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**BEING AN AUTHOR UNDER THE ROMANIAN  
COMMUNIST REGIME.  
THE ACTIVITY OF EDITOR-IN-CHIEF ION BRAD  
FOR *THE RED TIE* (1956-1958)**

**MIHAI CISTELICAN<sup>1</sup>**

**ABSTRACT.** He witnessed the foundation of the Communist regime in Romania and lived nearly all his life under socialism. The Romanian author Ion Brad is one of those who observed from the inside how the socialist regime propagated its beliefs in the media among the population. For almost 70 years, Ion Brad published hundreds of articles in communist newspapers and magazines such as *The Literary Almanac*, *The Star*, *The Red Tie*, *The Pioneer's Spark*, *The Literary Gazette* and others. The present study is meant to cover the activity of editor-in-chief Ion Brad for the children's magazine *The Red Tie* in a period of time when Communism was just taking up the reins in Romania (1956-1958). Apart from the articles he published, we also wanted to analyse the context in which he had to work (his collaboration with other authors, topics promoted in the magazine etc.). This study could prove very handy for future research in terms of better understanding how Ion Brad rendered the reality in the press of the time and also in observing the context in which writers did their job in a country from Eastern Europe, where Communism had already taken control for 10 years, in the time of a Cold War between two political and ideological systems.

**Keywords:** Ion Brad, Communism, newspapers, *The Red Tie*, history of press, Romania, Eastern Europe.

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### 1.1. Ion Brad – short biography

Ion Brad (November 8th 1929 – to present) is a Romanian author, poet and diplomat. He graduated from the Faculty of Philology of Cluj-Napoca (1948-1952) and started working as a journalist while still a student, being a reporter for *The Literary Almanac* (today *The Star*) – one of the first magazines established by the Communists after the end of World War II in Romania. Thus, he can be categorized as a journalist who represented the socialist realism, like most of the authors of the time. Becoming a journalist was just a first step many writers would take to make a living. The Communism brought in Romania plenty of economic issues which the state barely succeeded in sorting out. Consequently, an article published in a Communist magazine could solve the financial problems of a writer in the making. The articles written at the beginnings of the Romanian socialism are the more interesting to study as they show the ideas the regime wanted to spread among the population.

Ion Brad was born in Pănade, Alba County, in a large family consisting of nine children. Growing up, Brad would manage or collaborate with various newspapers and magazines from different positions. After he ended working as a reporter for *The Literary Almanac* (1949-1955), he became editor-in-chief for the children's magazine *The Red Tie* (1956-1958). Later on he would be editor for *The Star* (1958-1960) and then for *The Youth's Spark* (1960-1962), a newspaper which strongly promoted the Communist interests and beliefs.

Ion Brad attended "St. Basil the Great" Highschool in Blaj and in 1948 he became a student of the Faculty of Philology of Cluj. He was still in high school when he made a mark as a writer with the poem *I had a dream about you* (in Romanian language: *Te-am visat*) that he published in 1947 in the magazine *Thought Youthful* of Alba. In the period of time 1962-1965, he was secretary of the Writers' Union of Romania, thus he had so much work to do that he could no longer collaborate as much as before with newspapers and magazines. As of

1962 he became member of the Romanian Workers' Party later renamed the Romanian Communist Party. His political and diplomatic rise climaxed when he was designated ambassador of Romania in Greece for 9 years (1973-1982), later on being in various management positions for various cultural institutions until he retired. After 1989, when the Communism came to an end in Romania, he started to publish his literary and diplomacy memoirs in a lot of memoir volumes.

## 1.2. Context

In the '50s, the Workers' Party was trying to create the so called "new man". To this purpose, there was an abundance of children's magazines at the beginnings of the Communist regime in Romania, propagating the ideas, values and character that the new generation was supposed to embrace. Such magazines were: *The Pioneer's Spark*, *The Little Light*, *Ploughing Hedgehogs*, *The Children's newspaper*, *The Young Leninist*, *The Pioneer*, *The Pioneers' Instructor*, *Plougher*, *The Brave*, *The Hawks of Homeland*.

The Communists were eager to create role models among the young generation. The Department of Propaganda within the Romanian Communist state created magazines overnight, in such a circulation which today would be impossible to attain. This is what other topic-relevant studies concluded. Statistically, the magazines were directed to specific age groups, so anyone under 18 could easily find articles of interest: "*The Pioneer's Spark* - target group - children in the grades III-VII, weekly publication, an average circulation of 570.000 copies. *The Red Tie* - target group - children in the grades V-VIII, monthly publication, with an average circulation of 34.000 copies. *The Little Light* - target group - readers in the grades I-IV, monthly publication, with an average circulation of 114.000 copies, vividly illustrated, having a message easily accessible to readers, consisting of 20 pages and 21,5x30,5 format, in colours. *Ploughing Hedgehogs* - a

monthly magazine for pre-schoolers, an average circulation of 85.000 copies, being a vividly coloured illustrated album, short explanatory texts, consisting of 16 pages and 17,5x25 format.”<sup>2</sup>

As long as Ion Brad managed *The Red Tie*, the paper size was A4. In terms of illustrations, the magazine was abundant in photos, drawings, cartoons, caricatures and useful tips. It consisted of 32 pages plus the covers. Here are some of the most frequent topics: “In your spare time”, “Humorous page”, “You try this”, “Poems written by our readers”, “Overseas and far away”, “Questions from readers (for example: how much does the Earth weigh and how old is it?)”, “Caricature shop window”, “Our readers report” etc. The magazine published short stories, poetry, real events, games and useful tips for the little ones. It also contained Romanian translations of Russian poets, translations made by either people of the editorial board or collaborators of the magazine. Among the best-known writers and artists who published articles or graphic images in *The Red Tie* when Ion Brad was editor-in-chief were Nicolae Labiș, Ion Agârbiceanu, Tudor Arghezi, Nina Cassian, Doina Sălăjan, Puiu Manu (illustrator), Cella Delavrancea or Cella Serghi.

Although *The Red Tie* was a magazine whose target audience were children, the Communist propaganda was present with different messages. Either in the shape of Proletkult poems, short stories or illustrations, the Communist ideas were present in every issue. It is worth mentioning that the amount of Communist texts and illustrations differs from issue to issue. The magazine contains a lot of texts which are not at all related to or allusive of the Communist ideas, they are strictly aimed for children. Consequently, those who were in charge created a mix of Communist and unbiased articles. The former editor-in-chief Ion Bradu commented on this: “It was good to publish them as the life of the children was not systematically affected by politics. Children were supposed to play, sing and recite poems.

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<sup>2</sup> Apud <http://www.arhivelenationale.ro/images/custom/file/15%20preda,%20simona.pdf> (accessed on 18.10.2017, time 16:25, in Romanian language).

However, I myself wrote about Lenin after the visit I had made in the winter of 1957 in the Soviet Union, passing through Leningrad, where I saw the places in which he had started the Great Bolshevik Revolution on November 7, 1927 (October Revolution) after he had been hiding in a hut in Razliv<sup>3</sup>. His superiors, those who ran the Central Committee of the Union of Young Workers (to which I also belonged as an alternate member) welcomed such manifestations.”<sup>4</sup>

Before it became *The Red Tie*, the magazine’s name was *The Glow-Worm* and the people who edited it were partisans of the communist movement. Ion Brad, he himself a nomenclaturist, described the context of those times: “However, as education needed to be implemented in school age children and as the party was evidently focussed on the renewal and «Romanianization» of the top management positions in the press, instead of the pseudonyms mostly used up to that point, I found myself a «nomenclaturist» again, in the capacity of editor-in-chief of the magazine of pioneers, that previously had been managed by a former dressmaker, the wife of comrade Olaru, working for *The Spark*. Her deputy was also a dressmaker – the wife of a comrade whose pseudonym was Bălănescu (a talented psychologist), working for *The Contemporary* magazine, formerly managed by the pseudonym Marcel Breazu before it was handed over to George Ivaşcu from Iaşi county, through the mediation of powerful Mihail Ralea”<sup>5</sup>.

Examining the magazine in the years 1953, 1954 and 1955 – before Ion Brad started to manage the publication – a few conclusions can be drawn. For instance, before Ion Brad became editor-in-chief, that is between 1953-1955, the magazine published much more texts

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<sup>3</sup> Lenin escaped arrest in 1917, hiding in Razliv village, in the close vicinity of Sankt Petersburg.

<sup>4</sup> Ion Brad: “I was the first in Romania to write about The Merry Cemetery”. Interview done by Mihai Cistelican in *The Old Fireplace*, X, number 4 (112), April 2018, p. 3 (Romanian language).

<sup>5</sup> Ilie Rad, *Conversations with Ion Brad: “spring to fall”* (April-October 2013), Eikon Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2013, p. 132 (Romanian language).

translated from Russian authors, pictures of Lenin in the company of children, articles about visits to Lenin Park or about stamps reflecting Lenin's life. The influence of the Soviets who occupied different positions in the press, as mentioned by Ion Brad, was also obvious in *The Glow-Worm*, the future *Red Tie*.

After Stalin's death, in 1953, *The Red Tie* published a lot of articles about him, later on just a few. When Iosif Stalin died, a special issue came out in the memory of the former communist leader. The articles usually had Proletkult titles, such as: "I. V. Stalin, the brilliant mentor in biology" (*The Glow-Worm*, number VII, published 1953, p. 14). Romanian communists were also promoted. Gheorghiu-Dej's picture was published in the same period of time, which would be highly unusual for the period of time 1956-1958 (when Ion Brad was editor-in-chief) - his name was barely mentioned in the magazine (I. V. Lenin was the main leader promoted in that period of time). Before Ion Brad became editor-in-chief, the magazine contained children articles, however it contained very few illustrations. After 1956, graphics became much trendier in the magazine in the period of time 1956-1958. In the period of time 1953-1955, editors published a lot of articles about the events dedicated to young people, such as World Youth Congress. A trend of the time was to publish a lot in the communist publications about the activities of young people from different communist countries and to provide a lot of information after a certain event had taken place. The font used in the magazine was pretty small, which made the reading uncomfortable. On some of the pages, the text was split into 3 columns, whereas the pictures were quite small.

Colours used should also be mentioned. In the period of time 1953-1955, many illustrations and titles were black and white. This made the magazine unappealing to children. When Ion Brad became editor-in-chief, he introduced comics on the covers and colourful pages. Among the most important authors who collaborated with the magazine (some of them occasionally) in the period of time 1953-1957, we can mention Mihai Sadoveanu, Cezar Petrescu or Nicolae Labiş.

### 1.3. Validation in the eyes of the population

The Romanian Workers' Party craved validation from the population, so they turned to famous names such as Ion Agârbiceanu or Tudor Arghezi. Its strong desire for validation is best reflected in the case of Tudor Arghezi, who was not a friend of the regime from the beginning. As evidence, the newspaper *The Spark* published in 1948 the serial novel *Poetry of putrefaction or putrefaction of poetry*, by Sorin Toma, in which Tudor Arghezi was basically reduced to zero. Cynically, T. Arghezi would later on become politically engaged and would only write articles or poetry for at least RON 1.000. He signed the article *Last second* (in Romanian language: *Ultima secundă*), when Ion Agârbiceanu died, saying "his pen was crying for a tear"<sup>6</sup>. Mihai Beniuc, former president of the Union of Writers at the time, reported in his memoirs that Arghezi was paid RON 1.000 for that article: "Lucky for him there weren't two tears"<sup>7</sup>, Beniuc ironically commented<sup>8</sup>.

This tendency for relative ideological relaxation and the regime's desire for validation in the eyes of the population is also mentioned in the *Final Report* of the Presidential Commission for the Study of Communist Dictatorship in Romania: "A race has begun (a very long and very difficult one) to acknowledge again writers and books. «The valorisation of the literary inheritance» becomes a theme of the Dejist agitprop, aware now of the stability of the regime they support and also of the necessity to get validation in the eyes of a population deprived of values and who repressed its patriotic instinct

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<sup>6</sup> The last second, by Tudor Arghezi, in *The Literary Gazette*, X, number 22, May 30, 1963, p. 3 (Romanian language).

<sup>7</sup> Mihai Beniuc, *Under four dictatorships. Memoirs (1940-1975)*, Edition kept by Ion Cristoiu and Mircea Suci. Foreword by Ion Cristoiu, „Ion Cristoiu” Publishing House S.A., Bucharest, 1999, p. 294 (Romanian language).

<sup>8</sup> Clarifications about the real title of the article can be found: Mihai Beniuc. *Notes of an ordinary man. Diary and memoirs (1965-1969; 1971; 1974)*, Argument by V. Fanache, Preserved edition, foreword, note on edition, notes and comments, name index by Ilie Rad, Mega Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2016, p. 155 (Romanian language).

for too long. By correcting serious errors it itself had made, the party created for itself in time a glorious name, although these «concessions», these relaxation signs were accompanied by the blunt voices from *The Spark*. The latter warned against the danger of the irresponsible extension of «valorisation».”<sup>9</sup>

As from 1957, even in the first issue of the magazine, Ion Agârbiceanu started to publish in *The Red Tie*. He was one of the best-known writers who collaborated with the magazine and also very controversial at the time. At first, the communist regime reduced him to silence as he harshly attacked Communism in his articles, but in time, as years went by, he started to be active again in the field. Apart from Ion Agârbiceanu, other Romanian writers were also banned<sup>10</sup>: Lucian Blaga, Mihai Eminescu, Octavian Goga, Ion Antonescu, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, A. C. Cuza, Nichifor Crainic, Radu Gyr, Ion Mihalache and others. Ion Agârbiceanu would publish and get paid by *The Red Tie* as a consequence of his friendship with Ion Brad, lasting since the time Brad was in Cluj-Napoca (1948-1955). The texts Ion Agârbiceanu published in the magazine were non-political and approached themes related to nature, animals and happiness. In the first issue, Agârbiceanu published a short story about a wild cat. Ion Brad together with Mircea Zăciu brought Ion Agârbiceanu back to literary life in 1952, when they organized a conference at the Union of Writers in Romania – Cluj branch, where the great writer was paid homage to and then reaccepted in the Romanian Academy. Brad and Zăciu used this opportunity to praise the author for the novel *Archangels*, a book about the workers from a gold mining area in Romania, and the communist officials really enjoyed the theme. Asked why he thought Ion Agârbiceanu was a good choice to collaborate with the communist magazine *The Red Tie*, Ion Brad mentioned his

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<sup>9</sup> Vladimir Tismăneanu, Final report, Presidential Commission for the Study of Communist dictatorship in Romania, 2006, p. 493-494 available under [https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/RAPORT%20FINAL\\_%20CADCR.pdf](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/RAPORT%20FINAL_%20CADCR.pdf) (Romanian language).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 488.

literary talent, on the one hand, and his good relationship with Petru Groza (also a communist), on the other hand<sup>11</sup>. Unfortunately, the former editor-in-chief of *The Red Tie* cannot remember<sup>12</sup> how much Ion Agârbiceanu got paid for his articles. However, I. Radu Boureanu said in a letter from 1958 (comparable timeframe) that he had received from *The Spark* RON 12.000 for the poem *The ballad of executioner Tito*<sup>13</sup>. Ion Agârbiceanu had an even harder time because he was also a Catholic priest and the Greek-Catholic Church had been abolished in 1948<sup>14</sup>.

#### **1.4. The most promoted political figures in *The Red Tie***

In 1956, the Soviet troops were still in Romania and the Russians had control through their people over the way in which the cultural press of the time should be. The Soviet troops left Romania as early as 1958. This is an important aspect because, for as long as Ion Brad was editor-in-chief of the magazine (1956-1958), the publication did not publish as much about the Romanian leaders (Petru Groza, Ion Gheorghe Maurer or Gheorghiu-Dej) as it did about the Russian leaders. We decided to examine the fact and see how many articles about these leaders were published in *The Red Tie*. We counted how many times the names of some Russian and Romanian leaders appeared in the period of time 1956-1958 (these years cover the time when Ion Brad was editor-in-chief). There were 36 issues over 3 years. We did not consider the variations of names such as Lenin (example: Leningrad etc.) neither the names of institutions (as they do not

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<sup>11</sup> Ion Brad: "I was the first in Romania to write about the Merry Cemetery". Interview by Mihai Cistelican in *The Old Fireplace*, X, number 4 (112), April 2018, p. 4 (Romanian language).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> Ilie Rad, Novel letters to Nestor Ignat, in *The Romanian magazine on press history*, year VI, number 1 (11), 2012, p. 188 (Romanian language).

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.historia.ro/sectiune/general/articol/biserica-greco-catolica-prigonita-de-regimul-comunist> (accessed on 16.10.2017, time 17:02, in Romanian language).

directly refer to the person and political figure we examine). We also should mention that we counted the name Vladimir Lenin when he was mentioned under his original family name Ulianov or under Vladimir Ilici.

Based on our study, the name I. V. Lenin appeared 171 times, N. S. Hrușciov<sup>15</sup> 4 times, Nicolai Bulganin<sup>16</sup> 3 times whereas Iosif Stalin, Petru Groza and Gheorghiu-Dej one time each. All the articles in which we find the names of both the Russian and the Romanian leaders are not critical and place the protagonists in a good light. When asked whether he was forced or not to publish such articles, Ion Brad commented as follows in the magazine *The Old Fireplace* from Târgu-Mureș: “Only the general orientation of the party pressured us when Stalin died and Hrușciov took over. Petru Groza was still alive in Romania and he became the leader of the government during the Great National Assembly. In his capacity, he assigned our magazine «the Order of Labour». Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej had been considered by Iosif Chișinevschi and Miron Constantinescu for a cult of personality after the death of Hrușciov – Stalin.”<sup>17</sup>

### 1.5. Contradictions

Even though the magazine was under the direct control of the Communists, being edited by the Central Committee of the Union of Young Workers, it also contained illustrations contradicting the ideas that Communists normally believed in. They were atheists (they did not believe in God or other religions). For example, in 1956, in issue 8

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<sup>15</sup> N. S. Hrușciov was a Russian politician who headed the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

<sup>16</sup> Nicolai Bulganin was a Russian politician who had different positions in the Soviet Union: Minister for Defence (1953-1955) or prime minister (1955-1958).

<sup>17</sup> Ion Brad: “I was the first in Romania to write about the Merry Cemetery”. Interview by Mihai Cistelican in *The Old Fireplace*, X, number 4 (112), April 2018, p. 3 (romanian language).

from August, they published on the inside cover of the magazine a photo of a monastery or the Sphinx, both symbolic elements full of mysticism and religiousness – quite the opposite of the communist ideology. The two must see places were placed inside the magazine as a competition *Know your country*, urging readers to identify the images. When asked about religious graphics or pictures, Ion Brad said: “We published such photos as an illustration of our country’s beauty, that is why nobody banned them from being published.”<sup>18</sup>

Further examining the editorial activity of the magazine under Ion Brad, there were a number of articles or situations raising a question. Even if they were not signed by Ion Brad, they make a huge difference in understanding the whole context in which he published. We focussed on themes such as censorship, the mix of pro-Communism versus non-political articles as well as the editorial coordination. For instance, in 1956 – *The Red Tie*, issue 3, March 1956, page 23 – they published the story of Ella Zeller – *How I became a champion* – with very few thanks and praises to the party and the leader. When asked how such an article could be published in his magazine *The Red Tie* and whether the editorial board was indeed interested in such stories, Ion Brad replied: “Both. At the time, what really counted was the fact that we had been delegated as guests of honour to the International Festival in Warsaw. She was envied because she was a ping pong world champion and she would dress in very expensive elegant outfits which you could not find in Romania.”<sup>19</sup>

According to the former editor-in-chief, articles were checked by the official censorship and he also received comments from the Department for children and youth of the Central Committee of the Union of Young Workers. When I asked him if there were specific criteria in place when it came to the selection of articles, Ion Brad argued his superiors did not make special demands: “There were no special criteria. We would write memoirs and poems about our travels through

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 3.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 3.

the country and abroad. I was the first one in Romania to write about the so-called «The Merry Cemetery» from Săpânța, in the spring of 1958, after I had visited it with my colleague and friend Ion Horea and with the painter Traian Dăncuș. It was then when I received a story from one of his brothers, a story in which Holy Friday, a «mystical element», was mentioned. This would act against me in the summer of 1958 when they asked me to leave my job from everywhere.”<sup>20</sup> As far as banned subjects are concerned, he said „we did not receive such texts”<sup>21</sup> and the communist censorship did not change articles published in *The Red Tie*: “There were no such cases.”<sup>22</sup> Even though the magazine clearly had a communist nuance, it also contained non-political articles. When I asked him if he had to keep a balance between the communism-oriented articles and those that targeted its specific readership, editor-in-chief Ion Brad replied he did not<sup>23</sup>.

Among the articles that targeted children or those that were politically oriented, some authors chose to present historical articles (characters, situations etc.). When asked whether the Party set boundaries in terms of the historical events chosen, Ion Brad said loud and clear: no<sup>24</sup>. Nonetheless, we cannot not suspect there was not a written decision, but one everyone just was aware of. You cannot find in the magazine stories or poems that praise the former king of Romania, Michael I, for example.

## 2. Articles published by Ion Brad in *The Red Tie*

In the period of time 1956-1958, Ion Brad published in the children’s magazine *The Red Tie* five articles and a great number of poems. He published three commemorative articles (title: *Memories*

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 4.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 4.

about our writers: Ion Agârbiceanu in *The Red Tie*, number 9, September 1957, page 1; *The glassmaker from Ilmeanu* in *The Red Tie*, number 1, January 1958, page 31 and *The fruitfulness and beauty of life* in *The Red Tie*, number 3, March 1958, page 1), and two travel articles for professional purposes (*Brief moments in a one-century old city* in *The Red Tie*, number 5, May 1957, page 4 and *Teacher in Maramureș* in *The Red Tie*, number 6, June 1958, page 18). We need to mention that Ion Brad also published Proletkult poems such as *Sun, In May* or *To the beloved leader*. These can be found in the magazine on a frequent basis.

His first commemorative article was dedicated to Ion Agârbiceanu. In issue 9 from September 1957, Ion Brad offered Ion Agârbiceanu a Happy Birthday editorial. The article appeared on the first page under "Memories about our writers". Ion Agârbiceanu turned 75 on September 19, 1957. The evocations, descriptions and Ion Brad's impressions cover a full page and give the writer a positive image. The article does not refer in any way to the political and ideological situation of Ion Agârbiceanu.

Ion Brad starts his article by recollecting when he as a high school student would read the works of Ion Agârbiceanu. He then goes on describing how Ion Agârbiceanu would pick fruit from his yard or dig in his garden. Here is one of the moments Ion Brad reminds of: "It's like yesterday, seeing him a couple of years ago, in a booth at Radio Cluj, reading the sad story of Fefelega. At a given point, we heard him as he stopped reading, he reached for the handkerchief in his pocket and got out. He was tearful. I understood at that point what a strong connection Ion Agârbiceanu and his heroes have"<sup>25</sup>, Ion Brad said in his article. At the end of his article, he wished Ion Agârbiceanu Happy Birthday and mentioned his literary activity over the past years.

Ion Brad's first 1958 article was published in the January edition. He wrote a reportage about the glassmaker Max Grimm,

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<sup>25</sup> Ion Brad, Memories about our writers: Ion Agârbiceanu, in *The Red Tie*, number 9, September 1957, p. 1 (Romanian language).

under the title *The glassmaker from Ilmeanu*. Brad describes the glassmaker Max Grimm as „a cautious old man who is as assiduous as a wizard”<sup>26</sup>. During his visit, Max Grimm was sure to make a demonstration for the editor-in-chief of the magazine *The Red Tie*. The artist created a swimmer holding a ball above her head (the article contains an illustrative picture of the artistic piece). The swimmer that the artist did on the spot was placed among the rest of the objects created by the artist, Ion Brad mentioned in his article. “Fish, butterflies, roses, hounds, elephants, lean deer, a wide range of birds, oak trees, tangled tubes and gorgeous cups. A fairy tale world created by the hands of this man who I really wanted you to meet, those who had not already met him. I also took pictures of some of these wonderful pieces which I had brought home with me. A warm hello, old skilled man, from your new admirers and Romanian friends!”<sup>27</sup>, Ion Brad ended his article.

In March 1958, Ion Brad published the article *The fruitfulness and beauty of life*. The article was about the sculpture of artist Ion Vlasiu. The sculpture presents a mother holding her two children. Ion Brad comments the artist’s idea and provides his readership with possible explanations. “Those who have read the Memoirs of Ion Vlasiu, *I left my village and went away*, know that the sculptor was the son of peasants and lost his parents when he was very young. This might explain the warm and overwhelming sensation he gave the cold material from which he created the statue. And also, this might also explain why he has also been a great friend of children”<sup>28</sup>.

Ion Brad carries on his article by presenting a further sculpture created by Ion Vlasiu: *Chopping whip sticks*. The photo shows a child weaving a branch of willow. At the end of the article, Ion Brad urges his readers to read: “That’s how master Ion Vlasiu made his start in

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<sup>26</sup> Ion Brad, *The glassmaker from Ilmeanu*, in *The Red Tie*, number 1, January 1958, p. 31 (Romanian language).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 31.

<sup>28</sup> Ion Brad, *The fruitfulness and beauty of life*, in *The Red Tie*, number 3, March 1958, p. 1 (Romanian language).

life. For those willing to familiarize themselves with his beginnings, please read his memoirs"<sup>29</sup>.

His first article inspired by his travels appeared in the 5<sup>th</sup> number of the magazine, in May 1957. After a visit in Moscow, he named his article *Brief moments in a century-old city*. He begins his article by describing his first impression about Moscow when his plane landed. "The never-ending white accompanied me from Bucharest to Moscow, however, it made me sad not to see the birches, the steppe or the sleighs"<sup>30</sup>, Ion Brad wrote in the first part of the article. Further on he rendered his impressions about the Vladimir Lenin Museum, which he had visited. "You get to know Vladimir Ilici and to love him a thousand times more following his steps since childhood up to his last days in this museum"<sup>31</sup>.

He then informs his readers on another place he visited: the Kremlin. Ion Brad thoroughly describes what he saw inside the Kremlin (the architecture of the cathedrals, the bell, the buildings etc.). Based on his own words, he was mostly impressed by the boots of emperor Peter the Great. The illustrations used in the article contain three black and white photos of the Kremlin Square, a subway station, Ivan the Great Bell Tower and the Tsar Bell.

In the 6<sup>th</sup> number from June 1958, Ion Brad published another travel article – Teacher in Maramureş. He wrote the article after he had visited a teacher in Maramureş. Ion Brad gives a written report of how education is like in Săpânța, where a Swiss ran a business and children worked for him instead of going to school. "Beyond the outrageous stories about the adventures of smugglers, which people in charge made a lot of fuss over, life was hard for wood choppers and those who worked on the land and in the factories of Zürcher Otto, a Swiss who came to Săpânța all the way from Switzerland. He couldn't care less that 70% of the children would be illiterate! «His Majesty» indulged in gathering

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 1.

<sup>30</sup> Ion Brad, *Brief moments in a century-old city*, in *The Red Tie*, number 5, May 1957, p. 4 (Romanian language).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 4.

hundreds of children and then have them work for him in the field and in the forest, where he was building a timber factory, for just a couple of pennies. They would also pick the fruit and rose hips for the jam factory, located in the village centre, not far from the school. Poor school!"<sup>32</sup>. I. Brad continues his article by presenting the school in Săpânța: from how far children came to school, what their desks looked like, the number of teachers etc. He also refers to how villagers understood education after their children grew up, obviously in a communist perspective: "– We'll have him schooled in a wide range of jobs. People from Maramureș love Maramureș and I know they will be back to help to its development!"<sup>33</sup> At the end of the article, Ion Brad said his respectful farewell to the teachers from Săpânța, whereas the teachers promised they would encourage the children to get trained as postmen (a hint to the fact that Ion Brad came along with the "postman of the magazine").

Ion Brad wrote about his visit in Maramureș in 1958: "«Field work», «real life research» were trendy at the time, which, if we really think about the sources and purposes of writing, were pretty good initiatives. In short, on a spring day of 1958, I decided to take a trip in Maramureș, an area still unknown to me"<sup>34</sup>.

### 3. Ion Brad left the magazine *The Red Tie*

The political, economic and social context after the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 had an impact on Romania as well. When the revolt spread across Hungary, this was a difficult time for Eastern Soviet countries and Romanian officials tried to prove they were loyal to the Russians and started a restructuring process including in press. In the period of time 1956-1958, Romania was still a reliable ally of the Soviet

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<sup>32</sup> Ion Brad, Teacher in Maramureș, in *The Red Tie*, number 6, June 1958, p. 18 (Romanian language).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 19.

<sup>34</sup> Ilie Rad, Conversations with Ion Brad: "spring to fall" (April-October 2013), Eikon Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2013, p. 152 (Romanian language).

Union and the nationalist spirit manifested after 1965 was unbelievable: “The Hungarian Revolution and the change of the political context resulted in the revival of dogmatism in the Romanian culture. The Party signalled the continuation of the war against what was left of the exploiters, the intellectuals who worship the Hungarian Revolution, the Western life style and culture”<sup>35</sup>, indicated the report of the Tismăneanu Commission. Part of the communists and partisans of the Party were fired from the leadership positions they were having.

Restructuring, the removal of those who failed to fight for or failed to show their absolute loyalty to the Romanian Communist Party, was not the only way to go. Many intellectuals were also arrested: Vasile Voiculescu, Aurel Martin, Valeriu Anania, Constantin Noica and others<sup>36</sup>. The intellectuals in Romania would hear word that the situation was still unpredictable: “A new wave of arrests and political lawsuits spread fear among the Romanian intellectuals who would learn that political terror was specific to the regime and did not go away when Stalin faded from history”<sup>37</sup>.

Ion Brad, editor-in-chief of the children’s magazine *The Red Tie*, found himself caught in the same complicated historical context. In 1958 an assembly analysed the press environment. The assembly was headed by the former Romanian leader Nicolae Ceaușescu who was secretary of the Central Committee at the time. Ion Brad was fired. In the 9<sup>th</sup> number of September 1958, Ion Brad’s name was no longer to be found under the editorial team as editor-in-chief.

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<sup>35</sup> Vladimir Tismăneanu, Final report, Presidential Commission for the Study of Communist Dictatorship in Romania, 2006, p. 497 available under [https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/RAPORT%20FINAL\\_%20CADCR.pdf](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/RAPORT%20FINAL_%20CADCR.pdf) (Romanian language)

<sup>36</sup> [http://www.romlit.ro/scriitori\\_arestai\\_1944-1964](http://www.romlit.ro/scriitori_arestai_1944-1964) (accessed on 16.10.2017, time 13:10, in Romanian language).

<sup>37</sup> Vladimir Tismăneanu, Final report, Presidential Commission for the Study of Communist Dictatorship in Romania, 2006, p. 497 available under [https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/RAPORT%20FINAL\\_%20CADCR.pdf](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/RAPORT%20FINAL_%20CADCR.pdf) (Romanian language)

Ion Brad was blamed for allowing religious and anti-regime articles to be published in the magazine. They were referring to an article written by Doina Sălăjan (The Romanian Workers' Party labelled as „mean” the reaction of the poetess who said that the Soviet troops should not have gone to Budapest) and other religious articles. Doina Sălăjan worked for the magazine *The Red Tie* from Bucharest until 1958, when she was accused of „revisionism” and „meanness towards the regime” and she was labelled as „an enemy of the class”. One of the “evidence” the Communists presented was the poem *Forgetfulness* (in Romanian language: *Uitarea*) published in *The Literary Gazette*<sup>38</sup> of 1956.

As it appears in the *Final Report* of the Presidential Commission for the Study of Communist Dictatorship in Romania, this is how Ion Brad was asked to leave the magazine: “Ion Brad, an alternate member of the Central Committee of the Union of Young Workers, was sanctioned as guilty and fired from the position of editor-in-chief of the magazine *The Red Tie*, because he failed to draw attention to the «mean outbursts» of poetess Doina Sălăjan during the Hungarian Revolution (she said the Soviet tanks should not be on the streets of Budapest) and because he allowed religious articles to be published”<sup>39</sup>. The stand of the representatives of the Romanian state at the time is obvious and comes out in the report: „In her poem *Forgetfulness* [...], Doina Sălăjan openly attacked the Party, claiming that the Party had forgotten the suffering of «the people» and that the Party’s policy would fail to represent the interests of the people”<sup>40</sup>.

As for the religious articles, Ion Brad claimed they were referring to an article written by Ion Agârbiceanu (a poem about bees,

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<sup>38</sup> Doina Sănăjan, *Forgetfulness*, in *The Literary Gazette*, III, number 41, 11 October 1956, p. 3 (Romanian language).

<sup>39</sup> Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Final report, Presidential Commission for the Study of Communist Dictatorship in Romania*, 2006, p. 151 available under [https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/RAPORT%20FINAL\\_%20CADCR.pdf](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/RAPORT%20FINAL_%20CADCR.pdf) (Romanian language).

<sup>40</sup> ANIC, stock CC of RCP -Office, file 88/1962, unprocessed file (Romanian language).

which Ion Agârbiceanu considered „God’s flies”) and a fairy tale written after a visit at the Merry Cemetery in Săpâța. As far as Agârbiceanu is concerned, the article was *Blossoming acacias* in *The Red Tie*, number 7, July 1958: „Golden/ Bees;/ Fast/ And giving,/ After honey/ Off they fly/ As if they were/ God’s flies.../ Who knows what they say/ That’s me!”, Ion Agârbiceanu wrote<sup>41</sup>. Although the report of the Tismăneanu Commission and Ion Brad say nothing clearly about another religion-related article, we think we should mention it. In 1956, in the 8<sup>th</sup> number, the image of a monastery appeared on the inside cover, along with other touristic attractions from Romania. Readers were asked to identify those places. Romania is full of touristic attractions and we cannot ignore the fact that they chose to publish a religious attraction in a communist magazine that targeted children. The editors could have easily chosen a different objective for the children to identify but they did not.

The fairy tale which caused problems to Ion Brad contains stories with fantastic elements: fairies, a magic whip, the Bad Mother of the Forest, fantastic creatures etc. The fairy tale was written after a visit of the magazine’s representatives in Săpâța, in Maramureș. The fragment from the fairy tale *The magic whip* was published in several issues of the magazine *The Red Tie*, as a serial story, starting February 1958; it was told by a shepard from Săpâța: “It was on a lovely Sunday when Stan Pătru and the fairy went for a dance with all the other fairies and the Princes Charming up on the meadows of Arșița. The Bad Mother of the Forest started a storm out of the blue. The storm knocked down the houses and the outbuildings (my note, M. C.: buildings around one’s house), the Bad Mother of the Forest grabbed her whip and maliciously smiled to herself that she could finally take revenge on Stan Pătru, who refused to be her husband” – is one of the fragments in the fairy tale<sup>42</sup>. This is why the Communists accused Ion Brad of having promoted religious and

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<sup>41</sup> Ion Agârbiceanu, *Blossoming acacia*, in *The Red Tie*, number 7, July 1958, p. 3 (Romanian language).

<sup>42</sup> Titus Bîlțiu-Dăncuș, *The man of forests: Stan Pătru*, in *The Red Tie*, number 4, April 1958, p. 26 (Romanian language).

mystical themes in the magazine. Another article which promotes religious ideas is an article from 1956. The text describes how a little girl's grandpa died. One of the characters in the short story is a landowner who goes hunting during a very snowy winter – the writer Tamara Pânzaru described. Grandpa used to tell bedtime stories to his grandchildren and one of them was about Holy Friday<sup>43</sup>.

Another possible reason for firing Ion Brad could be “embezzlement of funds”, according to Mihai Beniuc, the former president of the Union of Writers of Romania at the time (in his memoirs). Ion Brad replied these were lies “told because at the general conference of the writers from the year 1965, I had to publicly part my ways with him, [...]”<sup>44</sup> because he was acting as “the instrument of the Soviets for us.”<sup>45</sup>

#### 4. Conclusions

The author Ion Brad is a figure worth to be examined due to the articles he published during the Communism and his present testimonials. He was an inside observer of how the Communist regime in Romania propagated its beliefs and ideology.

Based on his activity as editor-in-chief for the magazine *The Red Tie*, we conclude the following. His articles, though not many, present political aspects in 50% of the cases. He was able to write articles which had nothing to do with the ideology of the time. On the other hand, he would compensate by writing Proletkult poems or articles that would denounce very rich people. A further controversial and contradictory aspect was his attitude towards the Communist regime taking into

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<sup>43</sup> Tamara Pânzaru, A little joy, in *The Red Tie*, number 5, May 1956, p. 15 (Romanian language).

<sup>44</sup> Ion Brad: “I was the first in Romania to write about the Merry Cemetery”. Interview by Mihai Cistelican in *The Old Fireplace*, X, number 4 (112), April 2018, p. 4 (Romanian language).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 4.

account that he allowed to be published in the magazine while he was editor-in-chief banned authors and religious images and texts at the beginning of the Communist dictatorship.

Based on this study about the magazine *The Red Tie* and the type of journalism Ion Brad promoted at the time and also considering the historical and social context of the time, future studies can be performed. An example could be the evolution of language towards “the enemy of class” in the press of the time, so often invoked by the Communist leaders.

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# WHY DO WE SHARE. AN INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVE

DECEBAL-REMUS FLORESCU<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** This study focuses on explaining why people decide to share information online and what are the factors that influence what content we distribute using the latest scientific papers in Psychology, Sociology, Neurosciences and Communication.

**Keywords:** share, communication, content, social capital, dopamine, activation, novelty, behaviour

## 1. Introduction

People have shared stories, news and information with those around them for thousands of years, and technologies such as Facebook, Twitter, other social networks and online platforms have made this happen faster and easier than ever.

Aristotle considered the man to be a “zoon politikon”, i.e. a social animal, the difference between him and animals being the ability to transmit complex information. The survival of the human species over various development periods has depended on the humans’ ability to exchange information.

Aristotle’s intuition has been confirmed by numerous scientific studies. Researchers from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) have published a study that shows that whenever people hear

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information, their brains activate the neural networks involved in thinking about how this information can be interesting to other people. “We are built to want to pass on information to other people,” says Matthew Lieberman, professor of Psychology, Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at UCLA, in a detailed study (Lieberman, 2013).

What lies beneath the decision to distribute a certain type of information and what are the factors that influence this mechanism are key issues both for the marketing industry, whether we are talking about trade or politics, and for the media.

The survival of press institutions has become increasingly dependent of the number of people that view the produced content, and this figure often depends on the capacity of those materials to create the reader’s willingness to share the obtained information (Benton, 2014). Thus, being shared from human to human through a mechanism similar to the spread of viruses, articles can become viral. So, in order to know how to trigger media consumers to distribute content, media institutions need to know what makes them decide to share the information they receive.

This study focuses on explaining why people decide to share information online, it analyzes the characteristics of the information that is most often distributed, as well as the neurological mechanisms that affect the sharing of content.

## **2. The Anthropological Perspective**

Aristotle says in “Politics”: “Man is a social being by his nature, while the antisocial in nature, not by occasional circumstances, is either a superhuman or a beast. (...) At the same time, it is clear why man is a more social being than any bee and any beast; because nature does not create anything without purpose. But only the man out of all creatures has spoken. The voice is a sign of pleasure and pain, and it exists in all other creatures, because their nature rises only up to there, to feel the

pleasure and the pain, and to signal it to others, while the language of man serves to express what is useful and harmful, as well as what is right and wrong", says Aristotle. (Bezdechi, 1924). In other words, what distinguishes the man from the animal is the transmission and sharing of knowledge and experiences. "As social beings we are built to share information," says researcher and journalist Alfred Hermida, the author of "Why we share" (Hermida, 2014). The author further states that the ability to share information has greatly increased the chances for people's surviving. Humans can be smarter than other creatures, but neither of us is clever enough to gather all the information necessary to survive in a particular habitat by himself.

Aristotle's theory was scientifically demonstrated by researchers at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), who found that part of the brain associated with the distribution of ideas: the outer brain area - the temporoparietal junction (TPJ), which is activated when people find something interesting, useful or fun to pass on. "People are usually receptive to how the things they have seen will be useful and interesting not only for themselves but also for others. We always seem to be looking for other people who would also consider this information to be useful, funny or interesting. At the first encounter with a piece of information, people use their brain network involved in thinking about how this information can be interesting for others. We are built so that we want to pass on information to others", says Matthew Lieberman, professor of psychology, psychiatry and behavioral sciences at UCLA, in a detailed study (Lieberman, 2013). „We are constantly exposed to information on Facebook, Twitter and other networks, some which we further distribute, some which we don't", Lieberman says. The UCLA study has shown that the temporoparietal junction is activated when we hear ideas that we consider to be interesting to others. By further studying neural activity in these regions of the brain to see what information and ideas these regions are working on, psychologists could actually predict which press articles or advertising messages are most likely to become viral.

“Without noticing, our brain helps us assess the social currency to be achieved through the exchange of information. (...) Today, the media encourages us to distribute, like or recommend a story on the many digital devices we have at our disposal, appealing to an inner desire to be appreciated by others”, considers Alfred Hermida (Hermida, 2011).

### **3. The Sociological Perspective**

People’s desire to share information also has an important social component, functioning as a “currency” that feeds the social capital of each person.

“Posting on Facebook, YouTube or any of the many social platforms is not a matter of life and death; this is a way of giving something in the hope of getting something in return. Digital sharing is the latest expression of the ritual exchange of goods and information that favors social capital, serving as a binder that helps societies to thrive and to live on”, says researcher Alfred Hermida in “Why we share” (Hermida, 2014).

#### ***3.1 The Social Capital***

Man is built to share information, as demonstrated by neurological researchers (Lieberman, 2013), and this human activity, like any other activity, targets the receiving of a reward (Hermida, 2014). The author of the book „Why We Share” claims that the distribution of information becomes a kind of social currency that feeds the social capital of people (Hermida 2014).

According to the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, “social capital is the sum of real or virtual resources belonging to an individual or to a group because people have a sustainable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual knowledge and recognition.” (Bourdieu, 1992).

American sociologist Robert Putnam argues that there are two forms of social capital: bonding capital and bridging capital. Strengthening connections (bonding) occurs when we relate to people who resemble us, the same age, the same race, the same religion like family, close friends or people in similar environments (Putnam, 2000). The recommendation on a social network of a short film for example is a way to exchange consolidation capital for cultivating a common sense of identity. But Putnam says that in order to create peaceful societies in a multiethnic society, there is also a need for "bridge" social capital, which involves connecting with those in different backgrounds or with different points of view. Putnam argued that the two forms of social capital are mutually reinforcing, the decline in bonding ties will inevitably lead to the decline of "bridge" capital that leads to ethnic tensions. The researcher believes that "the central premise of social capital is that social networks do have value. Social capital refers to the collective value of all "social networks" (who do people know) and the mutual aid behaviors arising from these networks (rules of reciprocity)" (Putnam, 2000). The American author also points out: "The term "social capital" emphasizes not only sweet and warm feelings but also a wide variety of specific benefits stemming from the trust, the reciprocity, the information and the cooperation associated with social networks. Social capital creates value for people who are connected and, at least sometimes, for those who are not connected". Putnam states that America has suffered an unprecedented collapse in the civic and social activity, its association capacity and engagement in political life since the 1960s with serious negative consequences for the country. The country's social capital has been severely affected, the researcher considers.

One of the most important criticisms of Robert Putnam's theories is that he neglects the beneficial effects of the internet and social networks upon social capital.

### *3.2 Symbolic/cultural capital*

The ability to reach beyond familiar circles helps the development of other forms of capital that provide status and power, says the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. He extended the notion of capital beyond the terms of economic capital and social capital so that it also includes cultural and symbolic capital. Bourdieu sees the symbolic capital (for example, prestige, honor, the attention that individuals enjoy within society) as an essential source of power (Bourdieu, 1992). Cultural capital refers to assets such as the skills, the abilities, the qualifications that allow the holders to mobilize cultural authority. Participating in online discussions and posting links to informative articles represents a cultural and symbolic capital exchange that is beneficial to both parties. The person providing the information receives recognition and notoriety for the expertise it transmits, while the audience gains knowledge and understanding.

Sending a message on Twitter gives symbolic capital to the person who wrote it, and it can also indicate what is important to that person. A retweet is a way through which others are informed that distributed information actually matters. By giving it attention, the receptors recognize the value of the message, as well as the fact that it builds up to their professional capital by enriching their knowledge. In social networks, the act of listening is just as important as the act of conversation", Hermida claims. (Hermida, 2014)

### *3.3 Digital identity clothing*

"The desire to be heard is one of the top five reasons why people go online. Everyone wants to be heard. The Internet provides an open microphone that anyone can use to talk on forums or to post links on various social networks", says Alfred Hermida (Hermida, 2014). The analysis of the comments' section of a news site reveals that posting an opinion is also a way to express repression.

Distributing news, information, and posting comments through social networks is an identity statement that signals to others how one would like to be seen by them. "The clothing we choose has been an identity statement for a long time. Just as an Elizabethan (sixteenth-century) law permitted only the Counts and Knights to wear purple colored clothes for people to realize their social status through the clothing they wore, the materials we distribute online are a digital clothing of our identity", says Hermida (Hermida, 2014). Our goal is to project an idealized image of us by choosing what we share, when, where and to whom. By publishing information on the Internet, we try to influence the impressions that others make about us. Sharing is becoming a way to shape how others see us.

### *3.4 The Preferred Subject of Internet Users*

Much of the information distributed online has as a main subject the person that posted it. "It seems that social networks pull out the Narcissist from us, but actually that's just the way we're built. Speaking about ourselves - in a personal conversation or through social sites such as Facebook or Twitter - triggers the activation of those parts of the brain responsible for pleasure associated with food, money or sex, according to a study conducted at the University Harvard (Tamir, 2012). The same study reveals that people allocate 30-40% of the time they talk to others to sharing their own subjective experiences.

In a study realized by the marketing department of "The New York Times" (Consumer Insight Group, 2015), 2500 active and extremely active online people were asked why they distribute certain information through social media. Five reasons have been identified:

1. To draw the attention of others to valuable and funny contents: 94% of those interviewed think about how the information they distribute will be useful to the recipient.
2. To define themselves in front of others: 68% of the interviewed people distribute in order to make others understand who they are and what they care of.

3. To develop and to fuel interpersonal relationships:  
78% exchange information online because this allows them to stay connected to people they could not otherwise be connected with; 73% exchange information because it helps them connect with everyone who shares their interests.
4. Self-fulfillment - 69% disseminate information because it allows them to feel more involved in the world.
5. To inform others about different social campaigns and brands: 84% distribute information to support the causes and issues they care about.

The study also identified six types of people who distribute: altruists (distribute in order to help others), careerists (distribute business related information and exchange ideas on how to increase the value of company relationships with customers), hipsters (online distribution is a part of their identity), “boomerang” people (post controversial things because they want to be perceived as being involved and provocative), connectors (post in order to connect with others), and selective people (distribute information only to those for which that information would be relevant).

The New York Times study reveals that nine out of ten people have said that whenever they share on social networks, they always consider the way that information could be useful to others.

#### **4. Physiological Activation and Social Transmission**

The social sharing of information is everywhere, both online and offline: friends talk about holidays or movies, those who are interested in politics discuss the latest events, analysts exchange tips on different issues, neighbors gossip and young people talk about school or about what happens after school. “Interpersonal communication affects everything from decision making to the spreading of ideas, the persistence of stereotypes and the diffusion of culture”, writes Johan

Berger in an article published in *Psychological Science* (Berger, 2011). He tries to answer to two questions: What makes people share?, and Why are some stories and information more shared than others?.

Traditionally, researchers have argued that rumors spread according to the “3C” rule: conflict, crisis and catastrophe (wars or natural disasters) (Koenig, 1985) and the main explanation for this phenomenon has been the generalized anxiety and the concerns for negative results, Berger writes (Berger, 2011), but points out that “Such theories can explain why rumors are blossoming in panic times but they are less useful in explaining positive rumors such as the ones related to the Cannes Film Festival or the boom of the Internet. Moreover, although recent works on the social distribution of emotions suggest that positive emotions can also lead to an increase in content sharing, it is not clear why certain emotions determine distribution or why certain emotions determine distributions more than others”.

The researcher suggests in the above cited paper that the social transmission of information is partly determined by physiological activation. The intense physiological stimulation activates the autonomic nervous system, and the mobilization caused by this state may increase the distribution of content, Berger explains, while arguing that this theory explains why content that evokes more emotions of a certain kind (e.g. disgust) might be distributed more than others. Furthermore, this hypothesis also suggests a predictable mechanism: high activation emotions such as anxiety or fun will increase sharing much more than emotions characterized by low levels of psychological stimulation such as sadness or contentment.

“In a previous paper, we found that emotion was a decisive feature of the New York Times articles that have been the most distributed ones by email. Interestingly, we found that while articles that evoke more positive emotions were generally more viral, some negative emotions such as anxiety and anger increased the level of sharing, while others, such as sadness, decreased the level of sharing. Trying to understand why, we found that the degree of psychological activation might be a key factor”, says Berger, a marketing professor at the University of Pennsylvania (Berger, 2011).

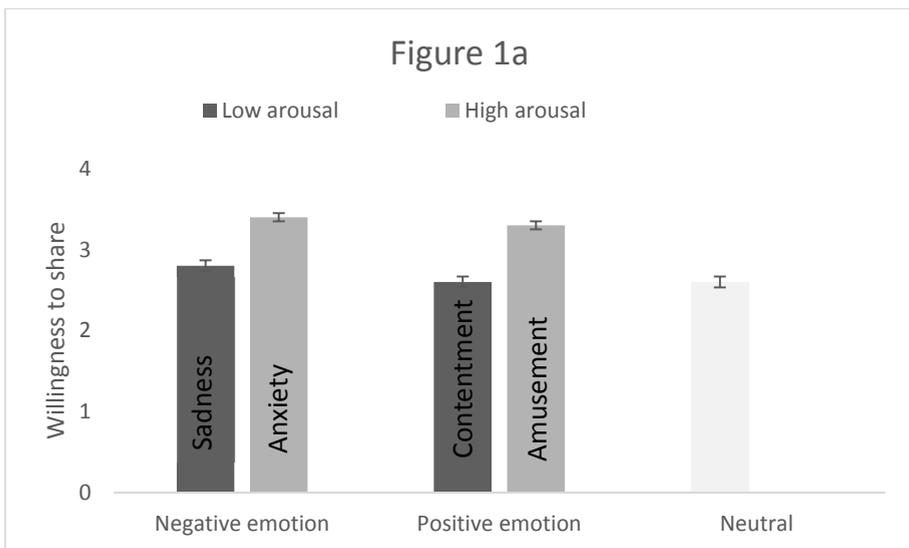
In the study, Berger suggests that fear, annoyance, or amusement determine people to share news and information. „If something makes you angry, for example, there are more chances for you to share it with your family and friends because you are psychologically activated, unlike the situations that make you sad,“ the researcher continues (Berger, 2011).

The hypothesis that activation, both physical and psychological, causes people to distribute has been tested in two experiments.

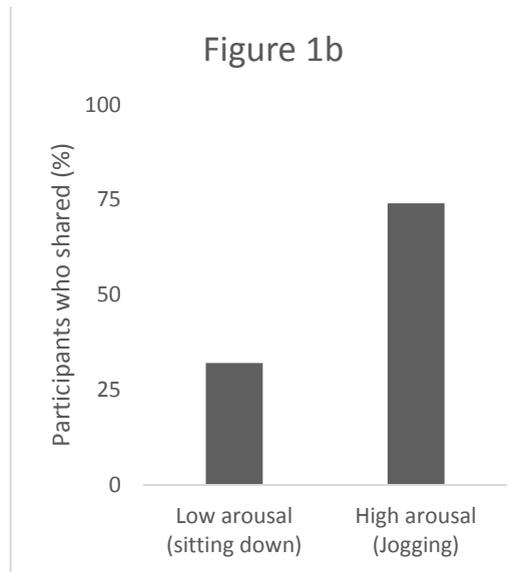
In the first experiment, which focused on specific emotions, 93 students participated in what they were told to be two unrelated studies. In the first study, students from two different experimental groups watched videos that made them feel either anxious or amused (emotions that triggered an increased activation), or videos that made them feel sad or content (emotions with low activation). In the second study, they were shown an emotionally neutral article and video and they were further asked how willing they would be to share that article and video with their friends and family members. The results have shown that students who have experienced high activation emotions have been more inclined to distribute that content to others (Berger, 2011).

In the second experiment, activation was stimulated outside of an emotional context. Forty students participated in what seemed to be two unrelated studies. At first, participants were told that researchers are interested in how their physical states affect their visual perception. The volunteers in a group sat down on their seats, while the second group ran for 60 seconds, an activity demonstrated to result in a general physiological activation. Then they were asked to evaluate the brightness of a set of five neutral images, a task designed to dissimulate the true purpose of the experiment. Finally, in what was said to be another study unrelated to the first, the participants had to read an online press article they could send by e-mail to anyone they wanted. Activation has again boosted the distribution of information. 33% of those who had previously sat down sent the article by e-mail to their acquaintances, and 75% of those who had previously run sent the article too (Figure 1b).

The study demonstrates that: “physiological activation can reasonably explain the transmission of news or information across a wide range of situations. Situations that increase activation should stimulate social distribution, whether positive (for example, an inauguration) or negative (for example, panic). These findings have a number of important implications. Firstly, they suggest that the content that causes activation should be more distributed than the non-activating content. Public Health related information, for example, could spread more effectively if it would rather evoke anxiety and not sadness. In general, the findings of the study show how psychological processes influence collective outcomes (e.g. culture): content that causes strong activation should be more widely distributed on the Internet and it should gain more public attention (Milkman, 2015).



**Figure 1A.** The volunteers who experienced high activation emotions were much more inclined to further distribute the content to others (Berger, 2011).



**Figure 1B.** Activation has boosted the distribution of information: 33% of those who sat down sent the article by e-mail to their acquaintances, and 75% of those who ran also sent the article by e-mail. (Berger, 2011).

## 5. The Surprise Factor/Novelty in the Distribution Mechanism

Researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) published on March 9, 2018 in the *Science* journal the largest article on the distribution of fake and true news in the online environment. They investigated the differential diffusion of all verified, true or false news, distributed on Twitter from 2006 to 2017. The analyzed data contain approximately 126,000 news cascades spread on Twitter, distributed by about 3 million people of over 4.5 million times. The news was classified as true or false using information from six independent organizations of facts-checking (Soroush, 2018). “Our results were striking: the analysis found that it took real news about six times more than it took false news to reach 1,500 people and 20 times more to reach a cascade depth of 10 (number of ramifications)”, points out the study (Soroush, 2018).

This analysis shows that out of all the fake news, the ones about politics, urban legends and science have reached the most people, while the fake news on politics and urban legends have spread the most rapidly and have been the most viral ones. “When we estimated a model of the likelihood of redistributing news, we found that fake news had 70% more chances to be redistributed on Twitter than the real news did”, the researchers concluded. (Soroush, 2018)

*The Explanations.* What are the explanations for these surprising results? An explanation derives from the information theory and from the Bayesian theory of decision: “People value the novelty. As others have also noticed, novelty attracts people’s attention, contributes to productive decision taking, and encourages the exchange of information. Essentially, novelty can update our understanding of the world. When information is new, it is not only surprising, but it’s also more valuable from the perspective of an information theory (provides the greatest help for decision-making) and socially (conferring social status based on the fact that the person who distributes information is a connoisseur or has access to unique «from within» information),” presents the study (Soroush, 2018).

To verify the results, the authors of the study have tested whether fake news is information with a higher degree of novelty than true news, and whether Twitter users are more likely to redistribute newer information. “The tests confirmed our findings. Numerous diagnostic and validation statistics supported our results and confirmed their robustness”, the researchers said. Moreover, a sophisticated algorithm for detecting and removing “bots” - software that creates fake Twitter profiles to send messages and distribute posts containing malicious links - has been used. Even if posts made from false profiles were removed or even when these posts were not removed, one of the main findings of the study remained unchanged: “False news is still spreading, faster, deeper and wider than real news is. The inclusion of the «bot» programs has accelerated the spread of both true and false news, affecting the spread of both types of news. This suggests the

opposite of what many believe, that false news is spreading faster and deeper than the true news, because people are more likely to share them than the «bot» programs” the article concludes. (Soroush, 2018)

## **6. The Neurological perspective: dopamine**

Dopamine is one of the 20 major neurotransmitters that carry messages between neurons, nerves and other body cells. In the 1980s, researcher Wolfram Schultz discovered that dopamine is linked to the reward we receive for an action. Wolfram Schultz, Peter Dayan and Ray Dolan received the € 1 million prize from the Lundbeck Foundation in Denmark in the spring of 2017 for their vital contribution to understanding how the human brain works. “Together, their research has shown how dopamine-related brain rewards systems influence our behavior and survival, playing important roles in decision-making, gambling, drug addiction, psychopathic trends, and schizophrenia,” says an article from New Scientist. (Coghlan, 2017)

Schultz discovered through experiments on monkeys, 30 years ago, that when animals receive a reward, specialized brain cells become more active and produce dopamine. Later, he showed that this could be triggered by learned clues, even without reward.

In Silicon Valley, dopamine is considered the secret ingredient that makes an application, a game, or a social platform successful.

“Technology companies understand the causes of increases in the dopamine level in the brain and supply their products with “hijacking techniques” that lure customers and create “compulsion loops’. Snapchat has Snapstreak, which rewards the users who distribute daily, thus encouraging social network dependence. News feeds are structured like «endless bowls», so one-page viewing leads to another and then to another, and so on. Most social media sites provide rewards at irregular time intervals; you must compulsively check your device because you never know when a social affirmation explosion might come from Facebook’, writes David Brooks (Brooks, 2017).

A widely used term when it comes to using psychology in technology products is the “compulsion loop”, where compulsion has a meaning derived from Psychology: “an imperious need and obsessive tendency towards having a repetitive conduct with pathological significance which, if not manifested, leads to psychological tension, restlessness, etc. Specific is its unintentional, involuntary character, the conduct thus determined being of no use to the individual”. (Popa, 1993).

### *6.1 Operational Conditioning*

The compulsion loop is nothing but a modern-day translation of the behavior strengthening principle.

Operational conditioning (sometimes referred to as instrumental conditioning) is a learning method that uses rewards and punishments for different behaviors. By operative conditioning an association is established between a behavior and a consequence of that behavior (Domjan, 2009). For example, when a lab rat touches a blue button, it receives a piece of food as a reward, and when it presses the red button it receives a slight electric shock. By this mechanism it learns to press the blue button and avoid the red button.

Operational conditioning also plays an important role in the learning process that people perform each day.

The term “operative conditioning” was introduced by American psychologist Burrhus Frederic Skinner (March 20, 1904 - August 18, 1990), who also was a renowned author, inventor, philosopher and professor at Harvard University. Skinner believed that it was not really necessary to analyze the thoughts and internal motivations in order to explain human behaviors. Instead, he suggested that we should only look at the external, observable causes of human behaviors. (Domjan, 2009)

In the early part of the twentieth century, behaviorism became a major force in Psychology.

The operational conditioning is based on a simple premise: the actions that are followed by a reward will be consolidated and they will be more likely to emerge again in the future. Because behavior has been followed by rewards or a desired result, previous actions are consolidated.

On the contrary, actions that result in punishment or unwanted consequences will appear less in the future.

### *Skinner's Box*

Skinner's box or the operational conditioning room is a laboratory instrument used to study animal behavior. The box was created by B. F. Skinner in 1930 when he was a PhD student at Harvard. The tool allows researchers to study conditioning behaviors by teaching an animal subject to perform certain operations in response to a specific stimulus (like a leverage). When the subject performs the expected behavior, the mechanism of the Skinner box provides food or another reward. In some variants of the mechanism, the subject can receive a punishment for not adopting the desired behavior.

The structure of the instrument consists of a large enough box that accommodates the subjects for which it is designated, usually lab rats or pigeons, which avoids all external stimuli that could distract the attention of the studied animals. Skinner's box is made up of an operator - usually a lever / button - that once pressed, activates a mechanism for the delivery of a primary consolidation element - usually food or water. Modern operational conditioning rooms have more levers and a variety of mechanisms that can generate many more stimuli, including lights, sounds, music or certain images, but they also have electrified areas. (Skinner, 1983)

Skinner has identified two types of consolidations and two types of punishments. Positive consolidation involves rewarding, such as giving a gift to the child after cleaning his/her room. Negative consolidation involves eliminating an unpleasant stimulus. Positive punishment means

applying an unpleasant response after a certain behavior, such as scolding a child when he/she is wrong. Negative punishment involves the removal of a pleasant element after a certain behavior.

There are two types of cure programs:

1. The continuous cure program, in which the desired behavior is reinforced every time it occurs. This program is used best in the initial stages of learning, to create a strong association between behavior and response.

2. The intermittent cure program: Behavior is not rewarded every time. There are four partial consolidation programs: I. Fixed weight consolidation programs - those in which a response is rewarded only after a certain number of iterations. II. Variable weight consolidation programs - which occur when a response is rewarded after an unpredictable number of iterations. III. Fixed-range consolidation programs are those in which the first response is rewarded only after a certain amount of time has passed. IV Variable-range consolidation programs occur when a response is rewarded after an unpredictable time interval has passed. (Coon, 2014).

While he was analyzing conditioned behavior, B. F. Skinner tested pigeons' reaction to different consolidation/reinforcement programs. The most effective one was the one that provided an intermittent reward scheme, i.e. food was not provided after each lever activation, but at certain intervals. If the reward is too rare, the animal gets frustrated and gives up trying, but if it comes every time, the pigeon will no longer push the lever so often.

"A great part of the behavior, however, is only intermittently strengthened. A certain consequence may depend on a series of events that are not easily predictable. We do not always win the game of cards or dice because the results are very difficult to determine so we call them "chance". We do not always find proper ice or snow when we go skating or skiing. Situations involving people's participation are, in particular, subject to an uncertain outcome. We do not always get a good meal in a particular restaurant because cooks are not always

predictable. We do not always get an answer when we call a friend because the friend is not always at home. We do not always find the pen in our pocket because we do not always put it there.

Consolidations of industry and education-specific behaviors are almost always intermittent because it is not feasible to control behaviors by strengthening each response. As can be expected, behaviors that are only intermittently hardened often result in an intermediate frequency, but laboratory studies of various programs have revealed some surprising complexities. Usually, this enhanced behavior is remarkably stable and persists for a long time after the reward no longer exists.

In an experiment, over 10,000 responses occurred in the extinction curve of a pigeon whose behavior was strengthened by a special intermittent program. Nothing of this kind has ever been obtained after the continuous strengthening program. This is a technique for “getting more answers from an organism” in return for a given number of rewards”, explains Skinner (Skinner, 1953).

## *6.2 From Gambling, to Video Games and Social Networks*

Natasha Schüll, an associate professor at MIT who had researched automated gambling devices for 15 years, published the book “Design Dependency: Gambling in Las Vegas in 2012. Schüll says that modern slot machines use the intermittent reward program. “It turns out that too many rewards have caused players to stop playing because this represents an intense change of the situation, making them pause, stop, take their money and then leave”, says the researcher (Schüll, 2012). Instead, increasing the playing time with small rewards will lead towards the consolidation of that behavior, Schüll says.

The researcher presents the significant change that occurred in the gambling industry in the recent years: “By the mid-1980s, mass games such as blackjack and dice games dominated the casinos, while slot machines were piled on the edge of casinos and had as their main purpose to keep the companions of the “real” players occupied. (...) By

the late 1990s, these machines moved into key casino positions and generated twice as much revenue as all the «live games» put together (Schüll, 2012). Frank J. Fahrenkopf Jr., president of the American Gaming Association, the lobby institution of this industry, estimated in 2003 that more than 85% of casino profits come from slot machines (Schüll, 2012).

The researcher explains that the foundation of the extraordinary productivity associated with the gambling industry is based on the intermittent variable consolidation program, where players never know how much or when they will win; that's exactly the one considered by B.F. Skinner to be the most effective in determining a particular behavior.

Gaming disorders have been included in the latest reviewed version of the International Classification of Diseases, a document realized by the World Health Organization, with the following definition: "a gaming behavioral pattern ("digital games" or "video games") characterized by an insufficient control over the game, manifested by the prioritization of the game in front of other activities as much as the games have priority over other interests and daily activities, and the increase of the time allocated to these games despite the occurrence of some negative consequences. In order to diagnose gambling-related disorders, the pattern of behavior must be of sufficient severity as to cause significant effects upon the personal, family, social, educational, occupational, or other important areas of human activity, and the behavior must have manifested for at least 12 months" (World Health Organization, 2018). The World Health Organization's New International Classification of Diseases would be released in mid-2018.

In the announcement published in March 2018, the institution draws attention to: "Studies suggest that gambling disorders only affect a small fraction of people engaging in digital or video games. However, people who practice video games should be careful about the time they allocate to these activities, especially when it comes to excluding other daily activities as well as affecting their physical or psychological health and their social life, if these situations could be attributed to their game behavior" (World Health Organization, 2018).

This warning is a silent acknowledgment of the fact that the way video games are built can induce addiction even in the case of a person who does not have a predisposition to it.

A research published in 2017 in "Frontiers in Human Neuroscience" reviewed 116 scientific articles on video games. One third of the studies referred to the dependence of video games, and 14% focused on video game violence. "Researchers have tried to discover the neuro-biological basis of video game addiction, and if it is similar to other addictive behaviors, by monitoring the extent to which abnormal reward processing patterns exist for the addicts. Studies seem to support this assumption, as many of the regions involved in the rewards system have been affected in video game addicts" (Palaus, 2017). The conclusion of the study is that, in general, video games addicts have a number of reward deficiencies involving dysfunction in the dopaminergic system, a common neurobiological anomaly for other addictive behavioral disorders (Palaus, 2017).

John Hopson, head of the "User Research" department of the Bungie Video Game Developer Company and principal investigator for a wide range of successful video games like "Halo" or "Age of Empires", has written several articles about the link between behavioral psychology and video game design. Hopson, who has a Doctorate in Brain and Behavioral Sciences from Duke University, claimed that video games can be described as a series of choices. "The player's entire journey is the result of thousands of small choices that lead towards success or failure, but they also determine the player's pleasure or dissatisfaction", he explains. (Hopson, 2002). According to Hopson, the system of rules that determines when the player receives his rewards is essential to the success of a video game. The researcher reminds of the same type of consolidation programs used by Skinner, the famous psychologist.

When confronted with multiple options, the player will choose the option that maximizes his rewards. "While maximizing is a positive thing for the player, it's probably not a good thing for the designer. If the player maximizes his performance, it means he will be able to

master the game. This means that the game has become predictable and, very likely, boring. A bonus rewards program that contains an unpredictable element will keep the player's interest for a longer time and will be more attractive to him", says Hopson. (Hopson, 2002).

To the question, "How do you make players maintain a high and consistent activity rate?", Hopson replies: "By analyzing the four basic behavioral consolidation programs, the answer is given by a variable consolidation program, one in which each action has the chance to gain a reward" (Hopson, 2011).

To the question, "How do you make players never give video games up?," Hopson replies: "The short answer is to make sure there *always* is a reason why the player is playing. The variable consolidation programs we have discussed produce a steady probability of reward, and so the player always has a reason to do the next thing and keep playing. What a gaming designer also wants from players is a lot of "behavioral impulses", a tendency to continue doing what they do even in times when there is no immediate reward. A consolidation program that produces a lot of behavioral impulses is the avoidance program, where players have to take care to prevent negative outcomes. Even when nothing happens, the player can get something positive by postponing a negative consequence." (Hopson, 2011)

### *Social Media*

Social networks make full use of the mental mechanisms that lead to the release of dopamine in the brain.

"Revenues and virality depend on user involvement and their retention. The survival of an application is guaranteed if it becomes a user's habit. Fortunately, habits are programmable: we do what we are stimulated to do. We do what gives us joy and amusement. Getting the proper stimulation is not luck, it is science. Neuroscience, specifically"- this is the motto of a controversial Silicon Valley company, Dopamine Lab, which provides customers with advice so that the applications they develop would create user dependency (BoundlessMind, 2018).

Several successful models are described on the company's website. An example is the "Vimify" application, which manages the diet and physical activity of users. Users' performances increased by 21% after the consolidation system was introduced to transform physical activity and healthy diet into habits. In the spring of 2014, two groups of users were monitored for 28 days: one group that used the company's incentive system and another group that used a system based on the random generation of user's rewards. The first group achieved 21% better results.

This system also worked, according to Dopamine Lab officials, in the case of "Tala" application, whose users in Kenya have paid their micro-credits in advance after installing the system. After monitoring two groups for 50 days in 2015, the conclusions pointed out the fact that the group that used the incentive system obtained 14% better results, i.e. they paid their micro-credits in advance.

The explanation for these results is the following: "These explosions to stimulate the new habit do not just cause a state of well-being, but they reconnect the brain centers for habits. Stimulation/consolidation is how the brain learns new habits. The rhythm and the timing of stimulating the new habit tells the brain what to focus on and what to ignore. Our program finds the pace needed by every user. Then it optimizes the pace to model the user and any behavior in your application" (BoundlessMind, 2018).

### *Why It Is Hard to Resist Social Networks*

"Why is it so hard to resist the desire to use social networks?" - is the question that the researchers at the Department of Communication Sciences of the University of Amsterdam have tried to answer.

"A possible answer is that people who frequently use social networks have strong and spontaneous hedonistic reactions to social stimuli, which, on the other hand, make it more difficult to resist social temptations", argues a study published in 2017 (Koningsbruggen,

2017). The Dutch researchers investigated the spontaneous hedonistic reactions that frequent users expressed as well as those who make sporadic use of social networks. "The results have shown that frequent social network users have had positive affective reactions in response to social media stimuli, as compared to control stimuli, while the affective reactions of sporadic social networks users are similar in the case of social stimuli as in the case of control stimuli", shows the study (Koningsbruggen, 2017). Moreover, spontaneous hedonistic reactions to social media stimuli (compared to control stimuli) influence the desire to use social networks, according to the same study. "These findings suggest that spontaneous hedonistic reactions to the social media stimuli of frequent users could contribute to their difficulty in resisting the desire to use social networks," the researchers conclude. (Koningsbruggen, 2017)

Thus, the conclusion is that they will share those articles that will make the user maximize the long-desired profit: that is, as many social reactions as possible from the other users.

### *Anti-Facebook Coalition*

A group of Silicon Valley technicians, formerly employed by Facebook and Google in their early stages of development, alarmed by the negative effects of social networks and smartphones, have teamed up in order to challenge the companies for whose development they had worked. These specialists have created the "Human Technology Center," The New York Times said in an article published on February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2018. (Bowles, 2018).

"Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Google created stunning products that brought great benefits to the world. But these companies are also trapped in a zero-sum race (the situation where a person's gain derives from the loss of another) for our limited attention, which they need in order to make money. Constantly compelled to overcome the performance of their competitors, these producers had to use more

and more persuasive techniques in order to keep customers close to these applications. They use Artificial Intelligence for news feeds, content and notifications, learning continuously how to get user attention and influence user behavior.

Unfortunately, what catches our attention best is not best for our well-being:

Snapchat turns conversations into “streaks” - a situation where two Snapchat users send to each other daily photos, making users seem to have many friends, and further redefining how our children measure friendship.

Instagram glorifies perfect life in its images, eroding our self-worth.

Facebook separates us into echo rooms, fragmenting our communities.

YouTube automatically plays the next video in seconds, even if this mechanism is depriving us of sleep.

These are not neutral products.

They are part of a system designed to provoke addiction”, says humantech.com (Humantech.com).

Sean Parker, co-founder of Napster and one of the first investors in Facebook, said that those who set up Facebook knew people would become addicted to the social network. “These applications, Facebook being the first of them, have been built with just one thing in mind: “How to consume the user as much time and conscious attention as possible?” And this means that the application provides a small dose of dopamine to its users once in a while, because someone gave a Like or commented on a photo or a post or anything else. And that will make you provide more content, which will bring you ... more Likes and comments. It’s a feedback loop for social validation ... exactly the idea a hacker like me would have in mind in order to exploit a vulnerability in human psychology. The inventors, the creators - like me, Mark (Zuckerberg), Kevin Systrom (the founder of Instagram) - have understood this consciously. However, we continued to develop our applications,” Parker explained. (Allen, 2017).

## 7. Psychology: the human desire to connect

A 2018 study from *Frontiers in Psychology* analyzing issues related to the use of new digital technologies has concluded that the functions of smart phones that give the highest dependency have one common theme: they all refer to the human desire to connect with other people. Many studies have drawn attention to the danger caused by the excessive use of smart phones: more and more people are unable to live without checking their screens every few minutes, sending messages or reviewing the most recent posts on social networks. One of the main concerns when it comes to smart phone addiction refers to the fact that it stimulates antisocial behavior.

The author of the article, Professor Veissière from the Department of Psychiatry at McGill University in Canada, an anthropologist who studies the evolution of knowledge and culture, explains that the desire to follow and monitor others - but also to be followed and monitored by others - has deep roots in our evolutionary past. "In this paper, we make the provocative claim that the current moral panic in relation to smart phone dependence ignores a factor of fundamental importance: there is no element of mobile technology that causes addiction to itself. We rather suggest that social expectations and rewards for connecting with others and seeking to learn from others induce and maintain this dependency relationship with smart phones. Much has been said about Internet addiction and the new environments and technologies that connect us and make us feel lonely at the same time, causing negative consequences on mental health (Twenge, 2017). However, the profoundly prosocial character of these mechanisms is often underestimated. The compulsive use of smartphones, we argue, is fundamentally social, and not antisocial. Specifically, we argue that the addiction to mobile technology is determined by the human need to connect with other people and the need to be seen, heard, considered, guided and pursued by others; all these are deeply rooted in our social brain, and have their origins far in our evolutionary past", the study shows. (Veissière, 2018)

The Canadian researcher shows that studies have revealed that smart phones are mostly used for social activities such as social networks, text messaging, and phone calls (Li and Chung, 2006, Lopez-Fernandez et al., 2014). Even the less interactive uses of smart phones, such as searching for information on the Internet or simply browsing the web, have implicitly become social: the number of Likes, the number of views and comments are social ratios for prestige and collective attention. In this context, the study shows that "Individuals who use their intelligent devices primarily for social purposes are more likely to develop smart phone dependence more quickly. These findings suggest that we cannot state the fact that intelligent phones cause dependence themselves, but it is rather caused by the direct or indirect social interaction they allow" (Veissière, 2018).

Addiction is caused by the notifications from applications that send beeps, vibrations, audio or visual alerts to let people know that someone is interacting with them.

"Social interaction (digital or not) activates dopaminergic reward circuits in basal ganglia. It is important to note that the very same circuits are involved in drug addiction, compulsive use of video games and the search for rewards in general. These are circuits that are also responsible for associative learning, the process by which an individual learns to associate two stimuli. With a smart phone, almost all notifications received by the user generate some social value and thus they activate the dopaminergic reward circuit, which causes the user to anticipate and search for these reward notifications. With each supplementary use, this relationship increases, and the user will anticipate and search for these rewarding notifications, paving the way for creating a habit", concludes the study (Veissière, 2018).

The dopaminergic system regulates two functions that govern dependence: anticipating rewards and evaluating outcomes (Linnet, 2014). "An important finding about dopamine and addiction, however, is that the release of dopamine usually occurs before the reward itself is obtained, more precisely when a clue (for example, an anticipative audio signal) points towards the reliable delivery of a reward (e.g.

pulling a lever). As activation decreases with frequent and predictable exposure, the expectation of reward is a much stronger mediator of strong dependencies than evaluations of the stimulus' results (Fiorillo et al., 2003, van Holst et al., 2012). According to this finding, dependence is stronger when we cannot predict the pattern for receiving rewards (van Holst et al., 2012). Behavioral scientists call these patterns of addiction, intermittent consolidation or variable consolidation programs (Zuriff, 1970 quoted by Veissière, 2018).

What is important to remember is that psychological activation is more correlated with the anticipation of reward than with the reward itself. The conclusion of the study is that "smart phones can be assimilated with a hyper-efficient kitchen equipment. Both technologies optimize the processing and delivery of specific types of basic needs: food, on the one hand, and social information, on the other. The key to eating well and becoming balanced social beings is to find the quality and intensity of consumption rituals" (Veissière, 2018). The authors of the study do not support the abandonment of smart phones, but the abandonment of elements such as notifications that activate the dopaminergic system announcing a potential reward and thus creating addiction.

## **8. Conclusion**

Each society comes with a way to hunt and gather information that is further passed on. Sharing information is one of the features that helped us survive and evolve as a society and is deeply rooted in our brain. Neuroscientists have discovered that whenever we hear new information, the part of the brain in charge of sharing information is activated, so they conclude that "we are built to share information with other people" (Lieberman, 2013).

The way information is collected, cross-checked and distributed has changed over time, but the dynamics of these processes has still remained constant.

Scientist Alfred Hermida, the author of "Why We Share", thinks „News and information are a coin that shapes what we decide to share within our social circles. People are not addicted to YouTube, Twitter or Facebook, but they are addicted to each other. Tools and services come and go; what remains constant is our human need to share", concludes the researcher (Hermida, 2014).

Hermida says people are further distributing exciting or funny news for the same reasons:

- „1. They want to strengthen their social capital by showing that they are aware of what is happening in the world.
2. They want to express and show what is important to them.
3. They want to enrich the lives of others by giving back to the community." (Hermida, 2014).

Behavioral psychology claims that any human behavior can be modeled and strengthened through punishment and, above all, through rewards. Thus, the online distribution of information works just like any other human behavior, so it can be modeled and reinforced through rewards. When we think about rewards, we refer to social interactions, mainly to what sociologists call social, cultural and symbolic capital, about the deeply rooted human need to share information that ensured the mere survival of our species.

Knowing that when confronted with multiple options, one will choose the alternative that grants the maximization of rewards (Hopson, 2002), the conclusion of this paper is that when the internet user considers sharing certain content, he chooses the information that maximizes the chance of achieving the desired social interaction from targeted users. For some people the desired social interaction may mean a comment from which to start a discussion to help them take a decision, for some others it may mean a "Like" that confirms that their projected identity is appreciated, and for others it is important to demonstrate that they are an expert in a certain area.

An external element that has an important influence upon the decision to distribute a certain type of online content is represented by social networks' algorithms. Especially in the case of Facebook, the world's

largest social network, these algorithms do not allow all friends on the list to see the posted information, but only a percentage of them. Posted content that produces interactions as for example “likes,” “distributions,” “comments” is further interpreted by algorithms as relevant information and will therefore be shown to several friends in the list. This mechanism makes users often distribute that type of content that will cause as much interaction as possible, which, as we have seen above, is content with an emotional activation load such as anger or amusement (Berger, Jonah, 2011) or content with a high degree of novelty / surprise (Soroush, 2018) or a combination of the two variants. This is the explanation of the mechanism by which the social network ecosystem is populated with information. Today, this mechanism favors fake or manipulated news, high emotional content, click bait, infotainment, because what catches our attention best is not the best content from a journalistic perspective.

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## AN INSTITUTIONAL VOCABULARY FOR SUSTAINABILITY. THE COMPUTATIONAL APPROACH

ADELA FOFIU<sup>1\*</sup> AND RALUCA IGRET<sup>2</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** Sustainability is a concept that incorporates a multitude of perceptions, attitudes and practices, from opinion leaders to decision makers, generating a lack of common framework and vision. Through our research, we question this lack at its origin: language. This paper explores institutional discourses in the European space, with the aim of collecting the vocabulary used in communicating sustainability principles. Automated tools are applied to explore raw text data of public discourses practiced in three European dimensions: European institutions (political dimension), UN consultative bodies (civil dimension) and European news outlets (media dimension). We use a mixed methods and mixed techniques research design, which combines text mining through Topic Modelling (TM) with a glossary-based approach using key words in context (KIWC) analysis. We analyze our corpus to discover keywords, topics proportion, social mood trends, for each type and source of discourse.

**Keywords:** sustainability lexicon, European discourses, topic modeling, discourse analysis, social moods, NLP

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## **Introduction**

Language is the most dynamic tool that creates and recreates the cultural reality and the frameworks in which this reality is perceived and experienced. Attaining a sustainable future starts at the level of speech, including the vocabulary used to convey sustainability related concepts. Research projects on sustainable lexicons in different social environments show that the vocabulary is insufficiently developed for building an upright and integrated vision of what sustainability is for at least three societal pillars: government, business and civil society. Multiple meanings and attitudes in terms of communicating sustainability principles have led to slow and rigidly adaptive strategies in creating mass awareness about the need to shift towards a mentality of sustainability in all aspects of human activity.

The main purpose of this research is exploring institutional discourses in the European space to collect the vocabulary used in communicating sustainability principles and help build an institutional vocabulary for creating a common vision and framework. Framing theories are used to support the assumption that the way sustainability is communicated today is insufficient to promote cultural change. This paper uses semi-automated content analysis methods in order to extract the main topics that sustainability is framed with. We next proceed to discuss the value of discourse in building sustainable futures. We then discuss discursive frames, prior to a brief introduction in what topic modeling means for qualitativists and humanists. We then present the design and the results of the semi-automated process of topic extraction.

### **The importance of discourse in transitioning towards sustainability**

Globally, the Anthropocene - the idea that the planet has entered a new geological era where the human footprint on ecosystems is irreversible, is gaining more and more popularity<sup>3</sup>. In many practice communities this concept stimulates a certain perception of the urgent

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<sup>3</sup> <http://anthropocene.info/anthropocene-timeline.php>

need to develop and implement a common sustainable vision, including the UN's sustainable development goals<sup>4</sup>.

The project GLAMURS Green Lifestyles, Alternative Models, and Upscaling Regional Sustainability<sup>5</sup> explored the complex dynamics of economic, political, cultural, social and technological factors that influence sustainable lifestyles and the transition to a green economy. In the closing conference of 2016, Adina Dumitru, PI of the project, discussed one of the key findings from a 3-year research across 7 regions of Europe: sustainable lifestyles do not reach a level of social contagion to determine and to stimulate the transition to sustainable economic models because they receive little recognition from public institutions, in particular from administrations and governments, and from mass media. (Dumitru 2016)

In this regard, the Lexicon of Sustainability<sup>6</sup> initiated in 2009 in the US is a crowdsourcing effort to create a lexicon to help communities express, implement and enrich the imagination of a sustainable world. Gravitating around the "local" concept, the ongoing project gathers the vocabulary of sustainability from practitioners and activists, in a bottom-up approach. For now, this lexicon has not affected US public policies, even though it is popular in civil society, and is becoming more and more known across the academic community. This is consistent with the understanding of Adina Dumitru/GLAMURS about how lexical contagion and practice can vanish in the absence of a positive institutional sanction. This is the context in which the exploration of institutional language in the European space is timely.

### **Frames in discourse analysis**

In an interview for The Guardian (Clark, 2013), George Lakoff explains how the Enlightenment era assumed a Cartesian approach to reason as being conscious, logical and rational, a mainstream

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://glamurs.eu/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://lexiconofsustainability.com/>

mentality still widely adopted. Nevertheless, we have since learned that reason is 98% unconscious (Lakoff, 2013 in Franks and Turner, 2013). How people think and talk derives from personal frames which are unconscious processes, sensitive to subjective experience and agendas. Therefore, framing cannot be avoided and requires attention when used by opinion makers. There is little cultural progress to publicly admitting that specific linguistic structures are used in public discourses to enable certain political ideologies. For Lakoff, ideologies are nothing else than systems of frames using certain words (ideological language) which activate the ideological system in the eyes and ears of the public to support or dismiss certain ideas and policies.

What sustainability means is dependent not only on linguistics, but also on how communicators frame sustainability principles. Sustainability is a topic which gained exponential presence in public discourses since the early 2000s, when global media started reporting environmental concerns at an unprecedented rate. The global political tensions around environmental issues were highlighted in 2007, with nations still not endorsing the UN sponsored Kyoto Protocol (United Nations 1997) and the writings on the subject accelerated.

Coverage of environmental issues is no less susceptible to framing. Lakoff (2010) points out that environmental framing is everywhere in the news: depending from which framing a public person speaks (conservative or progressive), they implicitly promote a particular agenda. Conservatives are pushing for the term 'climate change' instead of 'global warming' for being less frightening, 'climate' having a nicer connotation, while 'change' leaves out any human cause of the change (Lakoff, 2010, p.71). On the other hand, progressives use frames such as 'environmental protection', 'well-being' or 'personal responsibility.' The progressive moral system rejects market fundamentalism, sees government as necessary for improving environmental conditions and understands phenomena like global warming as systemic, not direct causation. The conservative moral system sees man above nature, promotes a Let-the-Market-Decide ideology and thinks more in terms of direct rather than systemic

causation (Lakoff, 2010, p.76). Although the public uses versions of language from both conservative and progressive value-systems, the current state of the global environmental crisis shows that conservatives have prevailed in using their language and activating conservative frames.

The use of word play (metaphors, narratives, domain-specific lexicon) and their implicit framings are crucial in communicating sustainability, particularly in how it guides cognition processes and attitudes within the public (Semino et al, 2016). Using positive or negative words with respect to a certain topic e.g. 'death' described as an 'ending' or a 'beginning', a 'tragedy' or a 'natural process of life', suggest different attitudes and perceptions of death. These framings can reinforce or influence different views of understanding death and furthermore affect how receivers relate to it.

The use of specific words, metaphors and framings can be considered in three perspectives (Semino et al, 2016): cognitive (e.g. Lakoff and Johnson, 1980), discourse based - who uses them, why, in what contexts, and with what possible effects and consequences (Cameron et al, 2010), and practice based - how it can help or hinder communication in particular institutional settings (e.g. Reisfield and Wilson, 2004). The three perspectives over discourse can be linked to the three societal dimensions able to influence mentalities through their corresponding framings: government (authority, political - public dimension) influencing moral frames; news outlets (media dimension) influencing attitudes and opinions, and third-sector (civil society, NGOs - civil dimension) influencing actions.

Either being mediated in the news, social media or websites, all three discourse dimensions primarily use specific framings in debating specific topics. The lack of consensus on sustainability may well be due to different frames and languages used by the conservative and progressive value-systems. An agreement that the environment is interdependent with other areas of society such as economics, energy, food, health, trade, and security can be achieved by looking at the frames which promote a global view and can make way for a bipartisan

discourse influencing media coverage and institutionalized frames (Lakoff, 2010). In finding a simple, non-technical language which communicates the facts, repetition is key for pushing a certain frame.

Language needs to be taken seriously and critically. Methodologically, applying a global view to detect language and frame patterns in communicating sustainability entails a complex approach. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) infers a variety of approaches towards the social analysis of discourse (Fairclough, 2012). CDA starts from the premise that content analysis and abstract analysis of context is insufficient and proposes a three-dimensional model for studying communication processes: the text, the discursive practice that produces the text and the socio-historical context of discursive practice. This approach implies working transdisciplinary with discourse, in dialogue with other disciplines and theories addressing contemporary processes of social change (Fairclough, 2012. p. 452). Analyzing texts includes interdiscursive analysis of how genres, discourses and styles are articulated together, while taking into account that these have a hybrid character, as Lakoff's framework includes an awareness of how conservative and progressive language frames intertwine.

Consistent with Lakoff's view of the emotional, less rational man in making decisions and speaking about the world is the socionomic theory of social moods. Robert Prechter, who initiated the field of socionomics, defines social moods as "a shared mental state among humans that arises from social interaction. Social mood predisposes individuals in the group toward emotions, beliefs and actions. It fluctuates constantly in a fractal pattern. It is unconscious, unremembered and endogenously regulated." (Prechter, NA) The innovative approach of socionomics and its understanding of social moods is that the way a group or a population feels about their future is what shapes events (Casti, 2010). Conventional wisdom has it that events, especially collective events, determine how people feel. Here, we adopt the socionomic view of collective states and explore how people express what they feel about sustainability, understanding that these feelings are the source of framing, which determines our cultural capacity to imagine futures.

As follows, in this research we propose an integrated multi-level framework for discourse analysis applied to a corpus of public discourses used to communicate sustainability by European institutions, European NGOs and European news outlets. We use social moods and Lakoff's frames to explore institutional discourses practiced in the European space and showcase how they can be used to detect language biases, disambiguate concepts and their frames of reference.

### **Methodological considerations and the research procedure**

For the purpose of developing an institutional vocabulary for communicating sustainability principles, text mining (Feldman and Sanger, 2007) and a glossary-based approach are used on a complex corpus of public discourses built from three sources:

- Policy agents: The European Administrative Office: the official website of the European Union - [www.europa.eu](http://www.europa.eu);
- Civil society: The Advisory body to the UN: Global Ecovillage Network official website - [www.ecovillage.org](http://www.ecovillage.org), and the official website of Global Ecovillage Network Europe - [www.gen-europe.org](http://www.gen-europe.org);
- Mass media: The Guardian website [www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com), Politico website [www.politico.eu](http://www.politico.eu), BBC website [www.bbc.com](http://www.bbc.com), The Independent website [www.independent.co.uk](http://www.independent.co.uk).

Having a thematic aim - sustainability, the selection of articles in the sample will be dictated by keywords consisting of three discursive categories: economic sustainability, environmental sustainability and social sustainability (Triple Bottom Line, Slaper & Hall, 2011). The publication period considered for the online materials is January 2016 - April 2017. To observe the variation of discourse on our chosen topic, a sampling pace of one article per week was used if the sources allowed for this frequency. Where this was not feasible, the selection followed the exhaustion of the keywords over a course of each month. The purpose of using this sampling pace is (i) to observe the variation of various frequencies by each data source, (ii) to enable the possibility of creating time series illustrating the variation of moods and sentiment and (iii) to facilitate frame interpretation according to the socio-historical context.

The steps of our research process in extracting and exploring the data consisted of selecting the corpus (by keywords, resulting in 623 articles from all sources), preprocessing the files to prepare them for import in the appropriate software, text mining using topic modeling for extracting main topics per source, identifying frames and social moods per source using a glossary-based approach, and finally data analysis and interpretation.

### **Text mining**

The method of choice for performing natural language processing on our corpus is topic modeling. This method has been initially developed for descriptive and exploratory purposes, as it looks for patterns in how words are used (Graham, Weingart and Milligan, 2017). Texts are considered as a collection of topics, while topics are considered as a collection of words, and each word has a certain probability of belonging to a topic (De Angelis, 2015).

Topic modeling comes with consistent advantages for researchers who are interested in inductive and forensic approaches to text as data, given that it is an unsupervised method of text analysis. In a conventional approach to content analysis and text analysis, specifically, creating a manual coding system is paramount. This requires that the text is known and understood by the researcher prior to performing data collection and analysis. This is why oftentimes a pilot-sample of text is manually analyzed and used to extract a coding system, later to be used in the annotation and analysis of the larger sample. This is time consuming and raises questions regarding inter-coder agreement when several people work on the same data. Unsupervised methods of text mining and text analysis, on another hand, allow for the discovery and emergence of coding categories not previously thought of (De Angelis, 2015). They also allow for the creation of a common understanding of the text among coders and researchers, significantly reducing the time invested in reaching inter-coder agreement.

Structural topic modeling is a specific type of unsupervised text mining that includes structures derived from document meta-data in the analysis of corpora. In other words, the researcher is capable, through structural topic models, to observe how document time and date, author's gender, length of text, etc., structures the detected topics. Roberts, Stewart, Tingley and Airolidi (2013) used STM in the analysis of differing media coverage of China's rise. The analysis on news stories that included the word "China" from 1997 to 2006 from five major newswire services allowed the topic prevalence in the model to vary by year and news source. This strategy indicated in the generated time series how important historical events are associated to differences between the topics these newspapers chose to discuss in relation to these events (Roberts et al, 2013).

The first step in our research design is to perform topic modeling without exploring for structures. In this sense, we decided to work with MALLET<sup>7</sup> (MACHINE Learning for Language Toolkit), the friendliest NLP tool for the less mathematically inclined, that requires the use of command line. MALLET is an excellent and simple tool to run text through topic modeling algorithms, with a few strokes of the keyboard. We have used the topic model prepared by Graham et al. (2017), which extracts 20 topics of each input sample.

We have also used Voyant Tools<sup>8</sup> in order to generate some topic visualizations, starting from key words in context (KWIC). This tool allowed us to understand how the words that compose topics interact with each other, in concept maps that highlight linguistic frames in the chosen discourses.

### **A glossary-based approach**

Next, we have built a glossary of positive and negative social moods, using WordNet<sup>9</sup>. This is a tool developed by Princeton

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<sup>7</sup> <http://mallet.cs.umass.edu/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://voyant-tools.org/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://wordnet.princeton.edu/>

University, which comprises a large lexical database of English: “Nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs are grouped into sets of cognitive synonyms (synsets), each expressing a distinct concept. Synsets are interlinked by means of conceptual-semantic and lexical relations.” (Princeton University, 2010) We searched for each social mood noun from Prechter’s list in WordNet and manually collected each first order synonym. We have stored the newly generated glossary in Yoshikoder<sup>10</sup>, a cross-platform multilingual content analysis program, ready for applied text analysis on our samples using keywords in context and concordance analysis.

### Results and data analysis

Our topic modeling approach extracted 20 topics for each sample, by source. As Table 1 below shows, there is a slight divergence in how the media, policy makers and the civil society construct their discourses on sustainability. The cognitive framing of government discourses revolves around the impact of business and industry on the environment and the public through growth, products and services, at both country and international levels.

**Table 1.** Topic models with the highest weight, as computed by MALLET

Media/Guardian	18	social future time environment waste areas trade increase recent provide report action large levels current real improve rights systems costs
Media/BBC	9	sustainability people world global food years climate environmental local change community life university time place land system living home society

<sup>10</sup> <http://yoshikoder.sourceforge.net/index.html>

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Media/Independent	16	sustainable business water environmental development companies businesses hemp environment company it's emissions green industry pollution plastic goals care
Media/Politico	16	home brexit politics supermarkets nhs worst read theresa crisis they're department shirt trust student win marriage class threats statistics logo
Government/EU	0	social sustainable public time food growth environment make business environmental including international impact services system industry access data country products
Civil Society/GENE	0	environmental sustainability sustainable climate company it's report emissions green home power farmers carbon access data communities land goals air human
Civil Society/GEN	3	social food work business public waste report environmental make sustainability growth years data government part industry development impact change services

The discourse-based framing of mass media equally regards the impact of businesses, trade, companies on the environment, but with a closer look to specific manifestations of this impact (waste, costs, pollution, plastic, emissions). Media also focuses on the role of people and communities (local, community, people, university) and on the value of natural resources (water, hemp, food). The practice-based framing of civil society changes the perspective and highlights the role of government and industry in sustainable growth with a focus on goals, carbon emissions, waste and on the impact on farmers, land and air.

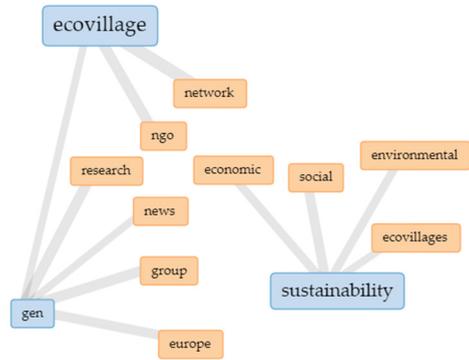
Concept mapping with Voyant Tools on the three subsamples - media, government, civil society discourses - illustrates the topic models that MALLET has extracted. The media discourse is the most complex of the three, being the only one that frames sustainability as a complex issue, at the interplay of economy, society and environment (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Concept mapping the mass media discourse on sustainability



**Fig. 2.** Concept mapping the government discourse on sustainability



**Fig. 3.** Concept mapping the civil society discourse on sustainability

The civil society discusses sustainability as environmental, social and economic, but does not connect the three dimensions (Fig. 2). At its turn, policy makers discuss sustainability as an economic issue in the European sphere, with no reference to the other two aspects highlighted by the media and by the civil society (Fig. 3).

An overview of social moods and emotional frames in the discourses, using our glossary-based approach, shows that all three societal actors discuss sustainability issues in a predominantly positive note. It is interesting to note, though, that the tendency towards negative social moods is the highest in the media discourse (Fig. 4), with almost 10% stronger than the government or civil society discourses (Fig. 5 and 6). This begs the question of what particular negative mood predominates each type of discourse. Thus, we have chosen three negative moods and three positive moods to look at. Figure 7 shows that fear predominates the discourses of all three societal actors and it is the highest in the media discourse. This is associated with supportiveness in all the discourses, which is by far the highest in the discourse of the civil society (Fig. 8). But how are these social moods associated with our key word, sustainability?

We have returned to Yoshikoder to address this question, by generating a concordance analysis of KIWC sustainability, then running the social moods glossary on the resulting concordance list. Figures 9 and 10 illustrate that the overall negative tendency of fear and the overall positive tendency of supportiveness still hold valid when looked at in the context of KIWC sustainability.

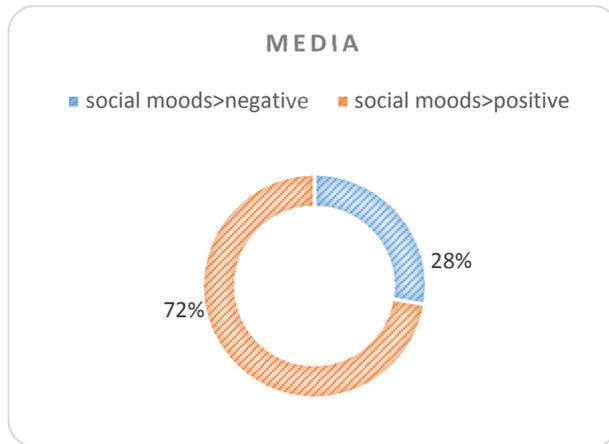


Fig. 4. Negative social moods vs positive social moods in media discourses

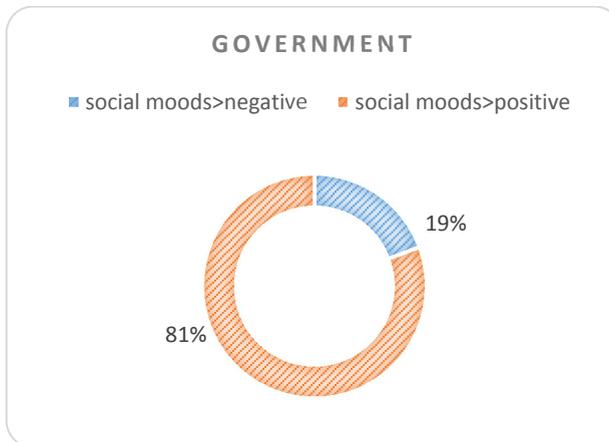
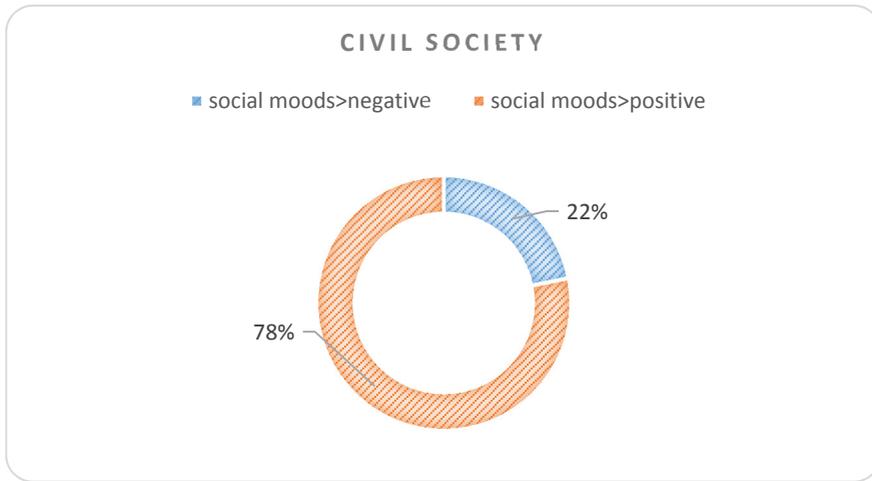
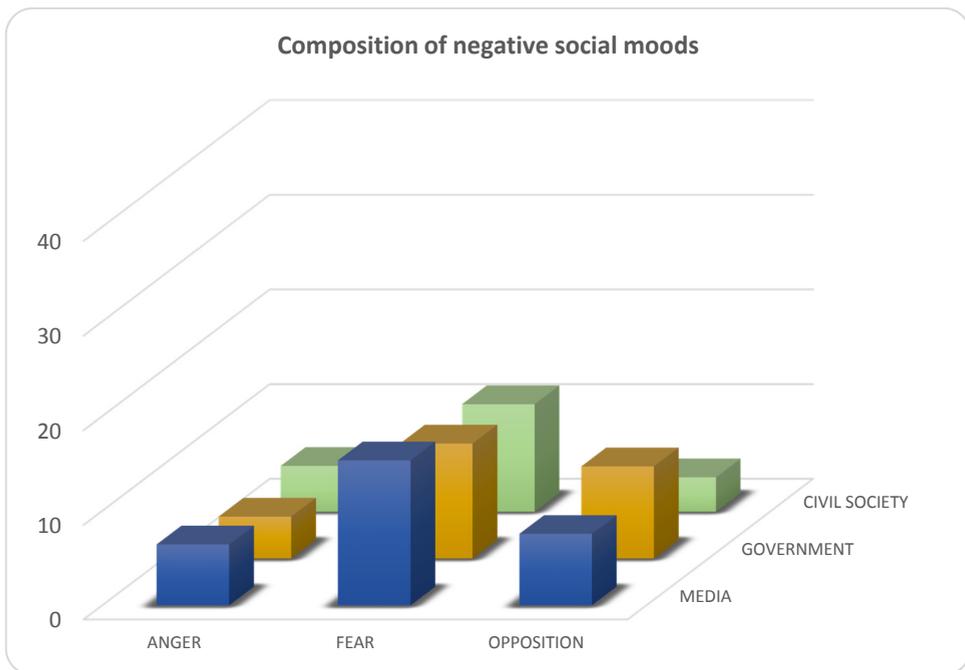


Fig. 5. Negative social moods vs positive social moods in government discourses



**Fig. 6.** Negative social moods vs positive social moods in civil society discourses



**Fig. 7.** Composition of negative social moods in all three discourse samples

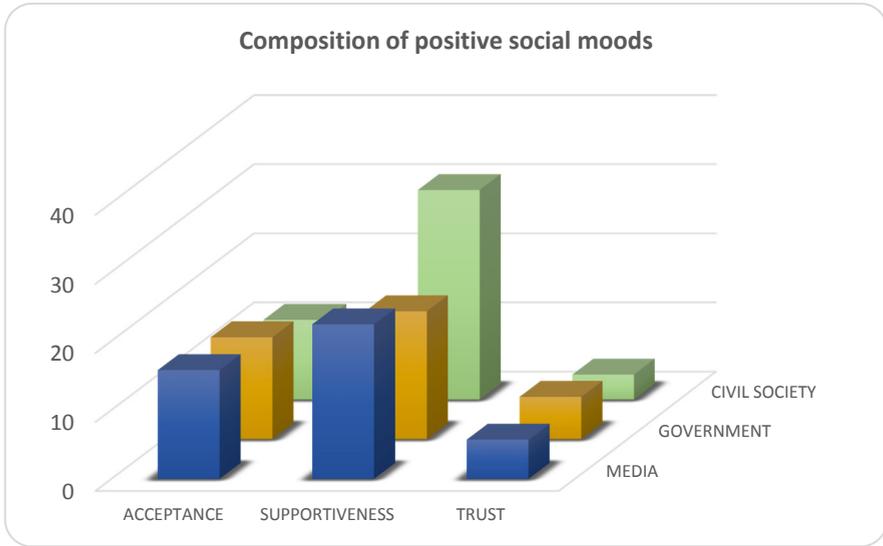


Fig. 8. Composition of positive social moods in all three discourse samples

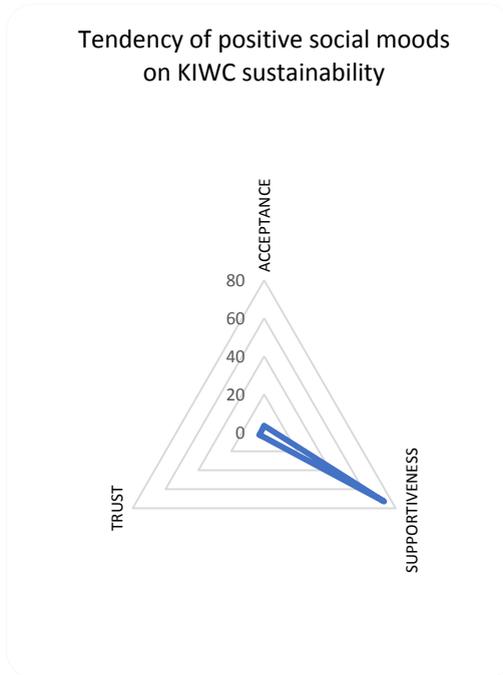
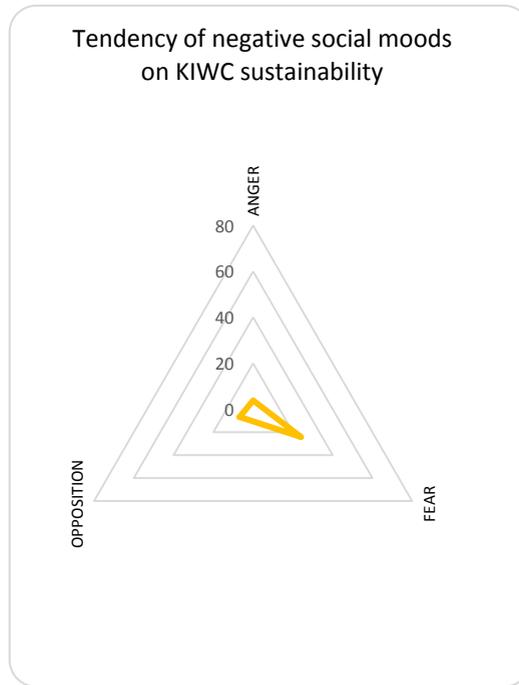


Fig. 9. Tendency of positive social moods on KIWC sustainability



**Fig. 10.** Tendency of negative social moods on KIWC sustainability

## Discussion and conclusions

The main objective of our mixed methods and mixed techniques research design was to explore how sustainability is communicated by three types of European institutional actors: mass media, policy makers/ government and civil society. On our overall sample of 623 articles published between January 2016 and April 2017, we have applied text mining techniques, a glossary-based approach and key words in context analysis. We have thus identified that mass media constructs the most complex discourse addressing issues related to sustainability, by discussing this concept as a phenomenon at the intersection of economy, society and environment, mediated by the important role of businesses. The other two actors understand sustainability in more simple terms,

by not connecting the various dimensions of the phenomenon and by constructing a disconnected discourse. In this sense, the discursive frames that mass media uses on the issue of sustainability are notable and indicate, in comparison, that media is a much more active and complex actor when it comes to stressing the importance of sustainability. Even though our research is exploratory, this result is somewhat surprising, as common sense would have indicated that the civil society is more prone to highlighting the sensitive issues of our age. It is consistent, then, to observe that media discourses are dominated by supportiveness and fear, a strong combination that indicates that the value of sustainable future is constructed as sensitive and of importance. Of the three actors, civil society manifests the highest supportiveness for the value of sustainability as practice, while media manifests the highest fear related to this issue. The policy-oriented discourses prove to be the least active and critical, given that sustainability is represented as solely economic and dependent on country reports and international agreements. This is not surprising, at a second glance, since it confirms the observations of researchers at GLAMURS: social change for sustainable futures is not sanctioned by governments, leaving the most advocacy and practice on the responsibility of communities and media.

The methodological and procedural cocktail that we have employed in processing and analyzing our sample and sub-samples, as demonstration of how powerful content analysis can be, is an encouraging exercise to continue importing knowledge from computational sciences to the field of social sciences and communication studies. Text mining can greatly benefit the development of critical thinking towards the many types of discourses that the public space accommodates, increasing awareness of how media products work and of the role communicators from all fields – media, government, civil society – play in the representation and construction of our futures.

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## ADDRESS UPON BEING AWARDED THE TITLE OF PROFESSOR HONORIS CAUSA OF BABES-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY

PETER GROSS<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** This address upon being awarded the title of Professor Honoris Causa of Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca , on 22<sup>nd</sup> of May 2018 discusses the role of journalism and media in modern societies as well as the role and the status of journalists.

**Keywords:** role of the media, role of the journalist, media education

Esteemed Vice Rector, Vice President of the Senate, Dean of the Faculty of Political Science, Administration and Communication, Director of the Department of Journalism, esteemed colleagues.

The awarding of the title of Professor Honoris Cause is for me a great honor and an emotional moment for a number of reasons, beginning with the prestige of the institution making this award, the reputation of the Faculty of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences and the success of the Department of Journalism.

Mass media and journalism are at the center of modern society, affecting every sphere of life. The independence and professionalism of the mass media represent the key to a society in which the citizen is free to seek his own destiny, to live in a just and tolerant society and to participate in the decision-making process at the local and national level. From this perspective all democracies have difficulties these days.

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In other words, it is the key to a liberal democratic society. It is not at all surprising that the president of Reporters Without Borders, Christophe Deloire, declared in January of this year that the “Crisis of Western democracy is a crisis of journalism.” The impasse in which the former communist states find themselves – including Romania – is twice as acute because they do not have consolidated Western-type democracy, nor did they build an independent and ethical media system.

The politicization of journalism, the lack of response by various governments to stories of corruption, and the ambiguous interpretations of laws that are meant to guarantee freedom of the press, to protect journalists and their sources, and to deal with libel, defamation and insults of public officials and personalities are anti-democratic, not only illiberal. The fact that some journalists contribute to the emasculation of journalistic independence and its power to change things for the better is concurrently sad and damaging.

I am certain that you are familiar with the sad situation of Romanian media and the uncertain status of its journalism. Romania is not a consolidated democracy. It is not an exception. That said, we have to recognize that all democracies, whether consolidated or not, are fighting today against both the ideologies of the Left and Right, and that the populism associated with these illiberal ideologies threaten the very basis of the values upon which liberal democracies are based: tolerance, reason, societal, individual and press freedoms.

The role attributed to mass media in the process of transformation in which East and Central Europe find itself was from the very beginning conceptualized from an idealistic rather than practical perspective. The model for media’s role in transition was certainly not based on experience, because in 1989 the world has not known an identical transition but only similar ones (Latin America, Greece, Spain, and Portugal). The world did not have experience with a transition from Marxist-Leninist totalitarianism to democracy.

I recently wrote that, “The “Third wave” of democratization smashed against the shores of the Baltic states, Eastern, Southeastern and Central Europe’s (BESCE) history and unprepared culture and

political culture like an out-of-control sailing ship caught in a severe storm. It left the expectations that the regions' countries would rapidly evolve after communism's overthrow in 1989 into liberal democracies, with reciprocally helpful media systems, clinging to leaking lifeboats.

The absence of a fertile ground for the establishment of media freedom should not have been a surprise. Those of us who study media evolutions are well aware that a confluence of needs were not present in 1989. The so-called enabling environment, as some scholars defined the overall need, included certain facilitators permitting the media to make significant contributions. Most were missing in Central Europe; all were missing in Eastern Europe.

You no doubt recognize that here in Romania in 1989-1990, for example, there was NO,

- civil society and an independent public sphere;
- established role for public opinion in public life;
- willingness to depoliticize important areas of social life;
- trust in an acceptance of public broadcasting regulation to serve public interest;
- no emergence of journalistic professionalism based on a notion of public service

In addition, other related requisite to enabling the media and journalists to be independent, ethical and efficacious contributors to democratization were missing:

- An independent judiciary to guarantee a liberal interpretation and application of new laws meant to protect journalists and their sources, and address libel, defamation, and other media-oriented laws;
- Sufficient transparency and social responsibility in government and state institutions to allow journalists to do their work;
- A political elite oriented toward society, that is, socially responsible, and sustaining of the first two elements listed here and appreciative of the media's role in democracies, with respect for journalists;

- A new media business elite that encouraged de-politicized journalism and editorial independence, and, finally,
- Professional organizations capable and willing to militate for journalists' rights, independence, and protection, and defining and enforcing journalistic ethics.

It is sufficient to say that defining the mass-media's mission has to be tied to the countries that are confronted with the difficulties of democratization and liberalization. Of course, none of these countries had experience with a liberal democracy - obviously a moving target. We should not forget that the mass media do not function as independent agents of change; we knew this but for unidentified reasons we did not seem to want to recognize this in regard to Central and Eastern Europe.

In turn, the socio-political, economic and cultural evolutions that are part of a transformation and to which the mass-media are connected are as much dependent on recent development as they are on the past. As Tony Judt wrote - perhaps too pessimistically - the evolution of Eastern European nations "remains *forever* mortgaged to the past."

Both Western and Central Europeans had unrealistic expectation in regard to the speed and extent of democratization and liberalization of post-communist countries. In this context, the perception that the development of mass media is a failure is not surprising. Of course, these were failures only if, as I pointed out, we consider the media as independent agents of democratization and we evaluate them through the lens of Western normative values.

In general, the media in former communist countries and, certainly in Romania, have remained less professional than in the West but more corrupt and corruptible, subordinated to political and economic power, operating in corrupt socio-political and cultural climates. A small segment of the media has managed to meet Western standards despite the overall atmosphere and the pressures established by politics. These (very few) media outlets have also played the role of watch dog, so necessary for growing and supporting civil society.

To date, Romanian democracy and news media's professionalization have not met indigenous and foreign expectations. Both institutions have failed to assume their social responsibility, but not because of the kind of ideological restraints present during the communist era. Rather, because of the persistent crisis in ethics, enveloped in the illiberal culture and political culture, is victimizing the process of democratization and the media's professionalization.

In a yet-to-be published book chapter co-authored by Brindusa Armanca, we recognize that there are two Romanias today. The Romania of the democratic civil society that militates for transparency in government, for state institutions run democratically on behalf of citizens, and yearning for an enlightened political leadership capable of establishing transparency and accountability in government. This Romania has a few media outlets and journalists who assume the responsibilities of their profession, respect and abide by its ethics, and strive to inform their audiences.

The other Romania has a corrupt political elite governing on its own behalf, clouding the state they control, without being responsible to citizens. Its media and journalists are not allowed and are unwilling to abide by professional standards and ethics; they serve as propagandists and political instruments to beffuddle, mis-inform, and dis-inform audiences and thus oppose civil society and democratization.

I repeat, the controversy surrounding mass media and journalism is present in all East and Central European countries – the manipulation, control and corruption; the constant pressure by the state, governments, political parties, politicians and companies – are in fact proof of their importance in each country, as well as at the international level.

Therefore, Romanian media's general failure to make game-changing contributions to democratization is not surprising. They are expressions of the political-economic systems that, in turn, are the children of the culture and political culture whose transformation is infinitely slower than the transition from one system to another. For these reasons, the situation has not changed, as we all know. As I have already mentioned, the majority of the Romanian media do not fulfil

their proper role in a liberal democracy. This is perhaps why the political elites do not embrace the true values of liberal democracy but we must not forget that there is a mutuality of causation. These elites, to reiterate, prevent the mass media in myriads of ways from playing a salutary role.

In general, the new and old Romanian elites' values, beliefs and attitudes are undemocratic, not because of an ideological choice, but because of calculated choices made out of personal interests. That means that the majority is not oriented to society; politicians are without social responsibility. They arrogate for themselves the freedoms they deny others, are intolerant, and hierarchical and have a "shocking lack of respect for the existing rules, regulations and laws," as one of my colleagues who deals with Eastern Europe wrote.

The emerging civil society of Romania, together with small media groups and independent journalists, are the key to the country's liberal and democratic future. Here's where hope lies for the future. That is why Western democracies should never give up on Romania and the European Union and the institutions to continue to support Romania. And for the same reason I would like to continue my modest support for the media, for journalism and for education in Romania.

The academic disciplines of communication, media and journalism studies have been well established since the beginning of the 20th century, at least in Western Europe and before that in the United States. Given its Marxist-Leninist content, the study of media and journalism during the communist era developed without much academic value. This is how it was in Romania, when I think of the Stefan Gheorghiu Academy, and to a somewhat lesser extent in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Yugoslavia.

In the United States, the works of John Dewey and Walter Lippmann produced what is undoubtedly the most important *multidisciplinary* scholarly contributions in this field, defining it as an area of study that is solidly contextualized in society. This is why media scholars who deal with media studies are both political scientists, sociologists, economists, psychologists, historians, literary critics and anthropologists.

I would argue that academic research in the field of mass media, and in particular in the field of comparative and international media research, is currently hampered by two distinct but at the same time correlated shortcomings. First, the inapplicability of theories and models formulated a few decades ago; they no longer explain today's changed and still changing media systems and journalism. The second shortcoming is the incomplete and sometimes incomprehensible socio-political and cultural context in which media and journalism operate, a context that is necessary for media scholars to do their job. Researchers argue that the relationship between theories of media systems and those of journalism is a symbiotic one; they are mutually informing.

Existing theories have certainly proved inadequate in examining Central and Eastern European developments since 1989. First of all, because theories based on empirical evidence observed in the West are not necessarily applicable in post-communist countries; Western, social, political, cultural and historical realities are not shared in Central and Eastern Europe. Secondly, the introduction of digital media, along with the changes in journalism that digitization has prompted, puts into question the validity of all theories and models either in the West, in Eastern Europe and anywhere in the world.

The problem of media systems theories, particularly, is that they have been formulated through the lenses (a) of politics; (b) economy; (c) social change - the media reflecting society, serving as agents of changing and / or influencing society. None of these approaches has been sufficient and effective in explaining the post-1989 development in Central and Eastern Europe despite the fact that their countries share similar socio-political and economic systems (democracy and open markets), as they also do with the West.

Existing theories do not help us to understand why these systems work so differently, even when their architectures and formal ethos mirror one another. The fact that democracy and open markets work differently in Spain compared to Germany, the United States of America, Poland or Romania shows us that the explanations are not grounded in political or economic systems. I have come to understand

that the explanation for these differences is based on the very concrete set of beliefs, values and attitudes that govern the way each society operates and its political, economic and social structure.

Briefly stated, culture is the key to understanding what is behind the nature and functioning of media systems, either directly or through the political and economic systems that culture also affects. There are studies by political scientists, economists, anthropologists and culture studies scholars to support a cultural approach to studying and modeling media systems.

In Romania, the awareness of the cultural specificity affecting the socio-political and economic domains is supported, as you know, in the works of Eliade, Noica, Cioran, Marino and, more recently, by Lucian Boia, Gabriel Liiceanu and Horia-Roman Patapievici, to name just a few. Reorienting our approaches to media systems studies is necessary for the reasons I have listed and it is also imperative to re-emphasize the growing importance of the public in defining media systems, now that digital environments have changed these systems.

The discipline of media and journalism studies, the continuous examination of this key societal institution, is of utmost importance in today's world. We must understand, first and foremost, how and why the media are organized as they are and, even more importantly, why they function as they do. Our economic, social, political, international, cultural, personal and even academic worlds are now more than ever before affected by the media and their journalism.

This is why the communication sciences and journalism program at Babes-Bolyai is so very important. Congratulations on your 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary and for making it such a great success, both from the perspective of teaching the discipline to future generations and for the scholarship that is produced here.

Thank you.

## THE CHALLENGES OF TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING IN *PLOT 28* (2013)

### Characteristics of transmedia storytelling: a personal approach

JAVIER HERNÁNDEZ RUÍZ<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** In a communication era where the “narrative turn” is on the present, managed by storytelling and digital technology, the paper presents, briefly, the characteristics of the identity of transmedia storytelling, continuing with introduction and analysis of *Plot 28*, the first transmedia universe of Total Fiction format, a pioneer project in Spanish transmedia storytelling.

**Keywords:** transmedia, storytelling, PLOT28

We live in the communication era where the “narrative turn” is on the present. Everything is managed by storytelling and digital technology.

*This is the notion that everything is a story, and that story-telling is our primary, perhaps only, mode of understanding, our cognitive perspective on the world. Life is a story, this discussion is a story, and the building that I work in is also a story, or better, an architectural narrative.*

(AARSETH, 2004)

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And finally a new protagonist is on the stage: the digital community. We're now in a participative digital era, that's the key why we need a "transmedia mentality" (DENA, 2012) in the frame of a "convergence culture" (JENKINS, 2008). The postmodern subject is a transmedia consumer (SÁNCHEZ-MESA, 2012: 209-210).

There isn't a definitive definition of transmedia storytelling; actually, the discussion about this subject continues in our days. We don't pretend to possess the commandments of this new narrative of the digital era, but we could propose our personal point of view, based in the most relevant studies and on our experience as a transmedia creator. Which is the identity of transmedia storytelling in our personal overlook? We're going to explain the main items:

- *Worldbuilding*: KASTRUP & TOSCA are talking about transmedia worlds in the contemporary mediascape (2004).
- *Intermediality*: serial products in an online and offline interactive display
- These products rule in a dialectical way: continuity vs. multiplicity, immersion vs extractability, spreadability vs. depth, etc. (JENKINS, 2009).
- Access to the fictional universe through several gates in a progressive display that is going to be revealed by users step by step.
- Participative audience: to shape a fandom and to promote crowd creativity and activism. Users as practitioners/ experiencers who want to be prosumers.
- An interactive, ergodic multi-genre and multimodal storyworld experience (*ecology of narrative interpretation*: HERMANN, 2002, p. 13):

*we must accept that stories are "entangled in an experiential network that comprises their producers, their recipients, and the events and existents that they semiotically represent"*

(Merlo, 2014: 84)

- Particular experientiality: user as an active explorer immersed in a ludo-narrativism (RYAN, 2006) when the enhanced strategies and ARG are important:

*The experience of playing games can never be simply reduced to the experience of a story* (JENKINS, 2004: 120).

This is not theory. There are many examples of transmedia storytelling building a specific universe. We can find all of these characteristics in one of the pioneer transmedia universes in the Spanish Language Cultural Area, *Plot 28* (2013), [www.plot28.com](http://www.plot28.com), that became an authentic case study (GÓMEZ DIAZ *et alia*, 2016: 94-99).

### **A case study: *Plot 28*, the first transmedia universe of Total Fiction format.**

Several “surfing novels”, fake documentaries, blogs, social networks, comics, filmed theater, games, pictures, thematic webs, blogs, ergodic narrative and challenges, music, activism, etc. Compose the kaleidoscope (worldbuilding) of this pioneer project in Spanish transmedia storytelling, the first universe of Total Fiction format *Plot 28* had his first landing in January 2013, through an exclusive application for iPad designed by computer engineer Alfonso del Barrio. It’s an independent production by BBD, rules by a kind of Spanish “transmedia showrunners” Hernán Ruiz & Agustín Serra V.1., with the collaboration of a young multidisciplinary team, mainly from Madrid (Universidad Europea) and Zaragoza (Videar Company). This transmedia world was displayed with a conscious intermediality targeted at interactive users.

The main plot of this narrative cluster of *Plot 28* starts trough the investigation of cyber-journalist Joana T. Silveira. She has recovered the writings by philosopher, professor and journalist Jaime Miñana, her close friend now auto-exiled on a remote island. These texts, mainly literature, reveal the hidden interests of the Water World

Exhibition held in Zaragoza in the summer of 2008. *Plot 28* focusing on a “glocal radiography” of *modus operandi* in the complex networks of the contemporary social and political powers. The cyber-journalist Joana also had recovered materials in other formats –film, theater performances, photographs, music, etc.- around this subject of Expo Agua Zaragoza 2008 in order to fill the transmedia cluster where intermediality and inter-genre exchanges are the rule. Joana, a kind of “demiurge diegetic storyteller”, focuses on contemporary consequences and challenges of a society on the verge of the first mega-crisis of global capitalism that starts the same day when Water Exhibition closed its doors: September 15<sup>th</sup>, a date to remember (HERNÁNDEZ, 2015).

*Plot 28*, the first product of Total Fiction (a diverse but converging format enabled transmedia storytelling), develops a new way of dealing with integrating fiction reading, viewing, web browsing, gamification and interactivity, as befits polyhedral universes and mutually conducive XXI century technologies. This project was shaped more than four years taking as its starting point the "fake documentary" by Agustín Serra v.1, *La Parcela 28*. This is the story of criticism about the social-political system and the dark intentions of world expositions. Hernán Ruiz had found this story very interesting and convinced Serra this could be continued in a cross-media multichannel cyber-tale. From there, it started an expanded story through various meanings, following the pioneers of this kind of cyber-narrative trials in the United States of America.

Hernán Ruiz & Serra v.1, as production and content designers, have been drawing a fictional universe with a modular structure and dialectical relationship between all the different contents. To reach this complex universe, users could enter by several gates... Amidst these creative and improving processes, the iPad came as appropriate technological support to collect these claims of *transmedia*. Thus, *Plot 28* was born as the first Spanish proposal of a new total fiction transmedia display. An active and interactive diegetic universe that aims to generate a fiction adapted to the challenges and approaches 21<sup>st</sup> century: today, fiction could be created and produced converging

on different platforms and using its narrative synergies. In this particular challenge, both authors know that the story is essential and they understand that it's a priority to entertain audiences and inform them to enjoy them in a new experience/immersion of fiction. Telling as playing..., because the ludo-narrativism is such a very important instrument.

Life is not only play. That's the reason why this project doesn't reject the engagement; in fact, *Plot 28* provokes critical reflection on perversion and corruption of the contemporary powers. For these reasons, this transmedia challenge is aimed at a wide audience that wishes to attract youngsters to this subject, with many classic thriller elements and provide greater access to this new form of storytelling. The immersion in that fictional universe does not claim only interactivity but also crowd creativity. The ideal users of *Plot 28* are not interactors but prosumers, meaning members of fandom able to create new products for that fictional worldbuilding. But we're in the new millennium and this transmedia universe also has promoted activism, for instance, Group 28, the historical collective in permanent fight against the power, an underground social-benefit activism that claims to continue in the new users, as the polemical action of Comando 28... But this is another story.

As transmedia identity was defined before, *Plot 28* became an expansive universe. Firstly, the product was put on the market in an Apple app January 2013. Then, arrived the ebooks of "cybernovel", the short stories of *Bitacora a la deriva* and *Laura's Diary*, as well as the compilation videobook *Plot 28 Conspiracy*. The next expansive item was the book's edition of *Bitácora a la deriva. Para una rebelión* (2015), an "engagée literature" composed by several short tales about the increasingly hidden Power and its disturbing social and political consequences today (HERNÁNDEZ, 2016). This enhanced book promotes an expansive reading toward *Plot 28* transmedia universe through Twitter calls (selected sentences and hashtags), photographs of Eva Amaral (one the most relevant Spanish popstars) and QRs codes. This pioneer expansive book in Spanish literature was

published by Esto no es Berlín, an independent publishing house from Madrid that launched in Amazon an *eBook* version titled *Bitácora a la deriva. Para una rebelión #2.*, with new short stories and enhanced photos. Thanks to this first edition success, in September 2017 a new analogical edition will put on the market.

In the end, after this analysis of such particular example of Spanish digital culture, we can conclude that all transmedia identity remarks were defined previously fit in *Plot 28* fictional universe, an expansive diegetic challenge that hadn't concluded; in this case it is not a common motto: to be continued.

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