, the Ukrainian Presidency had the duty to provide comprehensive public relations services about the event, providing attending journalists and media organisations with the necessary data, as well as appropriate images. Similarly, such an initiative, focused on the figure of President Iohannis, should have been carried out by the public relations officials of the Romanian Presidency. As far as journalists are concerned, a supplementary independent documentation should have been compulsory.

Information, sources, and news

Journalists gather information for creating specific communication products (news, reports, features, investigations) from human sources and documentary sources (Szabo, 2018). News can thus be obtained from individuals who have knowledge about significant events. They can be leaders of administration, politicians, victims or perpetrators of illegal acts, witnesses, law enforcement members, or experts of different sorts. Additionally, human sources might be groups speaking on behalf of institutions, organisations, companies, associations, unions, or others of this kind. Sources are individuals who possess data or are present where

significant events occur. But individuals or legal entities (organisations, institutions, or firms), as well as the areas of important events to be reported, are also sources to which the journalist turns to verify the essential elements of a journalistic product (Harcup, 2008). Each source must be reliable, and the journalist has the duty to verify both the credibility of the source itself (i.e., to know if the person in question knows what they are talking about, if they are capable of understanding the subject), as well as the information provided (Szabo & Petrovici, 2014). These are minimal and necessary verification (Metzger et al., 2023). Obviously, the relations with sources can be difficult, and they may not work, which damages the process of news checking and delivering. These are problems that arise especially when dealing with people from politics, public administration, whenever they try to block or hinder communication so that the negative aspects of their activities do not come to light. These individuals may appeal to various methods to block communication, including threats or aggression. Under these conditions, dialogue is difficult to achieve (Infante & Rancer, 1996). Generally, the process of gathering information is initiated by the journalist. They interview witnesses, victims, perpetrators, officials, and experts. However, there are situations when data gathering is initiated by the sources themselves. These sources either have a selfish interest in promoting their own products or image, or they want to provide details about important events in society, such as law violations. However, from a professional standpoint, it is important that representatives of media organisations do not wait for information to come solely from the outside, but also to pursue it (O'Neill & O'Connor, 2008).

In gathering information, journalists usually use three main instruments: observation, interviews, and document analysis (Szabo, 2018). Observation involves the direct contact of the reporter with reality, events and people (Petre, 2019). Observation can be direct, when events unfold before the reporter's eyes. The most common method is indirect observation, where facts are reconstructed through the investigation of traces left behind. Thus, the journalist may witness a car accident, a fire, or may receive some information in a press conference. However, in practice, a reporter arrives most commonly at the scene after the event has occurred. Information about an accident, an explosion, or a crime is obtained through the observation of traces, such as dead or injured persons, damaged vehicles, blood, and the accounts of victims (if they can speak), witnesses (if any), and intervention team members. Journalists then use their senses to reconstruct the events which they are reporting on. Observation does not only mean seeing or hearing, perceiving certain aspects of reality, but also

understanding the elements of actuality in their context, and the facts within the broader political, social, or economic framework that generated them (Gross, 2011).

Methodology

An important part of our research for the present study consisted of the analysis of journalistic contents published on five Romanian national and local online news platforms. The method used is randomised content analysis, focusing on the sources of information for the investigated media products during one month. This way, we attempted to identify which news articles were drafted after field research or with the help of information gathered at institutional headquarters and which of them based merely on PR briefings, with a special attention being paid to the relationship with various institutions of political power.

The first media platform selected for analysis was *ziare.com*. The choice was made because this publication is very broad content-wise, posting news from all areas of interest: politics, administration, justice and public order, social issues, sports, culture. Spatially, *ziare.com* integrates both domestic and international news and mostly curates content from other media platforms, as it does not benefit from its own correspondents. We targeted content published within a 48-hour timeframe, from June 19 to June 21, 2022. These were two days filled with events both in Romania and internationally, that were reported in 281 articles. Out of these, one-third (91) were foreign political news, taken from press agencies or other publications. Another 39 were sports-themed, focusing on the success of swimmer David Popovici. 14 articles concerned entertainment news, but were written in a balanced manner, with topics being carefully selected. Another 15 journalistic products could be placed in the category of useful information, offering advice for various life situations, from dealing with depression to accessible vacation spots. It is evident that these are also content adaptations from various sources. There remained 132 articles dedicated to domestic Romanian news, none of which were produced through original field research, but by using other sources, such as press releases/information provided by institutions, including governmental or local ones, either by transmitting them to media institutions or by gathering information from websites. Additionally, much data seemed to have been obtained by following the personal or institutional pages of political or administrative leaders on social networks, especially Facebook. All articles were apparently neutrally written, with those concerning governmental management being rather positive. None of them were critical. Even when

the topics they covered were controversial issues or accusations, they were generally mere transcriptions of institutional briefings, with opposing positions being seldom noted, and often with delay.

Sometimes, misinformation can occur on account of media publishing unverified messages from social media accounts. This is what happened when Eduard Novak was suspected of deliberately avoiding mentioning Romania in the Hungarian version of the congratulatory text for David Popovici. The minister replied that he does not manage the page himself and it was only a misunderstanding (Șerban, 2022). Another article, regarding the change of Romania's representative to the Venice Commission, published on June 25, 2022, explicitly shows the information gathering process: *ziare.com* took the content from the *Europa Liberă* media platform, which based its reporting solely on a statement found on the Venice Commission's website (Birzoi, 2022).

Balance, not bias - Where Have the Reporters Gone?

Another digital platform that we analysed was *Adevărul*. The publication is an important representative of the Romanian press, with the first printed issue appearing in 1871. Initially, the publication was anti-dynastic, and later it embraced leftist ideas. *Adevărul* became popular during the interwar period, as it was a publication with clear liberal and social-democratic affinities. It reached impressive circulations, due to its balanced tone and a certain impartiality towards Romanian social-political actors. It was suspended during World War II, then banned by the communist regime, with its assets being taken over by *Scânteia*, periodically edited by the Romanian Communist Party. *Adevărul* resumed its activity under this title in 1990, becoming once again an important publication in the domestic media landscape.

For the present analysis, we took into consideration 74 editorial journalistic pieces published on the main feed during June 30 and July 1, 2022. Out of the total, 20 news items were related to sports, and five concerned foreign issues. 49 materials reported on various Romanian current affairs: politics, administration, social issues, or events. None of the articles was produced by means of field data collection or interview techniques. All of them were adaptations of public relations materials provided by various institutions or news taken from other media organisations. For example, there are news items taken from *Agerpres* or *Digi24*, containing data from ready-made briefs. There are very few investigations conducted by *Adevărul* reporters (none during the analysed period), articles with information gathered directly by journalists could be

found only in the Local section, although most of their communication products are made after receiving press releases from institutions, organisations, or companies.

Our analysis moved further to the content published on *Libertatea.ro*, which is one of the most comprehensive mass media platforms in Romania. It appeared as a printed publication on December 22, 1989, replacing the afternoon daily *Informaţia Bucureştiului*. It had a fluctuating evolution, in the early years being rather in the wake of other important publications, editorially leaning towards supporting left-wing governments. After 2000, the publication had pronounced tabloid tendencies, but has now returned to a more balanced approach.

In this case, the corpus consisted of 113 journalistic texts posted on the platform on July 4 and 5, 2022, in the News section, covering internal politics and administration, external events, economic and social issues, excluding sports and entertainment. Out of these, 36 were external news, with the main theme being the war in Ukraine and Moscow's aggressive actions. Only six materials concerned the activity of the central administration. One was about the evolution of the number of COVID cases in Romania, neutrally reporting the data provided by Alexandru Rafila, the Minister of Health. Although the figures showed an alarming increase in infections (over a thousand per day), journalists did not seem concerned about this trend and did not attempt to gather additional information. Three news items were written with regard to statements made by President Klaus Iohannis in a press conference. As is known, the Romanian president rarely holds such meetings with journalists. These are the only pieces with a more reserved attitude towards the executive power, and a critical approach to the discussed topic. The 73 news items reported on various aspects of national interest and were not produced through actual field visits or discussions, whether by phone or with use of other sources. The common practice of the Romanian mainstream press seems to be rewriting informative materials provided by various institutions or online documentation on official web and social media pages.

Local Press is Fatigued

As far as local mass media platforms are concerned, we selected two of the most representative in Timisoara. The first publication we examined is *Renaşterea Bănăţeană*. Historically, the publication is the direct heir of the former newspaper *Luptătorul Bănăţean/Drapelul Roşu*, edited in Timiş County after World War II, under the aegis of the County Committee of the Romanian Communist Party. After the Revolution of 1989, it remained left-

leaning and pro-governmental even under the ownership of the controversial businessman Iosif Constantin Drăgan. In recent years, *Renașterea Bănățeană* has taken a much more balanced position, especially since experienced journalists from other important publications in Timișoara have joined the editorial team. The newspaper continues to be published in print format. While the printed edition includes between 50 and 60 editorial materials, in online their number drops to less than half, so for the two days analysed (July 7 and 8, 2022), we found only 45 pieces. They were unevenly distributed in 11 sections, with most of the articles found in the sections of News (20), Sports (8), and Events (7). Other sections did not record any appearances during this period.

Most of the news items were actually taken from other publications, especially national ones, or were adaptations of press releases sent by representatives of various institutions (Police, Timiş County Council, Timişoara City Hall). None of the 45 articles analysed were written after field documentation, which was surprising, as *Renașterea Bănățeană* has built the image of a proactive editorial team that gathers information of public interest directly from local communities.

The second local publication we analysed was the online news page *tion.ro*. It covers Timiş County, but mostly the city of Timişoara. *Tion* has had better times, 10-15 years ago, when printed editions appeared in several counties in the western region of Romania, benefiting from the contributions of important regional journalists. However, due to economic difficulties and declining circulation, print editions were closed and the publication remained entirely online. Although it still benefits from experienced reporters in a small team, the number of articles is low, only 21 in the two-day period we took into consideration, namely July 12-13, 2022. Nine of them were labelled as News from Timiş, and five were published in the Events section. During those two days, there were no articles published in the Economic or Sports sections. There were no news articles during that period resulting from field documentation, with most being based on information taken from institutional releases.

Thought-Provoking Results

1. From the analysis conducted, it appears that few Romanian journalists use direct observation and interviews in order to gather information for their articles. Researchers in the field have long established that good quality journalism depends on these activities and that any professional media product should be a result of such endeavours (Rudinschi, 2014). If attention to information gathering is essential in the

process of providing high-quality final products, producing *original* journalistic content should be equally important. That means as few content reproductions from outside sources as possible (information and news), especially from other media organisations (such as news agencies, primarily) (Rudinschi, 2014). However, it must be mentioned that gathering data from external sources is absolutely necessary, to some extent. Fewer journalists accompany official delegations, so their contribution is reduced, thus it is sometimes necessary to appeal to external sources. Similarly, mass media platforms have few internal correspondents or sub-editors, being forced to take national interest news from third parties. Furthermore, publications cannot ignore public relations materials (briefings or releases) issued by various institutions, organisations, or companies. Still, it is important to adhere to the fundamental principle for quality journalism: at least half of the content should be based on information gathered by reporters.

The lack of field and/or sources documentation proliferates journalistic products of poor quality, sometimes with inadequate information. There are many reasons for this degradation of Romanian media content, beyond the direct attempt to make money by mimicking, in fact, the idea of the press. Dependence on advertising provided by integrators like Google, a major source of money for the platforms, encourages the emergence of sensational news (Bader & Sirb, 2021). All efforts are directed to increase the number of clicks, the *click-bait phenomenon*, the number of hits being the criterion for calculating advertising money. It is the old technique of baiting, when the user is confronted with promises, found partially or not at all in the final communication product. It is a deliberate misrepresentation for the provider to increase their earnings (Guéguen, 2007). The economic crisis during 2007-2011 forced media organisations to make radical changes, mainly by reducing material costs, which led to a further reduction in fieldwork. Many of the old journalists were fired or left for safer positions. Those who remained, as well as the young ones who came later, found that they could develop media businesses capable of bringing in some revenue, especially in the years after the crisis, without worrying too much about compliance with ethics or quality journalism standards, and "this means, partially or totally, giving up informative content for predominantly entertaining content." (Nistor, 2018, p. 101)

2. Another source of this problem falls on information produced by private and public organisations, which is seldom published by news editors in the same form in which it has been received. In social media it is necessary to distinguish between *social networks* and *content-oriented networks*

(Momoc, 2014). Sometimes, the information is also sent to the e-mail addresses, through phone messages or on the social pages of some journalists or press organisations. Sometimes this does not happen anymore, the press people taking the information directly from the websites or social pages of the information transmitter. Many of the contents are reproduced as such in the pages (electronic, rarely physical!) of the media platforms, in many cases even with the signature of some members of the editorial staff. Thus, it arises the bizarre situation where quasi-identical corporate materials are published in several publications under different names.

3. A third characteristic of Romanian journalism is the intertwining between mass media and social media. Social platforms are open to everyone, regardless of their education. Some of the people active on social networks are experienced, they are easy to handle in their activity of posting content and can have an increased audience, as we can see in the case of some influencers, especially when they manage to gain the trust of a large number of followers (Balaban et al., 2021). Media professionals can use social media pages to amplify the effect of their own journalistic productions, to attract attention to them, or for related activities, such as publishing opinions and information not used in the main product, where the rigours of journalistic content production did not allow it. Media organisations and their actors can use strategies like *echo chambers* for the dissemination of useful and necessary information to the public, but the networks are much easier and more often used for disinformation and the imposition of false truths in society, often disguised as correct information (Bârgăoanu & Durach, 2019). However, the differences between the two should remain clear, and the failure to respect this boundary leads to the uniformization of the flow of communication products between mass and social media, resulting in a confused or indifferent public, thus reducing or nullifying the role of the press as an informing instrument (Attail, 2022). Media organisations are increasingly taking in information, in the form of text or images (photographs or filmed materials) from social network pages or personal accounts. Of course, professional mass media cannot always avoid this, especially when the contents are relevant, and interactivity is an essential feature of current virtual communication (Rotaru, 2014). However, turning the collection of data from amateurs (even in good faith) into a common practice has repercussions on journalism, as it largely replaces the work of professionals with that of enthusiastic and dedicated but unprepared individuals. It is another way to blur the boundary between mass media and social media, both in terms of information gathering and presentation methods.

4. Two decades ago, when the democratic progress of Romanian society was still weak, mass media was massively influenced by huge pressures exerted by the political and administrative factors. Pressures on independent media organisations were of economic and political nature (high cost of printing paper, restricted access to printing houses, distribution restrictions, refusal to grant licences in audio-visual media, tax inspections, and hefty fines). The goodwill of some media institutions could be bought by preferential allocation of advertising for various state institutions. Then, in the two years of the Covid-19 pandemic (2020-2022), the Romanian press received significant sums of money from the state budget to survive. It is clear that the pressures exerted by political and administrative leaders are aimed at limiting disclosures of corruption in particular. A difficult problem is the direct interference of politicians in the mass media, because in Romania some media organisations are owned or influenced by party patrons or their sympathisers (Radu, 2016).

There has always been an alignment of some media organisations with the government policy, while another part of the press has ensured balance, sometimes forming an even stronger position than parliamentary political opposition. In 2019, for example, much of the press in Romania criticised the errors of the then-government, contributing significantly to mobilising the public for the major demonstration on August 10, brutally repressed by the forces coordinated directly by the political factors in power. In 2022, the critical attitude was much diminished. Although governance continued to be deficient, with noteworthy exceptions of independent journalism, the media attitude was rather one of compliance, with few criticisms coming not from journalistic products documented directly in the field or in institutions but from opinion articles, many belonging to commentators not very skilled in news reporting.

The offensive position of the press in detecting government errors and irregularities was also diminished by the fact that political polarisation was annulled, by the formation, in 2022, of a government consisting of Romania's two major parties, PSD and PNL, one left-wing, the other right-wing. In this way, publications, radios, televisions, and other social and mass media platforms with left or right-wing sympathies found themselves in the position of limiting their revelations in order not to disturb the entire government structure, and scarcely succeeded in producing communication products capable of correctly analysing government measures and detecting errors or abuse.

Conclusions and Predictions

Our content analysis indicates that the current situation of Romanian online media is even more serious than the pessimistic premises at the beginning of our research. Less than 10% of the articles published while we underwent our research relied on information gathered even partially by reporters themselves. Additionally, direct contacts with sources are lacking and on the few occasions when information is gathered through questioning, it is done during press conferences, which are often formal and one-sided, serving more as promotional events for political parties or different organisations. In few cases, especially in more investigative or reportage-oriented editorial materials, human sources and outside documentation are used more intensively.

At this point, we must take into consideration an important limitation of the present research, based on the fact that our analysis was based towards what is perceived as quality national and local media platforms. A future development of the investigation could focus on media organisations defined by sensationalist content. Another important area of research should be television and radio content, as audiovisual media still have reporters accustomed to gathering information through field documentation.

According to the results of the present study, most journalistic products published in Romanian online media are based mostly on information taken from institutional or corporate briefings or other PR materials, or from posts on various social media platforms. In our opinion, further research should pay greater attention to this phenomenon, as many communication products created by public relations specialists are often flawed, raising ethical issues that should be addressed (Frunză, 2011). This trend of taking information generated by public relations specialists has been long-lasting, but in the last few years, more precisely, since 2020, it seems to have become generalised, as the main source of information for the mass media. Dumitru Borţun also pointed out one of the major dangers of abandoning collaboration between journalists and institutionalised communicators, because journalists should not expect them to have "an ethical behaviour, based on the principle of institutional transparency and respect for citizens' right to accurate information." (Borţun, 2020, 109-126). Although posts on various platforms, be them institutional or personal, facilitate the work of journalists, the lack of interaction, especially on sensitive subjects, leads to them being treated uniformly and superficially. It is necessary for media institutions to return to the basic principles of

journalism, stimulating the discovery of information sources and direct dialogue with them, even when gathering information from outside sources is difficult.

Our analysis also shows a massive increase in the volume of information that is being published, which is also highly diversified, in terms of topic and format. Given the variety of topics that media approaches, a critical perspective is highly recommended. We strongly believe that journalists should raise questions about missing or controversial data, not just to take, often without any alteration, the various contents offered by public relations offices. This is the linear model of communication, long surpassed in the era of convergence (Narula, 2006). It is necessary to return to the offensive role (not aggressive!) of reporters and editors, capable of asking good questions and obtaining essential answers. Only in this way will (mass) media organisations be able to find out what is really happening in society and provide the public with complete information in quality journalistic products.

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