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ONLINE BOOK REVIEWS: LIBRARY 2.0, BIBLIOBLOGGING, AMAZON.COM

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ABSTRACT. The increasing development of online media and the emergence and evolution of Web 2.0 platforms created a space where communication is not one-way, as in traditional media, but one focused on users. Within a mass communication system not anymore based on gatekeepers, as before, many media texts whose genres were established in the old communication paradigm pass to the territory of the new one, suffering changes at all their levels. In this context, this paper aims to analyze different types of online 'book reviews' compared to the traditional ones towards establishing a series of constant structural, linguistic, and stylistic features that define such user generated texts in relation to the latter.

Keywords: book review, Library 2.0, biblioblogging, Amazon.com, user generated content

Introduction

The traditional means of mass communication are increasingly turning towards digitization and furthermore, there is an obvious orientation of all the media from traditional 'push' strategies towards the new 'pull' ones. In this new paradigm, the mere sight of the message initially sent by the communicator gives the receiver the opportunity to reorganize and customize the received information. In addition to this, new media implies an increasingly bigger power given to the user, who can produce content that will become public in an instant, can interact with other users or even with the original sender.

It is only natural that under such circumstances the book reviews come under the influence of the new forms of mass communication and learn upon the practical possibilities for users to generate content that 'pull' communication

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strategies provide. Thus, in a virtual space where everyone has the opportunity to become in turn a communicator, the book reviews field becomes extremely heterogeneous: from publications that do nothing but take on online platforms the reviews already published in their print edition, online publications strictly specialized in book presentations conducted in a manner that adapts book reviewing techniques to specific online requirements, to book blogs (biblioblogging), online social networks in which all the interactions between the users are founded on their book preferences (Library 2.0), and online booksellers seriously investing in professional reviewer teams, but also allowing and even encouraging the ordinary platform users to post their own reviews, comments and ratings for the books.

The book review field changed forever with the advent of a web users generation who can comment, rate the reviews they read or write such texts themselves, being able even to easily create personal blogs or websites devoted to this purpose. It remains to be seen whether the online platforms based on user generated content will be able to totally change the traditional genre of 'book review', which is still understood most times in the classic mode of the term. The fact is that there is a radical change in the way book reviews are and should be seen. We're not talking just about their origin, about the growing power of the user, the fact that anyone can be a communicator, but as much about in-depth changes in the specific discourse of the book review and its inner mechanisms. In order to reach a point where we can compare traditional reviews to the online ones on multiple layers, we must first set a few fundamental lines regarding the book review as a traditional genre, and then point out some prime features of the Library 2.0 platforms we took under consideration in the present study.

Book review – a traditional genre

Although one can speak about the emergence of the review in a primitive form in 140 BC Athens (Kilgore, 1998), the first publication that hosted such texts was a French one, "Journal des sçavans", a journal devoted to scientific texts. One of its first issues, which appeared in early 1665, contained a "book review" discussing one of the major occurrences in the French literature of the moment. In 1816, after the cessation of the journal since the beginning of the French Revolution, "Journal des sçavans" reappears (under the new name "Journal des savants"), but takes the shape of a literary journal which includes texts that might fit under the genre called "book review" (Chen, 1976). From then until today, moving from a scientific manner of approach and keeping its

internal mechanisms, the pages of magazines and newspapers have always made room for this kind of argumentative text, located somewhere on the border between scientific, journalistic and literary style, with an increasingly acute penchant towards journalism. Although rooted in scientific texts, book reviews appearing today in mainstream publications are generally accepted as journalistic texts.

In order to reach a point where we can discuss the structural and stylistic changes which inflict in online book reviews compared to the traditional ones, we must set the latter as a landmark. Above all, we must define the concept of "book review" in its traditional meaning. According to The Oxford English Dictionary, "review" means "a critical appraisal of a book, a film, a theater show, etc. published in a newspaper or magazine". In the same vein, but customizing and introducing novelty to this definition, InfoScienceDictionary.com defines the book review as a series of "critical comments on a book, especially when it is first published". Carolyne Lee also gives a definition in this regard in "Reviewing Books in the Information Society" (2009): "To review simply means you form a solid opinion and then communicate it to others in a text that becomes a finished product, interesting in itself, so as to attract and retain readers". In the same spirit, Laurie Schwab Zabin notes that "A review should have two goals: first, to inform the reader about the content of the book and, secondly, to provide an assessment of the quality of the book and its author" (Zabin, 2003).

We have already introduced some fundamental concepts related to our subject: a book review is a "critical appreciation", but it also implies a personal opinion of the author. It should be an informative text, while also providing a personal judgment of the author about the book in question. Secondly, such a text usually deals with a new editorial issue and constitutes in a cultural product (with a commercial value) on its own.

The structural features of a traditional book review

According to Carolyne Lee, the reviewer must be able to express a consistent, rational and documented opinion about the original text. The review should be written in a persuasive manner that keeps the reader to the end of the journalistic text and therefore close to the hosting publication's pages. In order to achieve this, a book review should constitute in a well established argumentative structure, which may cover the whole range, from subtle or direct cultural references that support the claims of the reviewer, to an almost mathematical reasoning system (Lee, 2009). Although a must have

structure of the book review is almost impossible to determine, the problem that arises is a terminological one. In general, studies propose a structural model split in four parts. For example, Carolyne Lee speaks about the need for an Introduction, an Overview, an Evaluation and a Conclusion (Lee, 2009). According to the Australian author, the Introduction should begin with the so-called 'word bytes', phrases designed to hold the reader's attention and continue by setting a context for the work discussed(references to other books by the author, the outstanding awards or events in his/her life, references to authors or books that link one way or another to the subject of the review, a cultural wave or historical event which has a strong connection to the subject of the book or the moment of its appearance, etc.). The Overview should include general considerations on the thesis of the book and a summary of its subject in a manner that does not dispel the outcome of the action to the potential reader (for fiction books) or the structure of the whole reasoning used by the writer (for non-fiction). The Evaluation is the critical part of a review and requires the greatest effort from the author. It involves a rigorous documentation of the reviewer and implies technical considerations regarding the content, thematic, the author of the book or his writing style. Technical observations may relate to the writing tone, the narrative structure, the narrator, the pace of the book, the author's style, the language used and, most importantly, the manner in which the author reaches a certain result in the book. The Conclusion is where the reviewer's opinion on the book in question is expressed through evaluative words or phrases, by positive or negative remarks. This is the part of the review where the subjective presence of the reviewer is most keenly felt[2].

Book reviews on Web 2.0 platforms

In what follows, we will try to introduce the main theoretical landmarks for each of the four online content categories that this study aims to investigate.

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[2] The terminology proposed in the literature raises some ambiguity. In the vein of a greater clarity and a more accurate delimitation of the components of the review, but keeping the spirit of the definitions given in the literature, for the purpose of this study, and having in mind our own empirical experience with the reviews analyzed in this study, we suggest using the following terminology: Contextualization (as a direct correspondent to the Introduction), Subject (Overview), Critical evaluation (Evaluation) and Personal thesis (Conclusion).

1. "Social book cataloging" services: Librarything.com

"Social book cataloging" services such as librarything.com, shelfari.com or goodreads.com are part of the phenomenon called "Library 2.0". The term was coined by Michael Casey at a conference in Monterey, California in 2005. Next year after that, Casey founded the first blog in the "social book cataloging" service field, librarycrunch.com (Casey, Savastinuk, 2007). The newly introduced term defined an application which uses a running mechanism similar to the organizing systems used in libraries and personal collections of books. In addition to the traditional book organizing systems, "social book cataloging" implies the use of Web technologies and has, as main features, interactivity and use of multimedia collaboration between users. Thus, a theory of the Library 2.0 concept is circumscribed by Jack Maness through some of its fundamental characteristics:

• Communication is focused on users, in the sense that, on such a platform, they actively participate in the creation and consumption of dynamic content.

• Platforms as such enable multimedia experiences for their users (audio, video, photo).

• The social component is maximized in that community members are in a continuous synchronous (instant messaging) and asynchronous (creating wikis) interaction both between themselves and with the site staff.

• They are based on their novelty. Such platforms are conscious about the quality implied by public library services, but at the same time, they are conscious of the fact that communities' preferences are constantly changing. As a direct result, they allow users to change or add content to the "shelves" of the virtual library and the services it provides (Maness, 2006).

As we have seen, Library 2.0 is a concept that revolves around users. The new online platforms hosting such communities emphasize the increasingly important social component of their "discourse". The creator and administrator of the platform has the position of an "experience designer" rather than a proper communicator. He does nothing but to mediate, provide users with an environment to interact and, if necessary, provide them technical support regarding the issues of the website or its operating principles. The content is thus generated by interactions between users, in this case by creating virtual shelves, reviews, groups of friends, comment on the reviews written by other users, votes, discussions with the authors or other members of the group, joining the fan club of some author and his works, etc. These platforms are built on labeling systems like those used in real libraries, but they also provide all the utilities typical to the Web: instant messaging, multimedia content

streaming, the creation of collaborative wikis, online social networking, etc. All these contribute to the development of the tagging system and give users the ability to write reading diaries which look much alike blogs (Maness, 2006).

The general functioning of a Library 2.0 platform could be summarized as follows: the user signs up for an account on the platform, then creates a virtual collection of books using "shelves" or the tagging system provided. Usually, the books are divided into three categories: books already read, books that the user currently reads and books he/she is planning to read. Users can rate the books, review them or start discussions about them. Based on the affinities between their literary tastes and virtual collections of books, they interact in various ways. Such platforms begin by having a default book database, then the database expands thanks to the users' contributions.

As already anticipated, the appearance of Library 2.0 is closely related to the concept of blogging and biblioblogging, which began to develop five years before the first theoretical determination of the phenomena discussed in this chapter.

2. Blogs

The landscape of today's blogosphere is extremely heterogeneous. The types of blogs vary depending on the number of authors (from corporate blogs to personal diaries), different structures, ways of presentation, ways in which information is uploaded or issues addressed. In the latter respect it is worth mentioning the existence of blogs specialized in book reviews or those scientifically cataloging print and electronic books, studies published in various publications and on the Internet, which are all included by Michael Casey in the wider Library 2.0 phenomenon.

Linguistically, blogs generally fall somewhere on the line between standard language and the special categories of language used in new media texts (Netlingo, Netspeak) (Crystal, 2006). Although the punctuation, spelling and grammar used by bloggers are usually those imposed by the standard language, blogs comply with recurring signs of informality (which often lead to the violation of the standard language rules) and first person narratives. In terms of speech, blog posts are most often sequences of thoughts made of somewhat disparate units that can not be associated with what is commonly called "elegant writing" (Crystal, 2006). Either way, though, blogs remain a fundamental element for the development of new media, in general, and for the development of the phenomenon called Library 2.0, in particular. Their analysis is absolutely necessary for the present study, which aims to obtain a global view on user-generated book reviews.

3. Amazon.com

Amazon.com is the largest online selling platform in the U.S., with a strong book marketing department. In 1996, a year after the company was founded, Amazon.com created on their the official website a category called "Amazon.com Books" in which visitors could find about a million and a half books, divided into 23 thematic categories, tagged by title, author and subject (Spector, 2008). Amazon.com's goal was re-creating, with the help of a professional team of editors, the feedback a customer would have had in a real bookstore. For this purpose, they created an individual page for each book, which contained product descriptions, quotes from book publishers, book reviews written by the team at Amazon.com and short quotes from professional reviews published by various media. Also, many pages contain interviews with the books' authors conducted by Amazon.com editors. In addition to this, authors are also free to interact directly with the users of the website (Spector, 2008).

We now reach the fundamental point of our discussion and say, that, in addition to the text types already listed, users can enter the community by writing their own reviews on Amazon.com books, texts that can be graded on a scale from 1 to 5 by the other users. The user generated reviews climb to the top of the page based on positive votes (the formal aspect of the website section dedicated to "user generated content" reviews is very similar to that usually seen in blogs), so the first consumer reviews visible are those that have achieved the best ratio between the total number of votes and the number of positive votes. By allowing users to write their own reviews, Amazon.com aims to create a "sense of community" among customers, although the phenomenon does not always generate positive reviews. Despite the fact that the company does not basically censor the negative customers' reviews, they won't usually allow texts using insulting words or reviews which are offensive in a racial, sexual, religious, etc. respect. It is important, in this regard, to keep in mind that Amazon.com does not allow posting anonymous comments as such, only under pseudonymity.

During the last years, Amazon.com user-generated reviews became a real power in terms of influencing world-wide readers to buy or read a certain book. Even webpages dedicated to specific books on "social cataloging" platforms such as Librarything.com or Goodreads usually have links to the pages of the same books on Amazon. The big advantage of Amazon.com compared to blogs or other web applications dedicated to books lies in the fact that Amazon offers customers the possibility to order that book with a few

clicks (print) or even start reading it in a matter of minutes (e-book). This certainly ensures Amazon a lot of web traffic, all of it wisely directed towards the "Add to cart" button. In this regard, our research aims to study two different types of texts found on Amazon.com: on one hand, user-generated reviews, and staff-written product presentations, on the other.

A secondary purpose of our research, beyond establishing the general features of online reviews compared to the traditional ones, is to see how each type of content determines structural and stylistic changes in its specific texts, from commercial product presentations to blogs (which often are made by professionals who, in turn, in some cases, have commercial interests), from personal, but somewhat elaborate recommendations written by Amazon.com users to the short and often very outspoken ones written by Librarything.com users.

Research design

In order to determine the specificities of book reviews subject to the new paradigm imposed by the development of online communication, this paper compares four essential categories of user generated 'book reviews' to traditional book reviews in terms of their structural, linguistic, stylistic and discursive characteristics. The research thus considered the following four categories of online content: user-generated reviews and product presentations on amazon.com, user generated reviews on librarything.com, the Library 2.0 platform, and posts on blogs dedicated to book reviewing and compared them to traditional reviews, represented herein by texts published in "New York Times". By implementing such a work system, based on the five categories of texts already mentioned, we aimed to determine the structural, linguistic, stylistic and discursive specificities of book reviews on different online platforms.

Sampling methods

In the purpose of keeping a continuity in the study, we tried to find reviews based on the same books for each of the five content categories we took into account. Thus, if "New York Times" reviewed, for example, book *1* by author X, we tried to find reviews of the same book for each of the other four content types. To obtain a greater relevance to the global landscape of the changes that occur in the field of online book reviews, all publications or platforms were chosen for analysis according to the criteria of both greater

visibility and content relevance for the present study. In terms of choosing the books that generated there views under discussion, it was made based on several criteria: first, we took into account the presence of reviews of the book in all five content categories tracked. Secondly, we tried to choose books with a wide range of topics, from popular fiction to scientific works, more demanding in terms of readability. In total, we selected 13 books (thus 104 reviews, all published in 2009-2010) and analyzed the corresponding reviews on each category of content tracked, using the following scheme:

Book	"New York Times" review	Amazon.com product presentation	Amazon.com user generated review 1	Librarything.com review 1	Blog review 1
			Amazon.com user generated review 1	Librarything.com review 1	Blog review 2

Research methods

Based on this general table, using quantitative and qualitative methods, we conducted a content analysis of the reviews chosen, passing each of the corresponding texts for each book through a series of analysis grids that we considered relevant for this study and particularly relevant to the three major areas of changes produced in online book reviews compared to the traditional ones (structural, linguistic, stylistic), in order to obtain the following data for each category of texts:

1. Structural features:
   a. Average dimension of the texts (number of characters).
   b. Structure following the 4-part scheme of the review[3], in order of their appearance.
   c. Structure following the 4-part scheme of the review, the average percentages of their presence in relation to the overall dimension of the text.
2. Linguistic features:
   a. Percentage of evaluative terms and expressions out of the total number of words in the texts.

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[3] Contextualization, Subject, Critical evaluation, Personal thesis.

3. Stylistic features:
   a. Percentage of sentences that contain evaluative comments - positive or negative – out of the total number of sentences in the texts.
   b. Percentage of positive/ negative comments out of the total number of sentences that contain evaluative observations.
   c. Percentage of sentences that contain first person speech marks.
   d. The average number of direct references to other works, authors, literary movements, etc. for each category of texts analyzed.

Main findings

Our research showed that for all four online content categories analyzed fundamental changes occurred on all the levels of the texts. The main constant determined by us in accordance to the theories in literature is related to the hybridization of the online reviews in terms of the four traditional parts of the review and the increasing presence of some of these parts in different types of online texts.

The feature we observed most acutely regarding the online reviews is a sharp drop of their Critical evaluation dimension (30% of the text in "New York Times" reviews, 25% in Amazon.com user generated reviews, 15% in blog reviews and only 10% in Librarything.com reviews) and Contextualization (20% of the text in "New York Times" reviews, 20% in Amazon.com user generated reviews, 15% in blog reviews and 10% in Librarything.com reviews), and an increasing importance given to the Personal thesis (55% in Librarything.com reviews, 10% in "New York Times" reviews).

In the same spirit, the percentage of evaluative terms and phrases of the total number of words in the online reviews is much higher than in traditional reviews (1.4 % in "New York Times", 3.9 % in Amazon.com user generated reviews and 8.7 % onLibrarything.com).

The comparison of the reviews generated by users of the Web and those written by the editors of the New York Times showed, in the first group, changes in the sense of an increase in the number of evaluations expressed directly on the books and their authors (5.5 % of the total number of sentences in "New York Times", 47 % on Librarything.com). There were also differences in the percentages of positive and negative comments of all evaluative

observations, in the sense that platforms which allow posting reviews under anonymity or pseudonimity also contain a higher percent of negative observations. The online reviews also presented some changes in the sense of an increase in the presence of specific 1st person trademarks (2 % of the total sentences in "New York Times", 19 % on blogs, 35 % on Librarything.com) and a decrease in the amount of direct cultural references in the user generated reviews (confirming the above mentioned diminishing of Contextualization).

Conclusion

User generated book "reviews" become more personal, as demonstrated by the constant presence of 1st person marks, and the abundance of evaluative observations in the texts. Reviews generated by online users have a tendency towards the predominance of the Personal thesis component of their texts, disadvantaging the Critical evaluation and Contextualization. In this regard, these texts are not to be seen as reviews in the classic sense of the term, but as personal (usually bold) book recommendations going horizontally from one member of the network to another.

It is equally important to note the differences that occur between specific types of online content, which distance themselves from the traditional review directly proportional to the level of social interaction implied. Thus, as we have already seen, the features of the texts on the "social book cataloging" website move very far away from the traditional review, whereas blog and user-generated reviews on Amazon.com (which proved to be very similar at all their levels) keep some general features of the "New York Times" reviews, despite of a certain orientation towards a more subjective approach to the book under consideration. Regarding the product presentations on Amazon.com, it was interesting to observe how they fall within the advertorial discourse, leaving criticism and personal considerations almost completely out of the game by using a concise and often descriptive language.

Library 2.0 opens a whole new horizon in terms of book reviewing. The mere existence of millions online media users who have the power to become communicators in an instant can not leave book reviews as known in the old paradigm of unidirectional media communication. The dynamism and interactivity which define the online world make their presence felt at all levels of the reviews, turning them into fluid personal considerations rather than reviews in the traditional sense of the word.

It remains to be seen whether the book critic as an "institution" will be replaced entirely by a swarm of citizen literary "critics" or they will both survive in a complementary relationship. This is a matter of establishing who is the one in which we have the utmost confidence when looking for a suitable book for us. Is it the critic? Is it the more informal blogger? Or is it someone in our own friend network, and therefore very similar to ourselves?

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TEXT & CONTEXT IN MOVIE REVIEWS
(NEW YORK TIMES: 2002, 2013)

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ABSTRACT. A text can only function within its context. The context produces the text and joins it in the creating of meaning, as well as a publication cannot survive outward the society, which acts like a procreator. Professional movie review, with its origin in the mainstream media, remained an institution of the field, even though the ratings and the user generated content specific to the World Wide Web threaten to unseat or at least, to win a place as important in the eyes of consumers regarding the appropriate evaluation of movies. The (loud) advantage of professional reviews upon Internet's specific content is adding a contextual dimension of the movie analyzed in the text. The references, the cues and the voluntary use of intertextuality's powers are the main trump card that professional movie reviewers have upon hypertext and the avalanche of Likes, Comments and Ratings.

After a theoretical foundation that will try to establish the main courses of texts' analysis methods and the key structural, linguistic, stylistic and pragmatic features of the review in the field of journalistic genres, our paper's main target is to observe a few essential constants in forming and structuring the contextual function of the movie reviews published in "New York Times". Thus, we will analyze the characteristics of cultural references from texts at all their three levels of language: structural, linguistic and semantic area. The sight our research aims to attain is a diachronic one, approaching, on one hand, the movie reviews published in 2002, and on the other hand, the ones published in 2013. The objective is to arrive to a parallel between the data obtained looking for some real facts of the changes brought out by the contextual dimension of "New York Times" movie reviews of the last decade.

Keywords: *movie review, New York Times, context, cultural reference*

Western contemporary societies, as well as the media patterns defining them, suffer continuous changing. Once with the huge development of the online communication, as well as the burst and advance of Web 2.0 platforms,

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a new environment emerges, where the communication ceases to be unidirectional (specific to the traditional media) to being a user-centered transmission of information. We can not look at the journalistic output of an epoch and a cultural space apart from the context which accompanies the reader in the decoding process. Publications and hence the journalistic stories themselves are entities that move together with the social, cultural and economic life that generates them and which, in turn, is shaped by the released media products.

The virtual space which defines the contemporary communicational paradigm gives everyone the opportunity to become, in turn, a communicator. In such an environment, the field of professional journalistic reviews becomes pretty swampy. The boundaries between professional and amateur reviews are lost in the mists of hypertext, likes and ratings that require no more than a click in order to evaluate a cultural product, be it a book, a movie or a theater performance. However, even if traditional media outlets' ego (and budget) is seriously shaken by the new communicational paradigm, the media professionals manage to keep, in some areas, their quality as gatekeepers. An example for this is the review as a journalistic genre. Even if there are online platform that enable users to become communicators themselves, to evaluate cultural products, they do not in any way substitute the professional review as an authority in the field. Moreover, they do nothing but complement, develop, synthesize, create bridges between people and cultural products. For example, in terms of film reviews, rottentomatoes.com or metacritic.com, online platforms that already have enough users to raise or take down movies' box offices, do nothing but to put under the same roof professional reviews, on one hand, and texts written by the regular users of the site, on the other.

Even if we cannot talk (at least not yet) about a substitution of the trust that readers have in professional evaluations of cultural products with the trust given to those generated by Internet users, not to acknowledge that the new communicational paradigm has a more or less direct influence on professional reviews would be to voluntarily narrow your eyes. Changes (without any trace of a positive or negative rating intended) are there and must be admitted.

What makes a professional journalist to write a more complete film review than an amateur? The answer is simple: context. If there's something that makes the film columnist to issue relevant opinions about a cultural product, it is knowing the context in which it was produced, whether we talk about the social, cultural, artistic or the director's personal one. Professional review occurs at the confluence between the interdependent analysis of the text and the context of an artistic product.

This is, in fact, the first premise of the present research. Our work aims to probe in depth the birth of an artistic product's contextualization in professional film reviews by analyzing cultural references in the text at all their three levels: structural, linguistic and semantic. Moreover, our research proposes a diachronic approach to the issue, trying to create a parallel between the fundamental characteristics of the contextualization dimension in film reviews published by "New York Times" in 2002 and 2013. The present study is helpful in understanding changes in the rhetoric of professional film reviews of the last decade, closely related to contemporary social, cultural and communicational phenomena.

Text analysis

A text cannot be perceived in a comprehensive manner as long as it is not considered if the context in which it was written. The relationship between text and context is ambivalent: the context in which the text was produced can be recreated by analyzing the textual language, and the reverse is also true: the two are mutually predictable. If we want to understand a text's intimate configuration, we need to identify the ideological, cultural and situational context which generated it, and that's because the very language used in writing a text is a socio-semiotic system that crystallizes and reveals the peculiarities of the social group that creates it. Both the form of the text (graphics, vocabulary, grammar) and its meaning (semantics and pragmatics) are social constructs which respond to immediate circumstances and to the cultural tradition in which the text is produced. In this chapter we will try to trace the main lines of the scholarly works about the text as a symbolic system of meaning. After that, we will discuss the cultural dimension of texts through the concepts of context and intertextuality.

Russian formalism

When we talk about writing, we automatically think literature. Terry Eagleton begins his "Literary Theory: An Introduction" with a question that seems, at a first glance, quite simple: "What is literature?". However, even if there is a general sense that the literature is "writing based on imagination" or, in other words, fiction, things are not that simple. The answer to this question does not lie in the imaginative character of a text, but is rather a matter of language. Russian literary theorist Roman Jakobson, for example, defined literature as "organized violence against common language. "The idea of

language as the main point where you should start analyzing literature belongs to the Russian formalists, a very active group of linguists in the years after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. They began to push against the humanist vision of literature, claiming that the author himself can not understand his own work as a critic who is trained for this purpose can and denied the centrality of the author's explicit or implicit intentions in interpreting the text(Logan et al., 2011).Russian formalists rejected any mysticism of the look critics should have on literary texts and argued that literature stands simply in a mechanism, a specific way of language(Eagleton 2008, 17).They are actually the ones who first introduced the idea of direct linguistic study of the texts in literary theory. The importance of this group of critics in the history of literary theory lies in the fact that they are the ones who have seen first literature as a linguistic sign system, a mechanism that runs in itself and not as one of great artistic significance.

However, a text cannot be produced or perceived without taking into account its ideological, cultural and situational context. Every age and, especially, every reader sees a literary text through the social and cultural filters inherent to his/her existence. But what if the way we perceive literature is rooted in our deepest belief structures that go beyond ideology, cultural paradigms, or socio-economic specific eras? The answer to this problem didn't come from the Russian formalists, nor the members of New Criticism group (which looked into the literature as an aesthetic object in itself, independent of anything else)but decades later, from the structuralists.

Structuralism theory

The same as the critics in the New Criticism group did, Northorp Frye (literary theorist; although he has serious things in common with structuralist theory, he is not part of what is called "classical structuralism") sees literature as a functional circuit in itself, shut beyond any external intervention. Unlike them, however, Frye argues that literature can very well be a substitute for external history, create its own ways and myths, being a system of variations on the same theme. The meaning of literature does not come from the experience of the individual, but rather in a series of models and systems governing the language itself. The system creates its own laws, which always boil down to a set of verbal relations.

The central idea proposed by the structuralists relies in the fact that the individual units of the text system have meaning only because of the relations between them. The idea is based on the attempt to apply the principles stated

by Ferdinand de Saussure in his "Course in General Linguistics" (1916) to literary texts (Eagleton, 2008:119). By his theory, the Swiss linguist introduced a new way to look at language: "Language is no longer seen as peripheral in shaping how we view the world, but as bearing a central role in this process. [...] Words are collective products of social interactions, essential tools by which people represent and articulate their world"(Harris, 1988). Structuralists tends to demystify the literature, which is no longer a unique form of speech; reality is produced by language and not reflected by it.

Broadly speaking, structuralist analysis involves the application of Saussure's schema to objects different than language itself. Structuralists study the laws by which a text is configured, not what it actually states, and relate it to a larger structure, which may be a genre, a series of inter-textual links, an universal narrative model or a system of recurrent patterns or motifs (Barry, 2002). According to Frederic Jameson, structuralism is an attempt to rethink everything through linguistics (Jameson, 1974). The next major shift in the history of twentieth century literary theory will occur by moving the focus from language to discourse.

Post-structuralist theory

Post-structuralists come to say that language is not something stable, as claimed by structuralists. "Instead of being a sharply and rigorously defined structure containing symmetrical units of *signifier* and *signified*, language is starting to look like an unlimited branched network, in which there is a constant interchangeability and movement of elements, where none of them can be absolutely defined and where each of them is surprised and *followed* by all the others"(Eagleton, 2008: 153). Post-structuralists reject the idea that a literary text has a single purpose, a single meaning or a unique existence. Each reader creates, in fact, his own relation to a text. Thus, the post-structuralist critic must to be able to use a plurality of views when referring to a text, in order to create a multifaceted interpretation for it, even if two or more perspectives conflict one another. The main interest stands in analyzing how the meaning of a text changes depending on certain variables, including the identity of the reader.

Roland Barthes, himself a pureblood structuralist in his youth (think of his *Mythologies*), says that the transition from structuralism to post-structuralism coincides with the shift from "work" to "text". The literary text is no longer seen in terms of a closed circuit functioning ecologically in itself, but as being woven from a multitude of other texts. In this regard, any word or

phrase in the text becomes nothing more than a repackaging of a series of elements which already existed in other texts. The boundaries of the text vanish. It continuously flows into the texts surrounding it, generating a series of different perspectives, whose importance diminishes until it completely disappears (Eagleton 2008).

Text and context

Language is a system for creating meaning through the interaction between context and text, which makes both the style and genre of the text to be contextually specified. The style in which a work is written is given by the context. The specific situation in which it was produced circumscribes the use of the semantic resources, the possible and probable meanings that the author can use. On the other hand, the genre is given by the broader cultural context, which, by the recurrence of certain text types in specific situations, differs from other cultures. The form of the text is circumscribed by the very ideological orientation of the author, his own philosophical system and his life experience.

This relation between the different levels of the text is the one that the critic is facing not just while trying to contextually fit the cultural product under discussion and understand the author's views and choices, but also in elaborating his own text (Motta-Roth, 2009). Context (background) is not something that exists before the author or text, as it is not something that exists in their absence. Context only exists together with text, even within the text itself, as one of its integral parts (Lehtonen, 2000). Thus, the text is a meaningful raw material that actively produces the contextual resources of the reader: linguistic resources, ideas on the nature of reality, values, etc. The context is, in this respect, present both in writing a text, and in reading it. It should not be viewed as a static background, as it actively affects both the conventions writer used by the writer and how readers perceive the text (Lehtonen 2000).

Guy Cook provides a possible structure of the context:
• media (holder of the text itself),
• music and images,
• paralanguage (font, alignment, etc.),
• situation: characteristics and relationships between objects and people in the text's vicinity,
• co-text: text that precedes or follows the text in question. The participants perceive it as part of the main discourse,

• intertext: text that participants perceive as part of another text, but that they associate with the text, affecting their interpretation,

• participants in the act of communication: their intentions and interpretations, the knowledge and beliefs they have, interpersonal attitudes, feelings and affiliations,

• function: the author's intent with that text, and the intent perceived by its receivers (Cook, 1992).

Cook's notion of *context* is a practical one. Text's external factors such as the situational frame or readers are as important as those that occupy a central role in the traditional view of the *context*. These factors participate in the same way as the cultural frame of the author, for example, in the production of meanings. Meanings vary depending both on the author's identity and the cultural resources of the readers. In practice, it is impossible to separate the text from the context in which it was created, except where such separation is temporary, operated for analytical reasons (Lehtonen, 2000).

Context plays a crucial role in understanding the text. In trying to interpret a text, we rely on our previous knowledge on texts like the one that we want to analyze. The concept of context implies an emphasis on the reception of the text by the reader. The context does not refer, as traditionally accepted, only to the creation of meaning through discourse, but also implies the reception of a text. Reading means actually re-reading, re-producing the text by reading it (Lehtonen, 2000).

Contextualization in film reviews

Contextualization is usually found in the beginning of a review, introduces by a "word bite". It is one of the components that describe the picture of professional reviews. Both the existence and the quality of this section can make the difference between a text written by a professional and one written by an amateur. A good columnist must put the discussed cultural product in context, by previously going through an extended research on the biographical data of the author and his work. The reviewer should also be familiar with the general theme and motifs of the cultural product; professional reviewers are often chosen based on their expertise in a specific field (Lee et al., 2009). Useful information for putting a work into its context are the ideological or political views of the producer, his other works, a short biography of the author, information about the process of making the product under consideration, if relevant, or the relative position of the product related to current cultural trends (Kilgore, 1998).

No cultural product can be perceived in a comprehensive manner without taking into account the relation between the product and the context in which it was created. A movie, for example, is created at the confluence between the director's previous experience and the situational, social and cultural environment in which the film was produced. Following the same pattern, a film review is created at the intertwining between the text and the exploration of its context, both filtered through the columnist's previous experience.
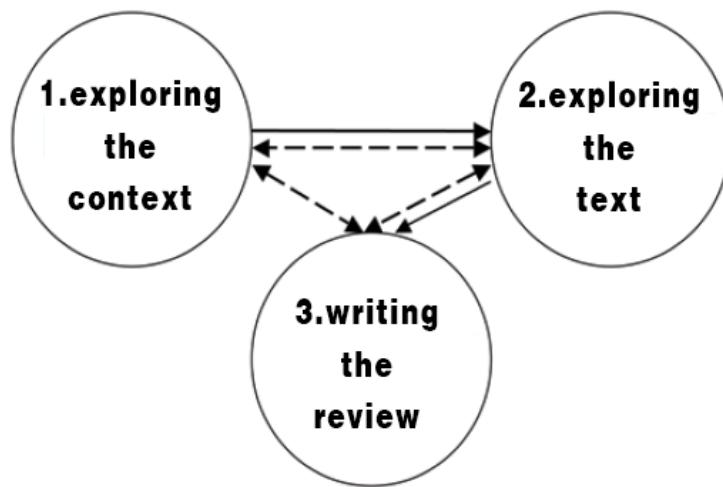
Fig. 1. – The relation between text and context in writing a review
(Motta-Roth 1998)

This relation between the multiple levels engaged in the creation of a cultural products the one that the reviewer will face not just when trying to fit the product discussed in a context and understanding the producer's views and choices, but also in writing his own text.

Intertextuality

The relation of a text to other texts has been a central concern for literary theorists since classical antiquity. Considering that the creation of a text depends to a significant extent on its alignment with the texts prior to it, and it is, at the same time, an anticipation of future texts, has always attracted

literary theorists (Bauman, 2004). One of the main methods to explore the relations between texts is that of intertextuality. Simply put, the theory states that any text should be read in conjunction with other texts. The same way extratextual reality is produced linguistically, texts do not refer primarily to the external reality, but to other texts in the same culture (Lehtonen, 2000).As Roland Barthes put it, reality exists for us through the way culture portrayed it in pictures and words.

Intertextuality theory states that texts are not hermetically sealed entities, running in themselves. They do not act as closed systems. Before being producers of texts, writers are readers. For this reason, works (fiction or non-fiction) are full of references to other texts. The product resulting through the act of reading is also influenced by all the other texts that the receiver has read before. Intertextuality involves guiding the reader toward perceiving certain meanings of the text in spite of others (Lehtonen, 2000).

In post-structuralist theory, the term of *intertextuality* was introduced by Julia Kristeva, and represents an attempt to create a synthesis between Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotics and Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism (his attempt to examine the multiple meanings of each text and each word) (Irwin, 2004). For Julia Kristeva, the meanings of a text are not sent directly from the writer to the reader, but going through a system of encoding and decoding processes based on both entities' past readings. Roland Barthes supports the idea that the meaning of a text lies not in that text, but is produced by the reader, who relates to the complex web of texts invoked by his previous reading experience. In this perspective, the traditional study on *meaning* was interested particularly in establishing the influences that certain texts have had on a particular writer and implicitly on his work. But the notion of intertextuality involves more than that. The whole use of language can be regarded as an intertextual one: first, people did not invent the language, the language precedes them. Secondly, the meaning could not be without pre-existing forms, conventions and codes. "Therefore, the concept of intertextuality refers to the way the relations between texts organize themselves in the process of reading a particular text, under precise circumstances"(Lehtonen, 2000:127). John Fiske identified two dimensions of intertextual relations. Horizontal relationships occur between primary texts, by genre, characters or content. Vertical intertextuality, on the other hand, occurs between a primary text and another text that makes an explicit reference to the first one (Lehtonen, 2000). The latter is the defining intertextuality model for the journalistic review.

Cultural allusions/references

A special case of intertextuality is the cultural allusion. It differs from the wider range of intertextuality models in that it always involves a voluntary effort by the author. In this respect, William Irwin notes that an allusion only moves one way: "If A alludes to B, B makes no allusion to A. Bible doesn't make allusions to Shakespeare, but Shakespeare can make allusions to the Bible"(Irwin, 2004:289).

Studying Virgil's *Georgics*, R. F. Thomas conducts a classification of the cultural references found. These can, of course, be applied to a much wider field of texts:

1. Casual reference to a situation, a specific antecedent, but made only in a general sense, unimportant to the new context.

2. Reference to the context of a known cultural model and the applying of that context to a new situation.

3. Self-reference (poet's references to himself and/or his work).

4. Corrective reference, where the imitation of a model is made against the intentions of the primary source.

5. Apparent reference which seems to evoke a certain model, but at a closer look, does not.

6. Multiple allusion or conflation, which refers to multiple sources simultaneously (Thomas, 1874).

The success of a cultural reference depends on the reader's ability to perceive it. It may be more or less transparent to the reader, depending on the intentions of the author, and the text type. The substantiation of the *cultural reference* or *allusion* concept, and the classification proposed by R.F. Thomas will be key points in our research applied to the contextual dimension of contemporary film reviews.

Research design

The present research aims to determine the quantitative and qualitative changes in terms of form and content that have occurred in the past 11 years in the way professional reviewers contextualize the films they analyze in their texts.

Research objectives

1. Determining the wayfilms were put into context in "New York Times" movie reviews published in 2002.

2. Determining the wayfilms were put into context in "New York Times" movie reviews published in 2013.

3. Determining the quantitative and qualitative changes in terms of form and content that have occurred in the past 11 years in the way professional reviewers contextualize the films they analyze in their texts.

Description of the sample used

The sample analysedcontains 40 movie reviews: 20 for 2002, 20 for 2013.To avoid any biases of the research caused by genre (e.g. an arthouse film review will implicitly have several references to cultural products of the same kind), thereviews were chosen for both 2002 and 2013, according to the following structure: 2 animation movies, 2 comedies, 2 dramas, 2 documentaries, 2 experimental movies, 2 SF movies, 2 horror movies, 2 romantic movies, 2 action movies, 2 war movies.

Research methods

Based on this general sampling scheme, and using quantitative and qualitative methods, we conducted a content analysis of the selected texts, passing each of the corresponding reviews (and the cultural allusions found in the texts) for the 40 films selected through a series of analysis grids that we considered relevant to the overall purpose of our research and,in particular, for the three major levels of the review's contextualization function: structural, stylistic and semantic.

Results

Our research showed that there are some fundamental structural, stylistic and semantic differences between how the movies were contextualized in 2002 "New York Times" reviews compared to those published in 2012.

In this respect, the first difference is a structural one: although the average text size remains the same, the film reviews published in 2013 contain about 50% more cultural references than those published in 2002.

In terms of style, there is a visible increase in the percentage of cultural references introduced by figures of speech: from 38% in 2002 to 50% in 2013. We have also found out that that the figures of speech that are used at a higher frequency are the comparisons (18 % compared to 13% in 2002), metaphor (21 % vs. 19%) and metonymy (8 % vs. 3% in 2002).Likewise, there is a

considerable increase in the percentage of implicit cultural references compared to the explicit ones: from 14% in 2002 to 44% in 2013.Thesefeatures of the texts come to speak about the fact that authors rely more on the stylistic enrichment of their reviews than they were in 2002.

The semantic analysis of cultural references has shown an interesting phenomenon: the tripling of the number of references to pop culture in 2013 compared to 2002. This leads toward an equilibrium between the percentage of references to the classical arts and those referring to popular culture artifacts. Also, the percentage of cultural references related to everyday situations (casual) increases with 7%in 2013 compared to 2002 (28 % compared to 21 %).Likewise, by setting a classification system for the cultural references (highbrow/ middlebrow/lowbrow[2]) we obtained data showing a balance between the three levels of cultural references in 2013, while in 2002 54% of the references were related to high brow culture. By analyzing the semantic field of the cultural references, we found an increasing importance given to a balanced stratification of cultural references and hence to the different levels of perceiving the text through an increased taste for popular culture and a careful cultivation of its specific elements.

Conclusion

Modern theories of culture talk more and more about the disappearance of the boundary between mass and high culture, traditionally seen as reflections of independent social, educational or economic groups. The new literary model tends to place Shakespeare next to Garfield and Doctor X next to Pythagoras. The analysis that we have undertaken has shown that, in terms of the contextualization function of film reviews published by "New York Times", there is a current phenomenon of balancing the percentages of references on the three levels of culture that we considered in our analysis, in relation to how it presented itself in 2002, when there was a clear tilt of the balance in favor of references and allusions to high culture. The fact that today there is even an artistic movement that took the name of Lowbrow, and the emergence of a middle class which jumped from the chat rooms directly to the

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[2]It is important to mention here that, using the terminology highbrow/middlebrow/lowbrow, we didn't take into account the pejorative meaning some of these words have. We do not believe in the existence of qualitative differences between these three categories of items. The classification is a horizontal, not vertical one, and was used strictly for scientific purposes based on an objective analysis grid.

cloud, having the power to set the tone in terms of the artistic taste of the time, is reflected in the visible participation of journalistic reviews in an active interaction with the real changes taking place among the society. Likewise, the explosion of the number of pop culture references speaks of the same opening towards cultural diversity and the disappearance of the boundaries between traditional cultural levels. Our research also showed that the number of references to everyday situations, aimed to make the reviews more familiar to the readers, has considerably increased since 2002.

From a linguistic point of view, our research showed that the authors have a growing liberty to "play" with the text, which is actually visible in the growing number of cultural references introduced by figures of speech, and in the relation between implicit and explicit cultural references and allusions. In this respect, the results speak of a gain in terms of literary features when it comes to the way movie reviews are produces nowadays. Broadly speaking, this gives texts a richer architecture that manages to attract young readers easier than one stuck in an extremely precise language canon.

Our research has shown that the contextual function of "New York Times" movie reviews gained, during the last decade, two crucial components: on one hand, a taste for popular culture and its specific elements and products, and, on the other, an extra attention given to the literary techniques used for producing the texts. The 50% increase in terms of the average number of cultural references per text, and a taste for an uniformly layered layout of cultural references come to show, first of all, a continuous exchange between the journalistic text and the society that generates it. The disappearance of clear separation lines between low and high culture, the leveling of cultural tastes is a real phenomenon, in a continuous interaction with the texts produced. This is clearly visible in the changes that occur in terms of the way movie reviews are written and perceived by the readers. From society to text. And vice versa.

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MANAGING PROXIMITY RELATIONS BETWEEN JOURNALIST AND READER IN PRINT MEDIA DISCOURSE. THE CURIOUS CASE OF A STUDENT MAGAZINE

ADRIAN HAZAPARU[1]

ABSTRACT. This study is analyzing the concept of journalistic proximity, applied to print media discourse. The author aimed to highlight the importance attributed to geographical, chronological, social and psycho-emotional proximity (in this paper referred to as "default proximity") in establishing a connection with the readers and how this connection can be maintained and prolonged (in this paper referred to as "proximization"). After a document analysis, a corpus-based discourse analysis and a multimodal analysis on a local student magazine, the results revealed that proximity is approached differently depending on journalistic genres, and not on audience profile, as generally presumed – obvious in informative and utilitarian pieces and obscure in opinion and interpretation pieces. A second part of the study revealed proximization strategies employed by the editorial team in order to catch the reader's attention, regardless of the existent proximity relations. The results showed that the lack of proximity relations can be addressed by paratext elements and its management within the newspaper layout.

Key-words: journalistic proximity – communication – discourse analysis – proximization strategies

1. Theoretical background

Proximity is one of the most important concepts in journalism and it is widely considered, both by practitioners and theoreticians, among the criteria that account for the newsworthiness of some facts, situations or events

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(Watson, 2008; Túñez & Guevara, 2009; Hyland, 2010). Moreover, Roselyne Ringoot and Yvon Rochard, researchers who have investigated journalistic proximity in several studies (2005, 2009) evoked the mandatory nature of the concept, stating that no publication could exist without building a close connection with its readers based on the proximity relations enabled.

Most often, in scholarly work on journalistic proximity, the concept has been defined in terms of spatial (or geographical) and temporal (or chronological) proximity, highlighting the idea that readers will be more interested (a) in local topics, instead of in news from other geographical areas unfamiliar to them and (b) in what is happening in the present and what will happen in the near future, instead of what has happened a long time ago or what will happen in a far away future. But these are not the only types of proximity identified. For example, Spanish researchers Armentia Vizuete and Caminos Marcet (2008: 134-135) talked about emotional proximity – "information that directly affects our feelings, as it is, from an emotional perspective, close to us" and thematic proximity, based on the familiarity degree that readers will discover in media topics, associated with his/her previous knowledge of those topics. A more elaborate classification belongs to Yves Agnès, who explains proximity using the central figure of the readers and what they perceive as being close to them. According to this approach, Agnès (2002) establishes four axes: geographical axis (apartment house – street – neighborhood – town – county – region – country etc.), chronological axis (today – tomorrow – yesterday – the day before yesterday – the day after tomorrow – last week – next week etc.), psycho-emotional axis (issues on safety, income, children, family, free time, health, sexuality etc.) and a social axis (lifestyle, work, religion, politics, sports, culture etc.). Applied to journalistic discourse, these axes determine a set of editorial choices that a publication has to make when addressing its target audience. In other words, in order to secure contact with the public, the editorial team has to be sensitive at least to one of the four proximity axes which – in different combinations – shape communities of people united by similar interests. Basically, there is a preliminary image the journalists have of their readers. This image results from sets of socio-demographic and psychographic characteristics that define *audience profiles* and it can determine the way the journalistic discourse will look like.

These socio-demographic and psychographic characteristics are often used as defining criteria in market segmentation, including media market segmentation. Every newsroom must sketch an "identikit" of its target audience, and every journalist has to know whom he writes for. Of course, no reader is identical to another, but an "ideal portrait" of the target audience could be used as a starting point for defining an editorial strategy, for choosing

an editorial structure and for selecting the stories to be written about. (Simion, 2007: 160-161) Furthermore, the proximity principles will impact upon the story selection process and, later on, upon the editorial content and its specific treatment: type of genre, angle, heading, layout etc. (Ringoot & Rochard, 2005: 75). At this moment, we can postulate that proximity is an important factor in journalistic discourse production because and enables various ways of reader engagement, by offering significant cues about reader socio-demographic and psycho-graphic characteristics.

In this article we discuss the particular case of journalistic proximity, which has been previously analyzed by researchers Pierre Fastrez and Stéphanie Meyer. In their study (1999), they suggested that proximity has two essential dimensions: an objective and a subjective one. Objective proximity deals with highly verifiable realities or situations, that is, in their terms, with what both sender and receiver agree there really *is* near – far, familiar – unfamiliar, imminent – far away in time etc. Subjective proximity, on the contrary, refers to what both sender and receiver *feel* near – far, familiar – unfamiliar, imminent – far away in time etc., that is, to realities or situations little verifiable. The authors expand the meaning of the concept by defining it in more particular contexts. Thus, they distinguish between what we will call in this paper "default proximity" and "added proximity" (the original denominations in French are *proximité inscrite* and *proximité induite*). Default proximity refers to the existent relation between sender and receiver, previous to any kind of intervention performed by one or another in order to modify it. Generally, this relation is based on what the interlocutors know of each other, before any interactions occur between them. By opposition, added proximity refers to the effort done by either sender or receiver to consolidate the existent relation, when default proximity is perceived as fragile. (Fastrez & Meyer, 1999: 7) The action performed is labeled "proximization", and, in the case of print media discourse, it is identifiable in the assemble of strategies designed by the newsroom in order to establish, maintain, prolong or even discontinue communication with the readers – in linguist Roman Jakobson's terms, in this communicational situation, language performs predominantly a phatic function. These proximization efforts can be objective by nature – are easily recognized performing this role and generally accepted as such, or subjective – when the strategies might fail to work properly due to the fact that one of the actors was unaware of or misinterpreted the closeness attempts at discursive level. Usually, subjective proximization occurs when default proximity is fragile. In other words, less proximization effort is required when default proximity is solid.

Going back to the four types of proximity presented at the beginning of the article, we can assume now that these are the main forms default proximity can take, because if proximity principles, as audience segmentation criteria (spatial, temporal, social and psycho-emotional, as defined by Agnès), are properly applied, no supplementary proximization effort (implicit or explicit) is required. This conclusion, formulated by Fastrez and Meyer in their study on proximity in the case of several Belgian local TV stations, will be tested here on print journalism, in the case of a local magazine addressed to the students living in the city of Iaşi, Romania – *Opinia studențească*. *Opinia studențească* is a free local student weekly magazine and its 5000 copies are distributed in the university campus from Iaşi, Romania. It is a compact format publication of 16 pages, half in color (1, 4-5, 8-9, 12-13, and 16), and half in black and white. The editorial team is composed by students from the Department of Journalism and Communication Sciences from "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University who are currently coordinated by two members of the academic staff: teaching assistant Laura Păuleț-Crăiniceanu, as editorial director, and Professor Daniel Condurache, as general editor. Among the local and national media, the publication stands out for its conservative orientation, but its "conservatism" refers to focusing on journalistic species that are no longer appealing to mainstream media editors, such as in-depth reportages and interviews. Moreover, the magazine is also known as an informal "journalism school" (Hermeziu, 2014), training students for the print media market, as a complement to their educational university program.

2. Objectives and research questions

The starting point of this study is the generally accepted and promoted premise that journalistic discourse is organized following the preliminary delimitations imposed by proximity principles, as described at the beginning of this article. Using the proximity terminology developed by Fastrez and Meyer (1999), we set a double objective for our study. In order to investigate the level of default proximity (as we have seen, very important in determining editorial choices, such as page profiles, type of articles, discourse genres, etc.), we evaluate (using a corpus-based discourse analysis) the degree to which the magazine respects the four proximity principles. Depending on the results, the next step is a multimodal discourse analysis meant to reveal the strategies that journalists use in order to enhance proximity. The overall objective is to identify how proximity works in written discourse and to describe the discursive mechanisms used by print media journalists in order to establish connections with their audience. In other words, we try to highlight the way a

sender manages to initiate, maintain, and interrupt the contact with the receiver in the cases of (a) high default proximity and (b) fragile default proximity. To fulfill the objective stated, the research questions that this paper will try to answer are: (1) Is the analyzed magazine respecting the four proximity principles used in journalistic communication? (2) In which of the publication's masts (section heads) is default proximity the strongest and in which the weakest? (3) How is default proximity distributed among journalistic genres? (4) Are journalists paying different attention to articles with fragile default proximity in comparison to those with solid default proximity? (5) How does proximization work in the case of print media discourse? After answering these research questions, a multimodal discourse analysis will be performed in order to test the conclusion issued by Fastrez and Meyer in their study: solid default proximity requires less proximization efforts than fragile default proximity. This will help us determine concrete strategies print media used by journalists to establish the necessary connections with their readers.

3. Methodology

This study triangulates several types of research methods, both quantitative and qualitative: document analysis, corpus-based discourse analysis and multimodal discourse analysis.

First, we performed a document analysis in order to select 20 different editions of *Opinia studențească* magazine – editions meant to represent the *corpus* to examine in order to analyze the default proximity and, therefore, the magazine's adherence to the four proximity principles previously described. The document analysis included all issues between October 2003 and October 2013, and the selection of the 20 issues was based on (a) a consistency criterion and (b) a randomness factor. We evaluated the profile of each page of the magazine over the last ten years and we were interested in excluding those editions that contained variations from the standard editorial architecture, which respects the following structure: Page 1: Frontpage, Pages 2 and 3: News (from the academic environment), Page 4. Incognito reports, Page 5: Dossier/ Investigation, Page 6: Column, Page 7: Short-form feature story; Pages 8 and 9: Interview, Page 10 and 11: Long-form feature story, Page 12: Culture, Page 13: Political debate, Page 14: Agenda/ Op-ed, Page 15: Miscellaneous, Page 16: Entertainment. However, the publication is known for its "conservatism" in this regard, and its editorial architecture and its graphic design project suffered minor corrections over the last decade. A comparative look at the magazine's structure between 2003 and 2013 is probative enough:

Table 1: Opinia studențească – editorial architecture;
a comparative look from 2003 until 2013

Sections	2003-2004	2009-2010	2012-2013
—	Page 1: Front-page	Page 1: Front-page	Page 1: Front-page
1	Pages 2-3: News	Pages 2-3: News	Pages 2-3: News
2	Page 4: Incognito	Page 4: Incognito	Page 4: Incognito
3	Page 5: Dossier/ Investigation	Page 5: Dossier/ Investigation	Page 5: Dossier/ Investigation
4	Page 6: Column	Page 6: Column	Page 6: Column
5	Page 7: Short-form feature story	Page 7: Short-form feature story	Page 7: Short-form feature story
6	Pages 8-9: Interview	Pages 8-9: Interview	Pages 8-9: Interview
7	Pages 10-11: Long-form feature story	Pages 10-11: Long-form feature story	Pages 10-11: Long-form feature story
8	Page 12: Culture	Page 12: Culture	Page 12: Culture
9	Page 13: Culture	Page 13: Political debate	Page 13: Political debate
10	Page 14: Agenda	Page 14: Op-ed	Page 14: Op-ed
11	Page 15: Miscellaneous	Page 15: Miscellaneous	Page 15: Miscellaneous
12	Page 16: Entertainment	Page 16: Entertainment	Page 16: Entertainment

The document analysis at this level revealed that the most significant issues were the ones published between 2003 and 2007 and thus the selection has been performed within this interval. The randomness factor presupposed the choice, within the mentioned period, of editions from October and beginning of November, because in these intervals the magazine suffered fewest changes both editorially and graphically. Indeed, insignificant changes have been also made to the graphic design project. The magazine kept same format, same number of pages, same number of columns, same fonts (both for body copy and headlines, leads, subheads), and same typographic colors, but due to some legal problems with the registration of the nameplate *Opinia studențească* at the State Office for Inventions and Trademarks, it suffered several variations (in 2006, 2008, and 2013, when it was rebranded). For visual proof of this consistency at the graphic and layout level, we are reproducing below two relevant captures – a 2003 front-page, compared to one from 2013:

After more than a decade in which the publication has never significantly parted from the editorial architecture and graphic design guidelines, in October 2013, the team decided to redesign its layout and to build a new editorial architecture for its content. However, this change did not affect at all the present study. Since the interest here was to select those items with the highest stability regarding editorial architecture and graphic design, our analysis corpus includes editions from 2003 – 2007, as our document analysis revealed that in this interval the publication has been less affected by any possible changes in the editorial and layout style. The document analysis was necessary not only for selecting the corpus, but also for the fact that stability of the editorial architecture and graphic design project can be an indicator for the relevancy and consistency of results obtained. Data for the monitored interval revealed that the year with most changes was 2003 (23% of variation), while for the other years the stability values were between 94 and 98 percents. The average value for the five monitored years was 93%[2].

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[2] A full detaliation of this monitoring can be provided at request.

The corpus-based discourse analysis aimed at identifying the type of default proximity based on the four proximity principles considered to generate the pre-discursive frame (with the central image of the reader) that the journalistic content will fit into. To do that, all principles had to be defined related to the object of study and its characteristics as media product. In this particular case, the pre-discursive frame built on proximity will take the shape suggested by the publication's profile. *Opinia studențească* is a local weekly magazine targeting students from the university campus of Iaşi, Romania. These geographical and occupational preliminary delimitations should theoretically presuppose better knowledge regarding the demographic and psychographic characteristics of the target audience and, consequently, should favor a high degree of what we called here default proximity, in comparison to media outlets targeting general audiences, where a precise determination of public's profile is much more difficult, due to audience heterogeneity.

Using the four proximity principles in this specific context, in our discourse analysis, spatial proximity includes all references to the city of Iaşi, with subspaces generated by the academic environment: public and private universities, and other academic institutions. Also, from a macro perspective, geographic proximity also covers allusions to the Romanian region of Moldova, since the majority of students are from this part of the country. Since *Opinia studențească* is a weekly magazine, temporal proximity refers to events taking place a week before and a week after the magazine is issued. Social proximity accounts for topics of interest regarding workplaces, scholarships, study programs, student housing, organizations and associations, politics, sports, culture etc., while psycho-emotional proximity is concerned with issues on safety, money, children, family, spare time, health, sexuality etc. This category is more difficult to define, and in our particular case we refer to *students*' safety, *students*' money, *students*' children, *students*' family, *students*' spare time, *students*' health etc.

At discursive level, in order to better identify default proximity types, the following compositional elements were analyzed: (a) headlines containing suggestions or elements that hint at one proximity type or another; (b) subheads, cross-heads and leads; (c) other textual elements graphically highlighted that include referrals to proximity. For example, *Opinia* uses bold highlighting for names and citation which will allow supplementary identification (names of people and places that correspond to one proximity type or another). In (a), (b), (c) and within the text, we look for words that refer to studentship, such as "housing", "campus", "exams", "lecture room", "amphitheatre", "professors", "seminar", "university", "education" etc.

On the newspaper page, from a discursive perspective, all these salient elements mentioned above play a role in catching the readers' attention and thus enhancing a connection between them and what they are (preparing to be) reading. This is why proximity should be especially explicit at this level, as it illustrates the first form of contact between sender and receiver, endowed with engagement discursive power.

Important to note, however, that our analysis did not include front-pages, because, metaphorically speaking, they represent a "show window" where all the key-topics from the newspaper are highlighted; therefore, they have no independent content, not even in the editorial piece, whose understanding largely depends on the knowledge the reader has about the other topics discussed within the paper.

Due to the fact that we covered a long period of time and that some of the pages contain a large number of items (like pages 2, 3, 6, 14, and 15), in order to avoid unnecessary secondary ramifications, the analysis unit is represented by the page as a whole, and not by each text within a page. Data were centralized in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, each unit receiving the value point of 0 (when proximity indicators were absent) and 1 (when proximity indicators were obvious). Exceptional or isolated items were ignored, the value appreciation concerning proximity (absent or obvious) being made in accordance with the dominant profile within a page.

4. Results and data interpretation

After monitoring and analyzing each selected edition, 20 worksheets have been created based on the following relevant categories: page profile, type of default proximity (temporal, spatial, social, emotional) and proximity value scored (0 - 1). The different combinations of the four proximity types (discursively absent or present) led to overall proximity values of 0.00, 0.25, 0.50, 0.75 or 1.00. The results of the corpus-based discourse analysis have been included in a centralizer organized on 12 editorial sections, to which one non-editorial has been added: advertising.

4.1. Default proximity analysis
In the attempt to answer the research questions, our analysis revealed that the publication respects the four proximity principles following different communication logics. Thus, the journalistic genre with the weakest overall default proximity is the long-form feature story (dp=0.19, where *dp* stands for *default proximity*). Also, weak default proximity was met in articles from page 6,

containing brief columns on various topics (dp=0.264) and from page 13, discussing political matters (dp=0.267). On the other hand, the pages with the solidest overall default proximity (that is all proximity principles were respected) were the news pages and the page containing the agenda of events for the coming week (dp=1.00). Also, strong default proximity was registered in the case of advertising items (dp=0.928) and in the case of the pages publishing dossiers and journalistic investigations (dp=0.921).

In our opinion, the mentioned pages and masts registered high values of default proximity because they cover topics that reflect "urgent" realities, with great significance for the target audience. Hence, they are the closest to the immediate interests of the reader. In the case of sections with fragile or even absent default proximity, explanations differ from one journalistic genre to another. For example, the mast dedicated to brief columns (page 6 in the editorial architecture) includes articles that express a subjective point of view on matters that are not strongly connected to factors such as time and space and, therefore, none of the correspondent types of proximity (spatial or temporal) is represented. For the political debate section, the magazine generally publishes op-eds on political matters (a topic underrepresented within the student social interests) that are written by commentators from Bucharest, well-known journalists that are not accustomed to the editorial practices and to the target audience of the magazine, as those from the newsroom.

Nr	Page profiles	No. of pages	Geographical proximity		Chronological proximity		Social proximity		Psycho-emotional proximity		VALUE SCORED	
			Total	Average value	Total	Average value	Total	Average value	Total	Average value	Total	Overall average value
1	News	42	42	1	42	0,94736842	42	1	42	1	42	1
2	Incognito	19	11	0,57894738	7	0,36842105	9	0,473684	11	0,57894736	9,5	0,5
3	Dossier/ Investigation	16	16	1	13	0,8125	15	0,9375	15	0,9375	14,7	0,921875
4	Column	17	2	0,11764705	1	0,05882352	7	0,411764	8	0,47058823	4,5	0,26470588

OPINIA STUDENȚEASCĂ – CENTRALIZER FOR THE MONITORED CORPUS (2003 – 2007) — TYPE OF DEFAULT PROXIMITY

5	**Short-form feature story**	**26**	20	0,76923076	14	0,53846153	8	0,307692	7	0,26923076	12,2	0,47115384
6	**Interview**	**36**	16	0,44444444	10	0,27777777	18	0,5	8	0,22222222	13	0,36111111
7	**Long-form feature story**	**40**	13	0,325	4	0,1	8	0,2	6	0,15384615	7,75	0,19375
8	**Cultural debate**	**25**	18	0,72	14	0,56	24	0,96	13	0,52	17,2	0,69
9	**Political debate**	**14**	2	0,14285714	6	0,42857142	7	0,5	0	0	3,75	0,26785714
10	**Agenda of the week**	**17**	17	1	17	1	17	1	17	1	17	1
11	**Miscellaneous**	**23**	7	0,30434782	7	0,30434782	21	0,913043	17	0,73913043	13	0,56521739
12	**Entertaiment**	**16**	13	0,8125	10	0,625	13	0,8125	15	0,9375	12,7	0,796875
13	**Advertising**	**7**	6	0,85714285	6	0,85714285	7	1	7	1	6,5	0,92857142

Further analyzing the genre with the lowest overall average values – the long-from feature story (in Romanian "reportaj mare", following the French tradition of the "le grand reportage") –, we observed that it generally lacks temporal proximity (dp=0.1). This may seem unusual when compared to other genres with fragile default temporal proximity (like the brief column earlier discussed), because the long-form feature story is an informative genre (in which space and time matter more), and not an opinion genre. But an explanation can be found in the periodicity of the magazine – *Opinia studențească* is a weekly paper. In the case of in-depth reporting, this kind of time expansion is to be expected. From the moment announcing what the story will be about and until the field work and, afterwards, the writing and editing of the text are done, two weeks at least have passed. Also, the low value on temporal proximity can be explained by correlating it to another similar value: spatial proximity (dp=0.325). From this point of view, the long feature stories published on pages 10 and 11) do not cover just the geographical area specific to the target audience: reporters go beyond these "frontiers". But space takes time: time to go where the events take place, time for documenting the topic, time for writing and editing, time for paginating and time until the text is published. Together, all these aspects related more to a work routine than to a discursive practice, justify the significant gaps between the moment an event takes place, the moment a reporter documents

it and writes about it, and the moment when the final story is published. At this moment, some preliminary conclusions can be drawn: in the case of long-form feature story, moving away from geographical proximity implies moving away also from the possibility of writing on topics of interest for the target audience, socially (default social proximity had a value of 0.2) and, evidently, the psycho-emotional link between the magazine and its readers is also damaged, by covering topics irrelevant in this regard (dp=0.153). In other words, since default proximity is fragile, in *Opinia studențească* in-depth reporting needs a stronger focus on added proximity, and the second part of this study analyses the strategies used at this level.

A comparison between short-form and long-form feature stories revealed that the stories published on page 7 are written on local topics, even if they do not always cover topics of interest for the target audience. However, as a reaffirmation of the preliminary conclusions on in-depth reporting, in the case of shorter stories, it is obvious that their writing and editing require less effort and less time on the part of the reporter, which will consequently lead to a higher degree of temporal proximity. This is also demonstrated by the higher values registered concerning spatial and temporal proximities, compared to the values for social proximity (dp=0.30) and psycho-emotional proximity (dp=0.26). The fragility of these two latter types is justified by the fact that the topics covered are not always related to what the public is interested in.

Getting back to the long-form feature story, one interesting result from this corpus-based analysis reveals that, for the monitored period, in 20 of the 40 texts within this section none of the four proximity principles was taken into account. Moreover, none of the 40 texts managed to respect all of the proximity principles, which would have led to maximum default proximity. Of the 40, only one story registered default proximity of 0.75 and thus respected three of the four principles. Here are the overall results on default proximity for the long-form feature story, compared to the overall values for the entire magazine:

Type of proximity	Average overall value in the grand reportage	Average overall value in the whole magazine
Spatial proximity	0,325	0,6293211
Temporal proximity	0,1	0,5291088
Social proximity	0,2	0,6935527
Psycho-emotional proximity	0,153846154	0,602228091

Overall, *Opinia studențească* manages to maintain default proximity of above 0.5 in each of the four types, whereas the long-form feature story section does not. This apparently awkward situation is explained by the special status quo of the student magazine. For more than 35 years, *Opinia* has played the role of an informal journalism school for the students of Iaşi, especially for those currently enrolled in courses at the Department of Journalism and Communication Sciences from "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iaşi, and has recently been labeled "the most difficult reportage school" (Hermeziu, 2014). Consequently, the stories that students-reporters produce for pages 10 and 11 are, more likely, ways to exercise their journalistic skills than journalistic texts created in the service of other students – as target audience for the magazine. This could explain why proximity principles – in spite of being known and successfully applied in other masts of the magazine (news, for instance) – are not applied here too. Moreover, with rare exceptions, the topics "available" within the limitations imposed by the target audience profile (thus within respecting the proximity principles) are not suitable for the type of in-depth reporting stories featured on these pages.

4.2. Proximization analysis

This second analysis of the present study can be performed only if we take into consideration the multimodality of journalistic discourse, as part of a pragmatic approach to journalistic communication. In the words of Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, discourse is multimodal when "its meaning is realized through more than one semiotic code." (1996: 183). In our case, this approach on discourse focuses on the "interplay between language and other communicative resources" (Cameron & Panović, 2014: xi), such as photographs and other graphically highlighted elements on a newspaper page.

In order to analyze proximization strategies that journalists use to engage with their readers, we correlated the partial results we have obtained until now with the conclusion proposed by Fastrez and Meyer in their study, which will be used here as hypothesis – the solider default proximity is, less proximization efforts are required. In other words, when default proximity is fragile, journalists should pay more attention to enable supplementary strategies (what we called in this paper "added proximity") in order to initiate and maintain contact with the reader. Even if this assertion is a demonstrated fact in the study of proximity in local TV discourse, it still needs validation in the case of print media discourse.

To gain consistency, our multimodal analysis is performed on two same type of texts, a long-form feature story which does not conform at all to the rules of proximity – "Revoluționarii leagă lupta de poarta Parlamentului" – and one where three of the four proximity types are manifested (note that no long-form feature story from the analyzed corpus met with all four principles) – "Doi studenți restanțieri candidează la primăria din Breaza". Certain coincidences about these two reportages give a humoristic touch to the research: the texts have been published in consecutive editions of *Opinia studențească* (261 and 262, respectively) and were placed on the same page – page 10. These facts could raise some questions regarding criteria used by the editorial team for the type of topics to cover on the pages dedicated to in-depth feature stories, since it includes, within the same section, subjects that normally get the attention of very different social categories.

As opposed to the previous corpus-based discourse analysis, which focused especially on text, in the present analysis, according to the multimodality premise stated before, we observe and analyze other strategic devices (generally with a phatic function) used in journalistic discourse in order to initiate, maintain and prolong communication with the readers. Such devices are (a) paratext elements, (b) page architecture, and (c) internal structure.

(a) According to Fastrez and Meyer, the results of our contrastive analysis should reveal that, due to fragile default proximity (dp=0.00), the story "Revoluționarii leagă lupta de poarta Parlamentului" should exploit (as) many (as possible) strategies of proximization, to ensure a connection with the reader. By opposition, in the other story, with high default proximity scores (dp=0.75), there should not be a need for supplementary efforts in this regard.

Paratext analysis has been preferred here because paratext elements are often referred to as visual communication tools meant, as part of their phatic function, to attract audience attention (Bonciarelli, 2012). They have a *captatio* effect and work like a magnet, selecting and orienting the readers, and establishing information hierarchies for them. Paratext is therefore an objective proximization tool. Both reportages compared here use more or less the same paratext "arsenal": straps, headlines, subheads, leads, crossheads, photos, captions and text boxes. This list of paratext elements should not be perceived as a quantitative method to evaluate the way these devices are used in order to initiate the contact with the reader. But even doing so, one can observe that, paradoxically, the feature story relying on solid default proximity also used more paratext elements, thus invalidating the work hypothesis, according to which it had, from the beginning, greater potential to attract the readers.

Table 2. Paratext elements as proximization tools. A comparative look

"Revoluționarii leagă lupta de poarta Parlamentului"	"Doi studenți restanțieri candidează la primăria din Breaza"
Strap	Strap
Headline	Headline
Subhead (introduced by bullet points)	Two subheads (introduced by bullet points)
Lead (chapeau)	Lead (chapeau)
Four crossheads	Five crossheads
Two photos (with captions)	Four photos (two with captions)
A text box (with a headline)	A text box (with a headline and a subhead)

(b) More than the mere use of paratext elements, what gains importance is how this paratext is distributed or, in other words, how its phatic force is used on the newspaper page. Evaluating this process in both feature stories, one of the conclusions suggests a more efficient visual arrangement in the case of the reportage "Doi studenți restanțieri candidează la primăria din Breaza". Here, the options to engage with the reader are more judiciously chosen, if we take into account existent theoretical and empirical studies on the matter. For instance, the Gutenberg Diagram or the Gutenberg Rule (Fadeyev, 2009), as interpreted by the famous American newspaper designer Edmund C. Arnold, suggests that every page has a Primary Optical Area (POA), situated in its top left, where reading generally starts, and a Terminal Area (TA), where reading ends, situated at the bottom right corner. The theory says that, when reading, eyes move across and down the page, from POA to TA, obeying what Arnold calls "reading gravity". When reading a newspaper page, the subject starts from the Primary Optical Area, but is attracted, due to this reading gravity, towards the Terminal Area. Consequently, a page contains two "sterile corners" that a reader will not observe. The questions risen by the Gutenberg Rule – How do we respect this natural tendency of the reader and manage to design pages with high legibility? – received an answer through Arnold's "10.30 Formula": a designer should see a newspaper page as a watch that stopped at 10.30. To avoid those "sterile corners", in the areas indicated by the watch's hands, the designer should place some elements that would attract the reader (photos, for instance) and counter-balance reading gravity. Seen in the particular case of our analysis, these layout suggestions represent proximization strategies applied to a visual level.

From this perspective and considering paratext elements entry points in the newspaper page, the two long-form feature stories use approximately the same strategies, with the difference that in "Revoluționarii leagă lupta de poarta Parlamentului", the bottom right corner – one of the sterile corners, as a matter of fact – is not sufficiently "blur". Thus, this could drive the reader away from the page and, consequently, put an end to any chance of further contact. For a better understanding on how the medium possibilities can be strategically used in order to keep the reader close to the newspaper page, we provide a comparative graphical representation of the page architecture in both feature stories, schematized according to the directions suggested by Edmund C. Arnold:

"Doi studenți candidează la primăria din Breaza"

"Revoluționarii leagă lupta de poarta Parlamentului"

■ Photo   ▨ Text (straps, headlines, subheads, crossheads)   ▨ Text (lead)
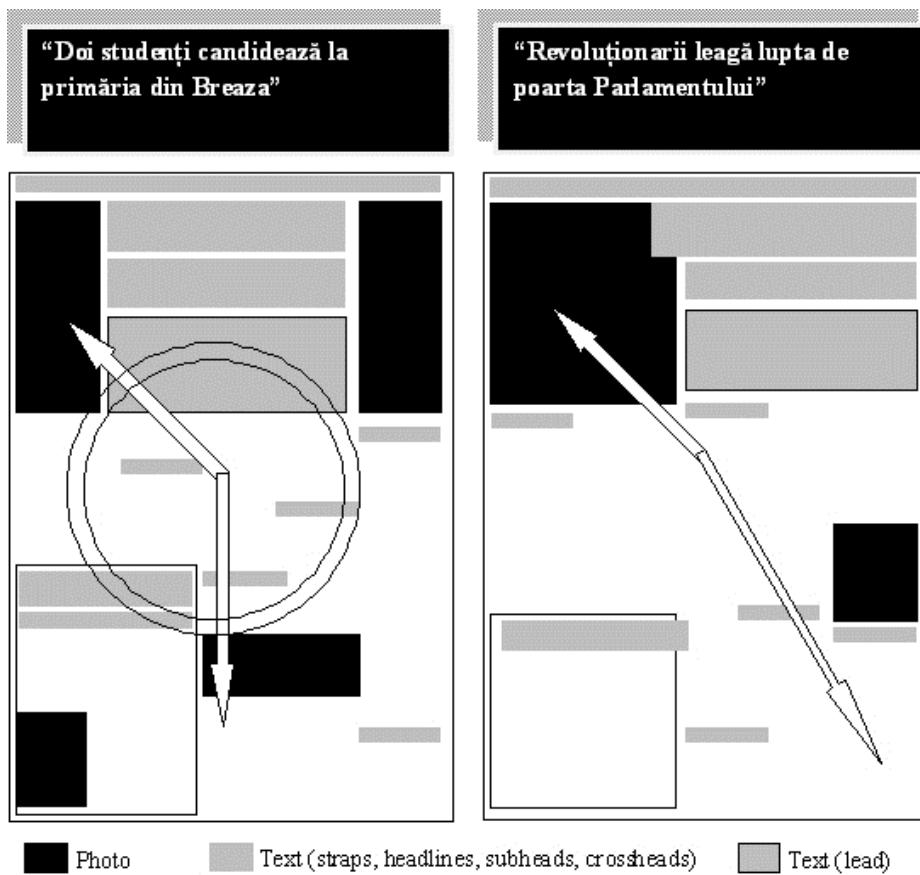
The results reveal that both feature stories (no matter the default proximity!) appeal to more or less the same *proximization* strategies. Moreover, these are even more efficiently used in the piece that, theoretically, did not even need it, thus invalidating again the work hypothesis.

(c) In their research on the possibility of discourse structure to work as an attention-grabbing device, Knobloch *et al.* (2006) suggest that the reader can be seduced by particular concatenations and arrangements of the events in a story, irreverent if it is a journalistic or a literary writing. Certain permutations in the chronology of events, Knobloch says, can trigger the reader emotions, like suspense or curiosity. But in the long-form feature stories analyzed here, the focus is rather on shaping human portraits and not on narrating specific events. Consequently, instead of playful shifts between narration timeline and event timeline, the stories are built following a dialectical structure (Ulibarri, 1994). The role of this structure is to organize the text using opinions expressed by the characters involved on a certain matter. Thus, from the point of discourse pragmatics, a polarization between characters at this level would enhance the reader's interest in the evolution and culmination of the story. This type of structure is phatic, because it induces into the reader a state of curiosity regarding remarks and comments made by the characters, but because it focuses more on rational than emotional construction, its potential as a proximization tool is limited.

5. Conclusion and future research

Our analysis of proximity revealed that print journalists do not always take into account the four proximity norms considered to generate the pre-discursive frame (having the reader as a central image) that their messages should adhere to. We have discovered that sometimes work routines interfere with discursive practices, favoring deviations from the proximity principles. Also, the type of journalistic genre strongly impacts on proximity: while news and other informative pieces obey the proximity norms, in opinion items, geographical and spatial proximity tend to matter less. Moreover, there are genres, like long-form feature story or in-depth interview, where not even social or emotional proximity are that important.

Unlike the case of TV media discourse, regardless of the solidness of "default proximity", in print journalism, a team of communicators (journalists and designers) must think of other ways of getting into contact with the target audience and establish relations that can ensure a solid readership base. As proximization strategies, we have analyzed the use of paratext elements,

newspaper page architecture and discourse structure. Results revealed that the connection between sender and receiver significantly depends on the clever management of paratext. These proximization strategies can be assessed objectively, as they represent constant elements that are creatively and lucratively used on the newspaper page. The other dimension of proximization, the subjective one, requires much more research effort, as it focuses on what the reader perceives or feels as being engagement attempts from the part of the journalist. Since subjective proximization cannot be standardized, further research in this particular area is certainly needed.

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THE ROLE OF LOCAL PRESS IN PROMOTING EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE[1]

MĂDĂLINA HODOROG[2]

ABSTRACT. The paper "The role of local press in promoting educational opportunities for young people" explores how the online editions of three local newspapers from Cluj-Napoca: *Monitorul de Cluj*, *Ziua de Cluj* and *Făclia de Cluj* include educational and developmental opportunities for young people. Instead of analyzing only the articles related to education in general, the present study adds a new dimension and closely focuses on all the articles that are address to youth. Moreover, the paper analyzes the Youth in Action projects conducted in Cluj-Napoca in order to understand how institutions try to address their projects to local press.

The current paper includes one theoretical and one practical part. The first part contains information regarding the previous studies on the topic and on youth and defines concepts used in the study. The practical part contains the actual research that represents a rather new approach on how the online editions of the three local media include youth opportunities in their agenda, and how institutions that undertake Youth in Action projects promote their projects in the local press. The final part consists in the results of the study, but also includes discussions, recommendations and limitations of the study. The research strives to be meaningful for young people, youth workers, NGOs, student journalists, journalist and parents that consume these types of media, as it provides substantial insight into the major opportunities that young people have nowadays, and how they are addressed in local media.

Key terms: *youth, educational media, local journalism, local media, Youth in Action projects.*

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Introduction

News and information habit of young people has been a topic of debate in recent years in the context of the rapid evolution of digital media. Researchers have been trying to focus on how interested young people are in news and information and especially, if newspaper readership has declined among youth.

The aim of the study is to find out how the online editions of local media include in their agenda educational and developmental opportunities for young people from Cluj-Napoca. In doing so, the paper analyzes the online editions of three local newspapers: *Monitorul de Cluj*, *Ziua de Cluj* and *Făclia de Cluj* by using an analysis grid. Moreover, interviews with applicant institutions for the Youth in Action program of the European Commission will be conducted in order to understand how institutions promote their projects in the local press.

The present study is the first study conducted in Cluj-Napoca on this topic and presents a new approach on how local press journalists cover topics related or addressed to young people. The main reason of the study is that Cluj-Napoca is one of the biggest university towns from Romania with more than 80,000 students annually (Oros, 2013) and it is also the 2015 Youth Capital of the European Union. Hence, the role of media in spreading youth opportunities is of great importance.

The idea of the study comes in a period when the unemployment rate of young people aged between 15 and 24 years old increased with 50% from 2008, with more than 30% of young people being unemployed for more than a year (Europa.eu 2012). As youth is one of the most vulnerable groups of people within a society, with more than 20 million young people from Europe living in poor societies, the Council of Europe proposed in 2009 the "EU Youth Strategy (2010-2018)" whose main objectives are to create equal opportunities for young people in the fields of education, employment, social inclusion, volunteering or participation (European Commission 2012). European Commission and all the EU member states were invited to take specific measures for young people development in each country. Programs such as Erasmus, Youth in Action, Comenius, Leonardo da Vinci, Erasmus Mundus or Grundtvig were created for European and worldwide young people to develop their competences.

Accordingly, we will present the definitions of the concepts and the literature review in order to create a general idea about the topic and its importance in the media field. Furthermore, we will describe the methodology that we used in creating the analysis and present the results with further discussions.

Definition of concepts

2.1 Youth

The definition of *youth* varies in many countries according to national, socio-economic context and time. In Romania, young people are considered to be between 14-21 years old based on a marketing profile realized by SMARK Research (Lungu 2012). However, the age-spam for eligibility in Youth in Action programs financed by European Union is 13 to 30. For statistical purposes European Union considers youth as people between 15 and 29 years of age (European Commission 2012). The World Health Organization defined *youth* as a person between the ages of 12 and 24 years old, while a young adult was seen as a person between the ages of 18 and 29 years old (Ann Geiger 2011). In the present study, we decided to use the European Union age category (15-29) for young people as Romania is one of the member states of the European Union.

2.2 Educational Opportunities for young people

When using the concept of *opportunities for young people* we decided to include events dedicated especially to young people aged 15-29 such as: conferences, trainings, European projects (Youth in Action, Comenius, Erasmus etc.), workshops or courses. All these events have the primary purpose of helping young people develop personal skills. Hence, festivals, theatre events, concerts that are only for entertainment or relaxation do not fit into the category of educational opportunities.

2.3 Educational function of mass-media

Along with functions such as communication, correlation, entertainment and information, mass-media is also important for educational purposes. Mass-media offers spontaneous education with the use of digital media. Denis McQuail (2010) argues that media has a visible impact on the individuality of people, groups or institutions and has effects on the cognitive, affective and behavioral dimension of a person.

2.4 Local journalism

There are numerous statistics that show that local newspapers are the primary means of information both for adults and young people. The Newspaper Society's website shows that 31 million people read local media in UK, being the most popular print medium. More than 85% of adults read local newspapers, while the number of 15-35 years old who read regional media is higher with 10% than those accessing the Internet for local news. Moreover, local newspapers are trusted more than twice in comparison with other media channel (Newspaper Society 2012).

The situation is similar in America where 72% of adults are strictly following local newspapers (Miller, Purcell and Rosenstiel 2012). However, in Romania, local media has been describes as "subjective and poorly financed" (Botnaru 2011).

3. Literature Review

There are no previous studies that address the topic of the present study, but that investigate the role of media on educating young people or the consumption of media by youth. Studies that address youth media consumption show that young people are interested in news, contrary to the popular belief that they are not.

According to the Reuters Institute Digital Report, 60% of 18 to 24 years old like to read news, while half of those under 35 years old consume news online. The study was conducted in UK, Germany, Spain, Italy, France, Denmark, US, Brazil and Japan (Newman and Levy 2013). The idea that youth turns to online media is also shown in the YouGov poll conducted by Guardian in March 2013 that found that 29% of people aged 18 to 24 have not read a print newspaper in the last year (The Guardian 2013). Moreover, 57% of people aged 18 to 25 years old read an online newspaper in the last year and they are also more likely to pay for an online newspaper (The Guardian 2013). World Association of Newspapers tried to more investigate the topic by conducting an online questionnaire among young people across the world aged 15 to 29 and found that more than 30% are interested in local, national and international news topics (Margaret Vassilikos 2008). As digital natives, the needs of youth online vary. 82% of young people aged 16 to 24 said they use the Internet to look for advice and information for themselves, while 71% argued that they like to find as many sources as possible when looking for information (Hulme 2013). A study conducted by Ofcom in 2010 revealed that youth aged 16 to 24 spend nine and a half hours per day using several types of media for information (Wearden 2010).

In Romania, 79% of people aged 18 to 45 use computers for reading news and for entertainment, followed by TV, smartphone and radio, according to an eResearch study from 2013. When consuming news, 89% of respondents stated that they primarily use Romanian newspaper, while 11% international ones. Moreover, 63% of people trust online newspapers followed by search engines (26%) and Facebook (7%) (Ionescu 2013).

Rodriguez (2012) argued that young people expect more from media as they want to be motivated by having "a more active stance, more opinion-

making, via campaigns and encouragement to raise people's awareness and engage them, making people think of the group and not of the individual." Hence, the role of media in education is essential as it transmits plenty of information, creates values, attitudes, ways of behavior, having effects on individuals' personalities (Academia de Studii Economice Bucureşti 2010). Centrul Educaţia 2000+ analyzed in 2004 news articles that focused on education and found that education-related articles are sufficiently covered in the press but the focus is on the sensational part of the news story, creating negative images for both young persons and teachers (Bunescu şi Negreanu 2005).

As the literature review points towards the need of youth to be informed regarding their opportunities, the current paper posits the idea that media should pay a closer look to the needs of youngsters. Mass media has the advantage to communicate to large numbers of people simultaneously (Gamble şi Gamble 1999) and with the help of the digital media it can target specific audiences. Saunders and Goddard (2002) showed in their study on how media facilitates community education in relation with child abuse that "media has the potential to positively influence child welfare policies, community responses to children and young people, and societal acknoledgment of, and reaction to, child abuse and neglet." By using mass communication campaign, mass media has the power to transform ideas within societies but also to encourage young people in transforming their lives.

4. Research Questions

The following research questions have been put forward:
1. Which online edition of local newspaper often promotes educational and developmental opportunities for young people?
2. What are the educational and developmental opportunities that are most often promoted in the online editions of local newspapers?
3. Which online edition of local newspaper often promotes European educational and developmental opportunities for young people?
4. What is the relationship of local NGOs with the local press when promoting Youth in Action projects?

5. Methodology

In order to reach the aim of the paper, we decided to use two qualitative and quantitative methods. Firstly, the paper analyzes the online editions of three well-known local newspapers from Cluj-Napoca: *Monitorul de*

Cluj, *Ziua de Cluj* and *Făclia de Cluj. Monitorul de Cluj* and *Ziua de Cluj* are two daily, local newspapers from Cluj-Napoca that cover varied topics related to politics, economy or administration. Both newspapers have regional editions such as *Monitorul de Suceava*, *Monitorul de Vrancea*, *Ziua de Constanța*, *Ziua de Vest. Făclia de Cluj* is an independent, daily newspaper from Cluj-Napoca that also includes articles related to politics, economy or administration. The newspaper was previously named *Lupta Ardealului* and *Adevărul de Cluj* by switched to *Făclia de Cluj* in 2007. *Lupta Ardealului* was a magazine that appeared in 1946 – 1989 and included articles related to the communist regime.

We created an analysis grid that consists of 9 categories numbered from A to I: A-Name of local newspaper, B-Title of the article, C-Author, D-Date of publication, E-Category, F-Genre, G- Articles related to young people, H- Supporting Elements, I-Word Count. Each category has multiple subsections as seen in Annex 1.

The second methodology used is the sociological interview whose focus is on how NGOs from Cluj-Napoca promote their Youth in Action (YiA) projects. We conducted sociological interviews with the project coordinators or public relations representatives of the YiA projects accepted in Cluj-Napoca during February 2012 – Mai 2013 (Annex 2). We presented the conclusions without giving the names of the project coordinators and the organization they represent.

6. Data Analysis

The grid analysis consists of 10522 online articles out of which 3067 are *Monitorul de Cluj* newspaper articles, 4129 *Ziua de Cluj* newspaper articles and 3326 *Făclia de Cluj* newspaper articles.

6.1.1 Monitorul de Cluj

During 3 months, there were 3067 articles analyzed, mostly included in the Politics Category (18.12%), Administration (10.10%) and very few in the Education category (3.71%). The online edition of *Monitorul de Cluj* focuses more on news articles (88.94%) and commercials (8.83%) and it uses photos as supporting elements in 93.8% of the articles. Moreover, the online articles have on average 349 words with the shortest news article of only 14 words and a longer interview of 2643 words.

Articles related to youth

There were **277 articles (9.03%) that address topics related to youth** including the articles under the Education category, as seen in Table 1. For a better understanding, we are going to define those articles as "youth articles." Out of 277 youth articles, 71 (25.65%) are related to Politics/ Educational structure, 70 (25.27%) Promote young people and **65 (23.46%) promote opportunities for youth (Annex 1)**. When writing about youth, journalists from *Monitorul de Cluj* online newspaper write news stories (76.53%), commercials (22.02%) and feature stories (1.44%). 94.92% of youth articles include only photos.
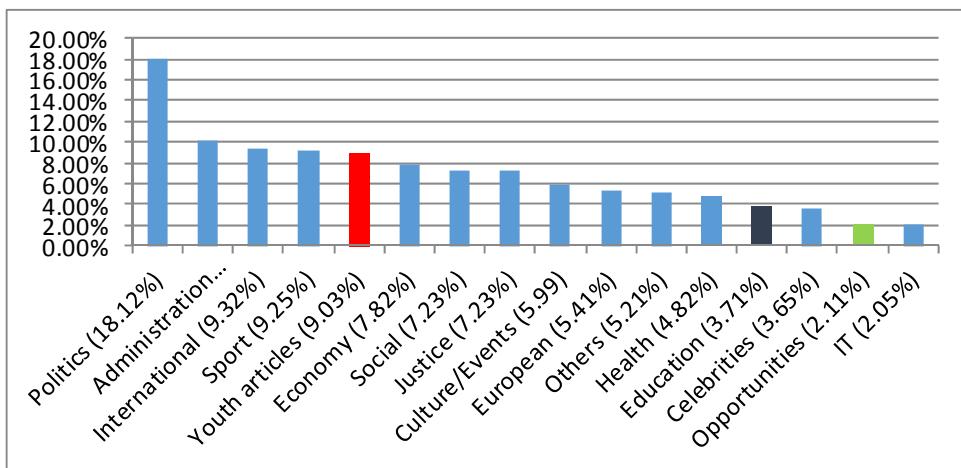
Table 1: Category list for *Monitorul de Cluj* local newspaper

Opportunities for youth (G1)

Most of the opportunities for youth encountered in the online newspaper are **cultural events (29.07%)**, **conferences (23.07%)** and courses (16.92%), as seen in Annex 2. The opportunities presented in the newspaper are mostly formal, **free of charge** (53.84% - Annex 3) and are for **professional training** (35.38%) and for gaining knowledge in a certain domain (32.30%). The events take no longer than a day in Cluj-Napoca (Annex 4) and most of them are addressed to young people aged 18-29 (38,46%). Journalists mostly include the name of the institutions that create the events.

6.1.2 Ziua de Cluj

During 3 months, there were 4129 articles published out of which 17.31% are included in the **Politics category**, 14.82% in Sport, 13.56% in Administration while 4.98% are related to Education as seen in Table 2. The local newspaper contains primarily news articles (87.84%) and commercials (7.16%) as seen in Annex 5. There are no investigative news stories. Moreover, *Ziua de Cluj* often uses no supporting elements (44.24%) or just photos (39.16%). The average words used in articles are 461 words.

Articles related to youth

There are **391 articles (9.46%) related to youth** out of which 343 articles (87.72%) are news stories and 30 (7.67%) commercials. 119 articles (30.43%) are related to Politics/Educational Structure, **88 (22.50%) promote youth opportunities**, 68 (17.39%) are about young people's way of living and 46 (11.76%) promote youth, as seen in Annex 6.

Opportunities for youth – G1
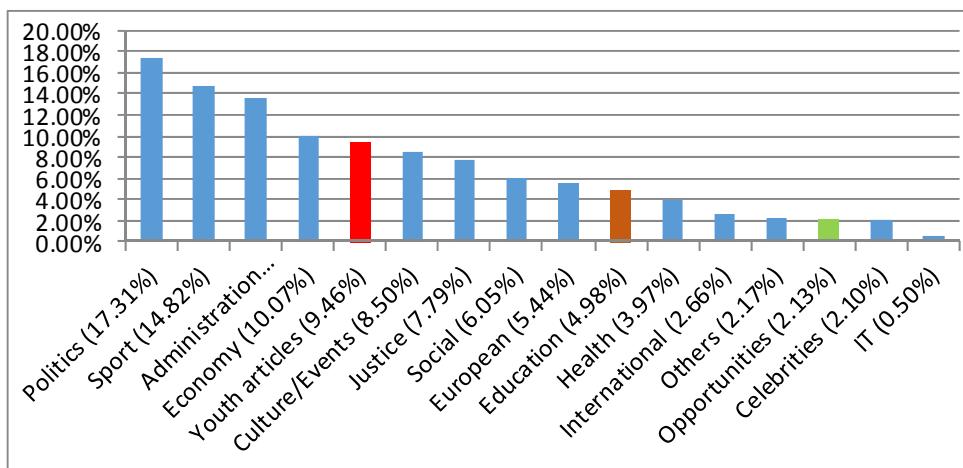
Table 2: Category list *in Ziua de Cluj* local newspaper

22.50% of the articles related to youth opportunities include events such as: **conferences (38.63%)**, **cultural events (21.59%)**, workshops (10.22%) and European projects (7.95%) as seen in Annex 7. Most of the events are formal, **for professional training** (35,22%) and for gaining knowledge in a specific domain (23.86%) and take **no longer than a day** (40.90%- Annex 8).

The payment is not specified in the articles (Annex 9). The events are mostly addressed to young people aged 18-29 (56.81%). Institutions (65.90%) are mentioned in most of the articles related to youth and 80.68% of the events are local. Photos (45.45%) are the most used supporting elements, followed by no use at all of them (35,22%).

6.1.3 Făclia de Cluj

The section will analyze the 3326 *Făclia de Cluj's* online newspaper articles. The agenda of the newspaper includes articles about **Politics (26.24%)**, **Culture/Events (22.12%)** and Economy (11.09%). There are only few articles related to **Education (3.57%)** as seen in Table 3. Most of the articles are news articles (79.73%) and commercials (11.24%) and there are no investigative articles (Annex 10). Moreover, half of the articles include no supporting elements (50.24%), while half of them include only photos (49.48%). The average number of words used in the online newspaper is 433 words.

Articles related to youth

There are **338 articles (10.16%) that refer to youth** mostly in the form of news articles (72.78%) and commercials (22.78%). Out of 338 youth articles, 169 are **promoting youth opportunities** (50%), 92 are related to Politics/ Educational Structure (27.21%) and 35 are promoting talented youth (10.35%) as seen in Annex 11.
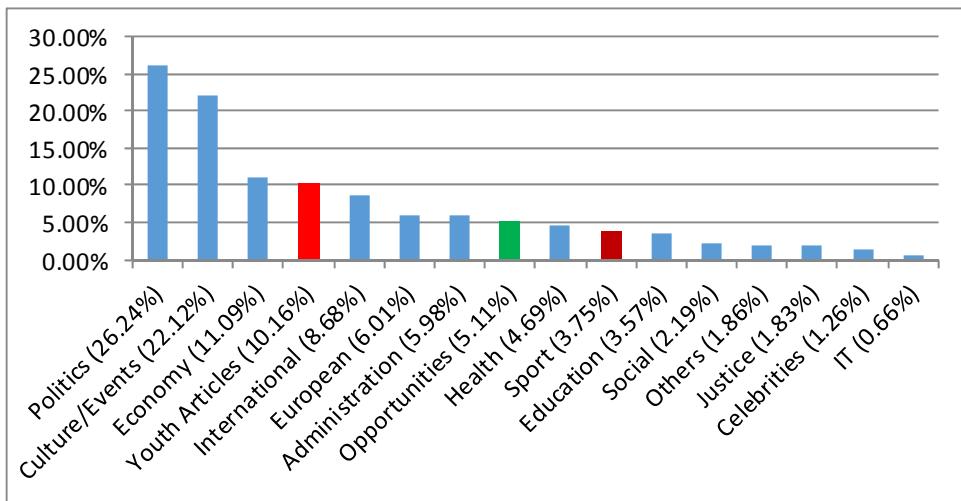

Table 3: Category list *in Făclia de Cluj* local newspaper

Opportunities for youth – G1

As mentioned above, out of 388 youth articles, most of them refer to youth opportunities (50%) such as: **conferences** (37.27%), **cultural events** (30.58%), workshops (6.47%) and European projects (5.29%), Annex 12. There are 9 European projects presented such as Comenius, Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci or Youth in Action. Most of the events are **formal** (90.53%), **free of charge** (71%) and are **for gaining knowledge in a specific domain** (49.11%), for relaxation (21.89%) and for professional training (15.38%). Most of the opportunities for youth presented in *Făclia de Cluj* take **at least one day** (58.57%) and are addressed to young people aged 18-29 (53.84%). Institutions are often mentioned in opportunities for youth articles (70.41%) and are happening in Cluj-Napoca (88.16%). Articles use mostly no photos (57.39%) and only a few of them use photos (42.01%). The average word number of the articles is 342.

6.2 Analysis on Youth in Action projects

There were 31 NGOs and informal groups that implemented Youth in Action (YiA) projects during this period with 52 projects being accepted. We conducted interviews with the project coordinators from 16 NGOs and analyzed 28 YiA projects by using the interview method. The analyzed projects were varied, from youth exchanges (Action 1.1), youth initiatives (1.2) or EVS projects (4.3).

Based on the analysis of the YiA projects, we could summarize the results in three main categories: a) Visibility of the project, b) The NGOs – local press relationship and c) The evaluation of the relationship.

a) Visibility of the project

All the project coordinators of the YiA projects from Cluj-Napoca create a visibility campaign with several objectives depending on the project's idea: promoting the project and the organization, attracting participants for the project, informing local audience of the events included in the project, motivating young people to participate in European projects such as YiA, promoting volunteering or recruiting volunteers in the organization.

In order to fulfill the above mentioned objectives, the local NGOs create visibility materials for each project such as: posters, logos, stickers, flyers, brochures, banners, Youtube or Trilulilu short clips, websites, Facebook pages, press releases, promoting on social media channels such as Facebook or Yahoo groups, presenting the project on different social events etc.

b) The NGOs – local press relationship

In order to address the local media, NGOs create press releases, media partnerships, press conferences or pay for articles in the media. Based on the analysis, all NGOs create press releases and most of them create press releases before, during and after the project. However, all the press releases created *after* the project include details of the activities, photos or short clips.

Most of the press releases are sent via E-mail to journalists from the local press, while others include also journalists from national or international media. When contacting journalists, most of them use E-mail, but there are also NGOs who use Facebook, phone and websites.

There are very few articles regarding the projects included in the local press with maximum of 5 articles per each project. All the project coordinators agreed to the fact that the articles in the local press are copies of the press releases with very few changes in the original articles. After the press releases are sent, there are few journalists who contact the NGO for further information (maximum 3 local press journalists) and when they do, local journalists are interested in the idea and purpose of the project, participants, volunteers management, financing or the organization.

Another important aspect is the fact that local TV and radio stations are more inclined to include in their agenda journalistic materials regarding youth opportunities such as Youth in Action. Almost all the YiA projects analyzed in the period of February 2012 – Mai 2013 were covered on local TV and radio stations such as Transilvania Live, TVR Cluj, PRO TV, Napoca FM, Radio Național Cluj. Project coordinators are often present at live shows where they present the project either before or after the project.

Because the medium requires images and voices, TV and radio journalists are present during the implementation phase of the projects and create either news stories or features. The main focus of their materials is the volunteer and his acting of volunteering. However, there are journalists who focus only on the sensational angle or try to create a sensational story as one project coordinator said: "We had a bad experience when PRO TV journalists came to create a material based on our project. They came to the organization, took plenty of interviews and participated at the activities. As a project coordinator, I had to tell them all the aspects of the project they needed (financing, idea, purpose etc.). When I saw the final piece, I was amazed what they did: "Hundreds of tourists visit Romania" was the title of the news story in the context that there were only 21 participants. They did not mention anything regarding the project and at the end the main idea of the news story was that Italians, Turkish and Spanish people (we did not have Spanish people in the project) visit Romania because it is so good here."

c) The evaluation of the relationship

All project coordinators believe that journalists from either local or national press are not interested in creating complex articles or features regarding the projects, as "they seek only the sensational part of the story" as one project coordinator said. Another project coordinator agreed that "The majority of the articles are copies of the press releases which show that journalists are not well-informed regarding European financing, they are not interested in finding more about the topic or in creating an analysis of it." In this situation, the project coordinators believe that if they manage to create detailed and complete articles regarding a project, the targeted audience will manage to be well-informed as journalists only take the information and distribute it as received.

7. Conclusions

The purpose of the study was to find out how educational opportunities for young people are included in the agenda of the online editions of local newspapers from Cluj-Napoca. In order to achieve the presented purpose, the paper included two qualitative methods: an analysis grid which focused on the online editions of *Monitorul de Cluj, Ziua de Cluj* and *Făclia de Cluj* and a sociological interview which focused on the Youth in Action projects implemented in Cluj-Napoca. During three months, there were 10522 online articles analyzed out of which only **322 articles are opportunities for young people.**

It could be seen from the findings above that the online editions of the three local newspapers include very few articles related to opportunities for youth (322 articles out of 10522) in comparison with other categories such as Politics, Administration and Economy (Annex 13 and Annex 14). **However,** *Făclia de Cluj* **includes more articles related to youth opportunities and youth in general than** *Monitorul de Cluj or Ziua de Cluj.*

When writing about youth, both *Monitorul de Cluj* and *Ziua de Cluj* include articles related to Politics/Educational Structure such as new changes in educational laws or administrative aspects of schools. In these articles the attention to youth is mostly secondary as they are affected by the changes institutions take. The articles that focus on educational opportunities for young people occupy the second position. **This is not the case in** *Făclia de Cluj* **online newspaper which primarily focuses on including youth opportunities and then Politics/Educational structure articles in the daily agenda.**

When speaking about genre, all the three online newspapers write news articles and commercials when speaking about youth or when writing about youth opportunities which shows the fact that articles are short and simple. Interviews and features stories about young people are very few included in the agenda of the local newspapers.

After conducting the close analysis on the three newspaper articles, we could conclude that **conferences, cultural events and workshops are the educational opportunities most often presented in the media, along with courses, voluntary activities and European projects.** The three local media include very few articles related to campaigns or job fairs (Table 4). European projects are also very few mentioned in the local newspapers. In *Monitorul de Cluj* there were only 2 projects financed by the European Union during the three months period, while *Ziua de Cluj* included 7 articles. ***Făclia de Cluj* however, included more diverse European projects such as Erasmus, Comenius, Leonardo da Vinci or Youth in Action (9 articles analyzed within 3 months).**

All the three online newspapers include local educational opportunities that are primarily targeted to young people aged 18-29. The educational opportunities presented are mostly formal and focus on professional training (*Monitorul de Cluj* and *Ziua de Cluj*) and on gaining knowledge in a specific domain (*Făclia de Cluj*). Most of events take at least one day and are either free of charge or the payment is not specified. When coming to the structure of the articles, journalists choose to always include the names of the institutions that create the events and use at least one photo.

The study added a new dimension and included findings provided by the sociological interviews conducted with the project coordinators of 28 Youth in Action projects who received a European Commission grant during February 2012 – Mai 2013. **Based on a qualitative analysis of these projects, we concluded that TV and radio journalists are keener to include educational opportunities for young people in their agenda than local press journalists.** Almost all the YiA projects were covered by TV and radio journalists through a news story or feature story of the project. Moreover, project coordinators along with volunteers were also invited to participate to live TV and radio shows either before or after the project.

TV and radio journalists also participate to the events included in the project, despite local press journalists who rely only on the press releases received on E-mail before, during and after the project. Almost all local press journalists' copy-paste the press releases or add only few changes to the original article written by the NGOs.

However, the local press journalists who come to the events of the project write short news articles about the idea of the project, purpose or financing without including the project in a broader context as "local press journalists are not interested in the context of the project and they do not know how Youth in Action program actually works", one project coordinator said. The analysis on the online editions of local newspapers also supports the idea as articles regarding youth opportunities are both short and simple, in the form of commercials or are copies of press releases. In this context, a major question arises: who is the journalist in this situation? Project coordinators or public relation representatives of the NGOs give journalists photos, videos and complete articles regarding the Youth in Action projects, and they also have the knowledge of what a European project means.

Sensationalism is often sought by local media journalists, an aspect that often relies on the personality of the journalists rather than the media trust the journalists represent. In this context, a new approach to journalism should be taken into consideration by local journalists who are covering topics related to youth and their educational opportunities. New angles based on the themes of the project and their context should be taken into consideration by journalists who report topics related to Youth in Action/Erasmus+ projects, but also projects coordinated by the NGO sector from Cluj-Napoca.

As every study has its limitations, the present paper is of no exception, although the research has reached its proposed aim. The first major limitation of the study was that data collection meant analyzing each of the articles separately and put them in a specific category which can be subject to personal opinion. The limitation exists because there are articles that cannot be included *only* in a specific category. A second limitation that can be found was that the data collection was conducted on a short period of time (three months) and for a better understanding of how projects financed by the European Union were included in the online local newspapers a longer period should have been taken into consideration.

In conclusion, the current paper achieved its purpose in showing how educational opportunities are included in the local newspapers from Cluj-Napoca.

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Annexes
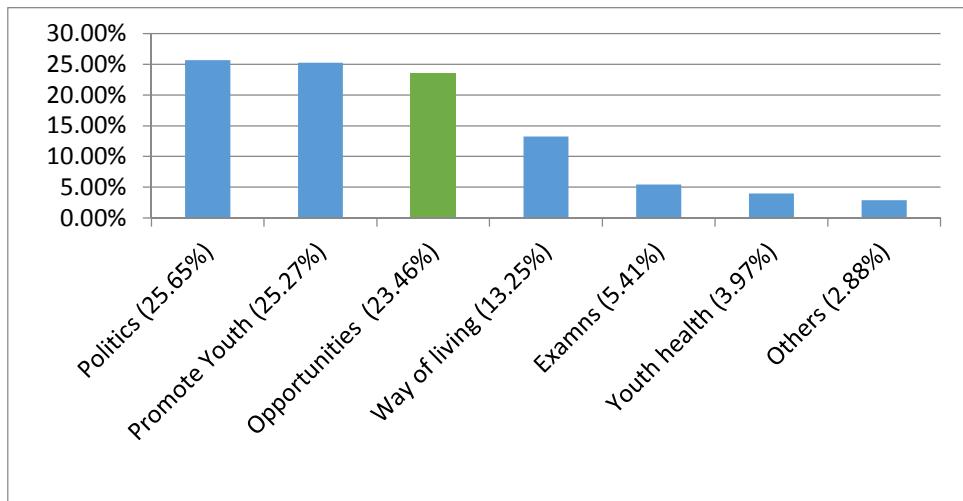
Annex 1: Youth articles' main theme in *Monitorul de Cluj* local newspaper
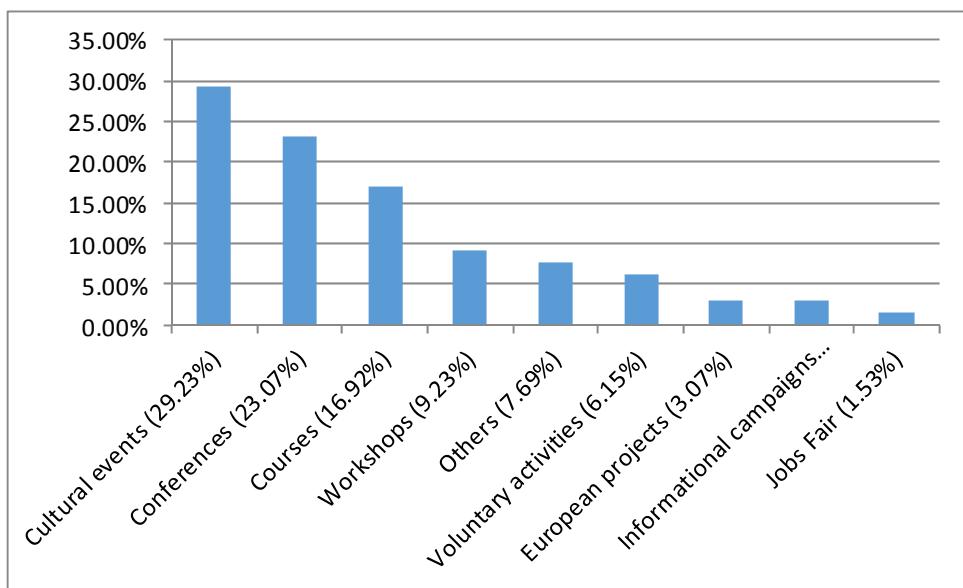

Annex 2: Types of events for young people in *Monitorul de Cluj* local newspaper
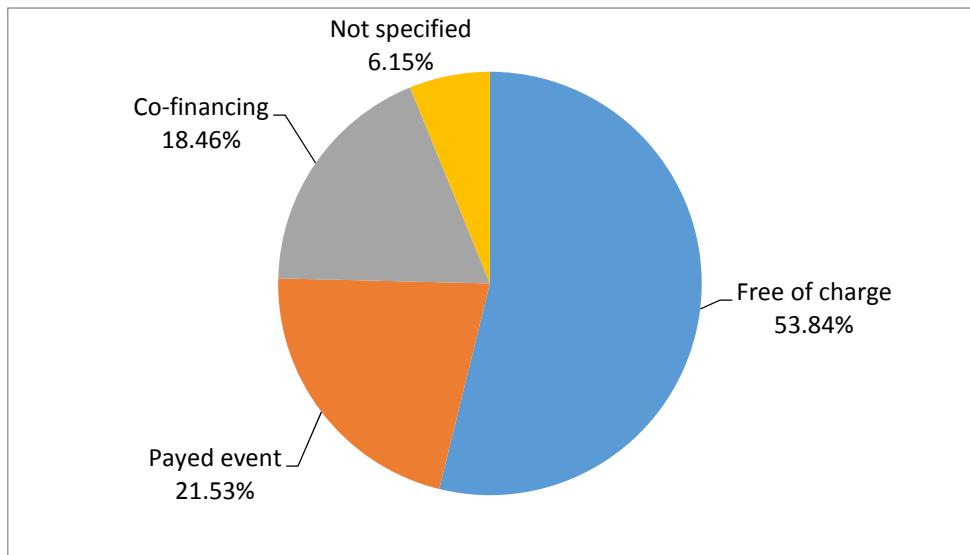
**Annex 3:** Payment of the event promoted in *Monitorul de Cluj* for youth
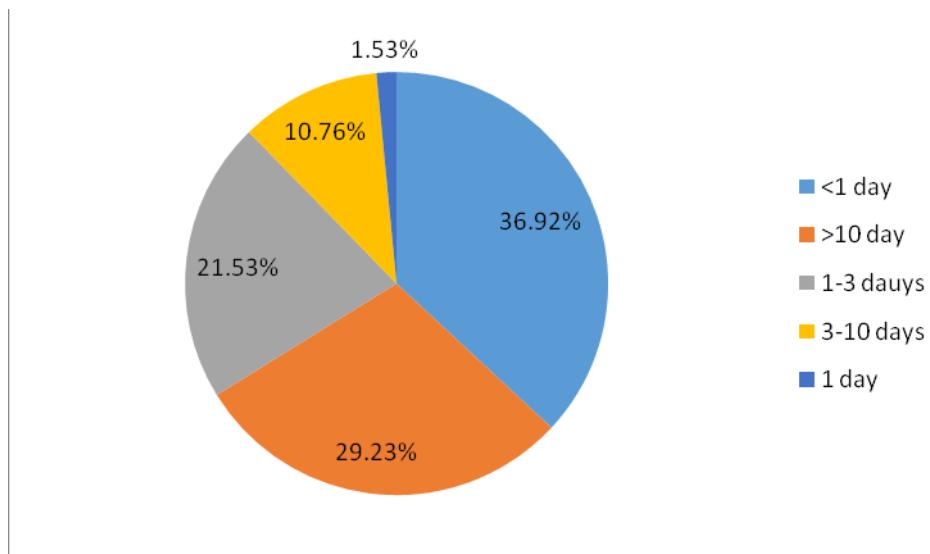
Annex 4: The duration of the events presented in *Monitorul de Cluj* local newspaper
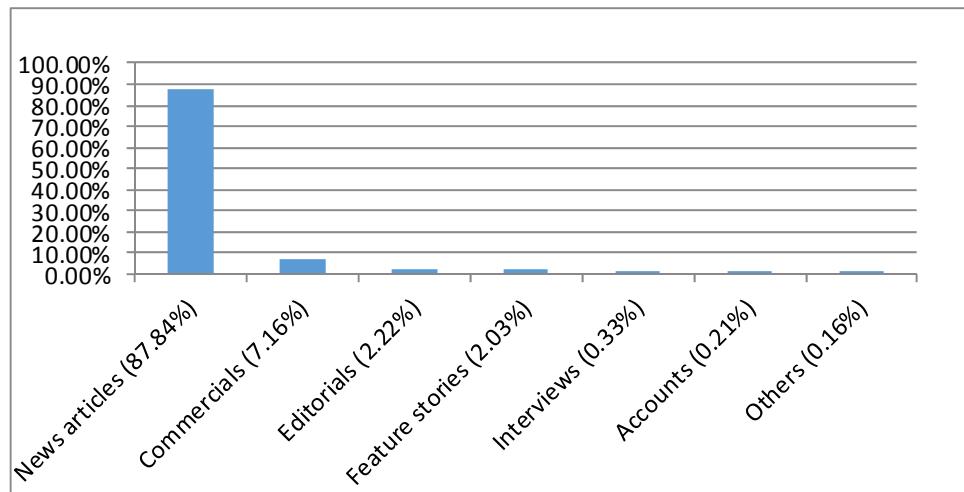
Annex 5: Articles' genre from *Ziua de Cluj* local newspaper
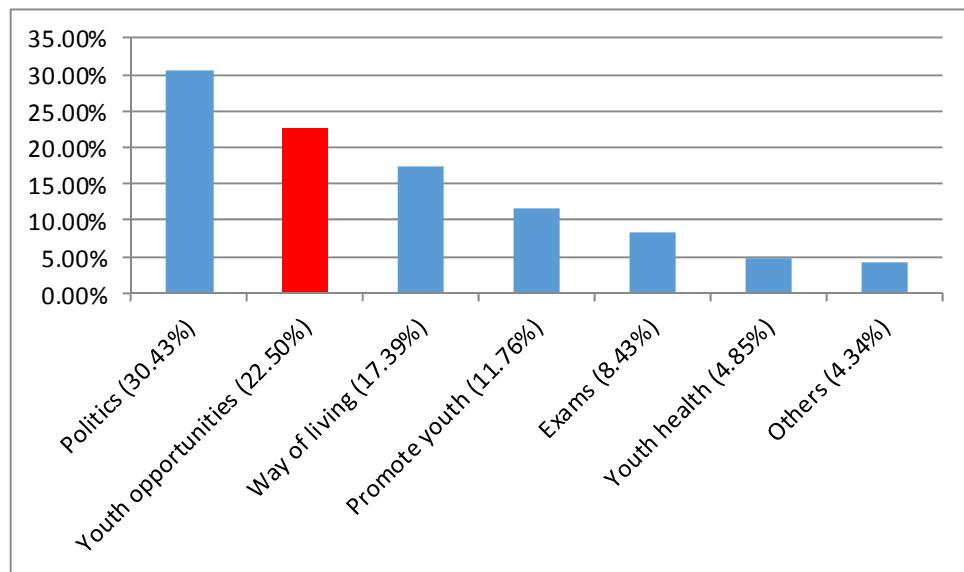

Annex 6: Youth articles' main theme in *Ziua de Cluj* local newspaper
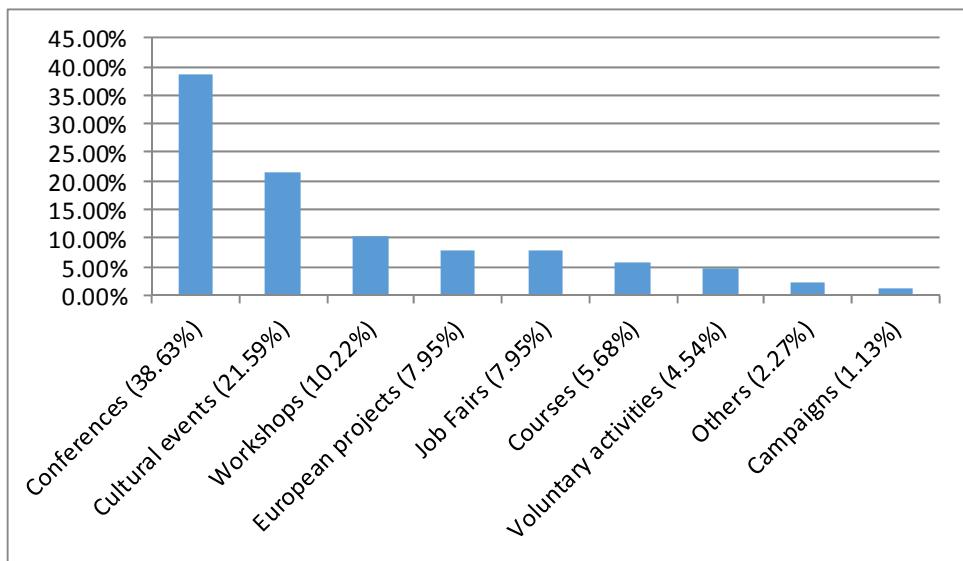
Annex 7: Types of events for young people in *Ziua de Cluj* local newspaper
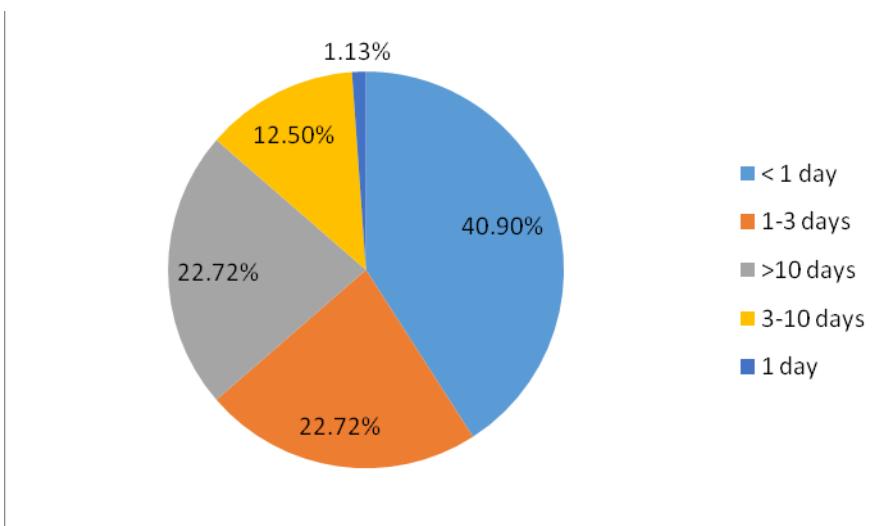
Annex 8: The duration of the events presented in *Ziua de Cluj*
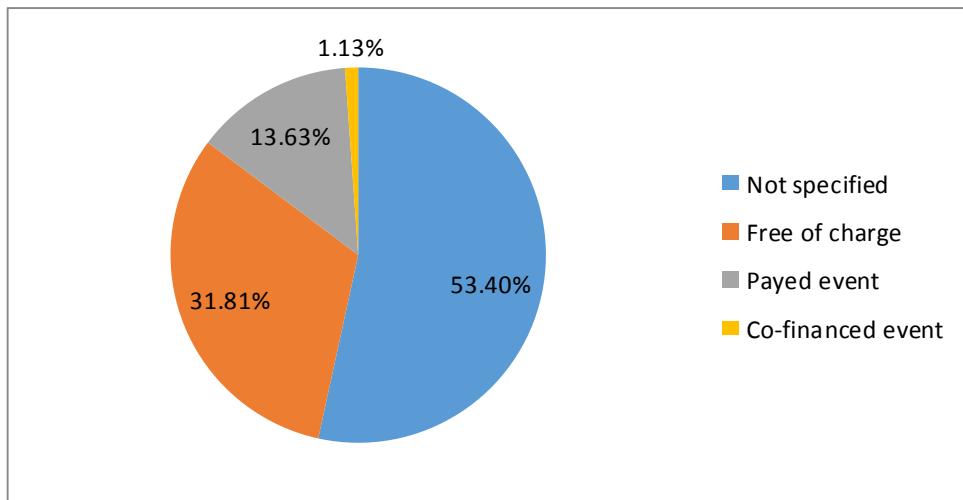
Annex 9: Payment of the event promoted in *Ziua de Cluj* for youth
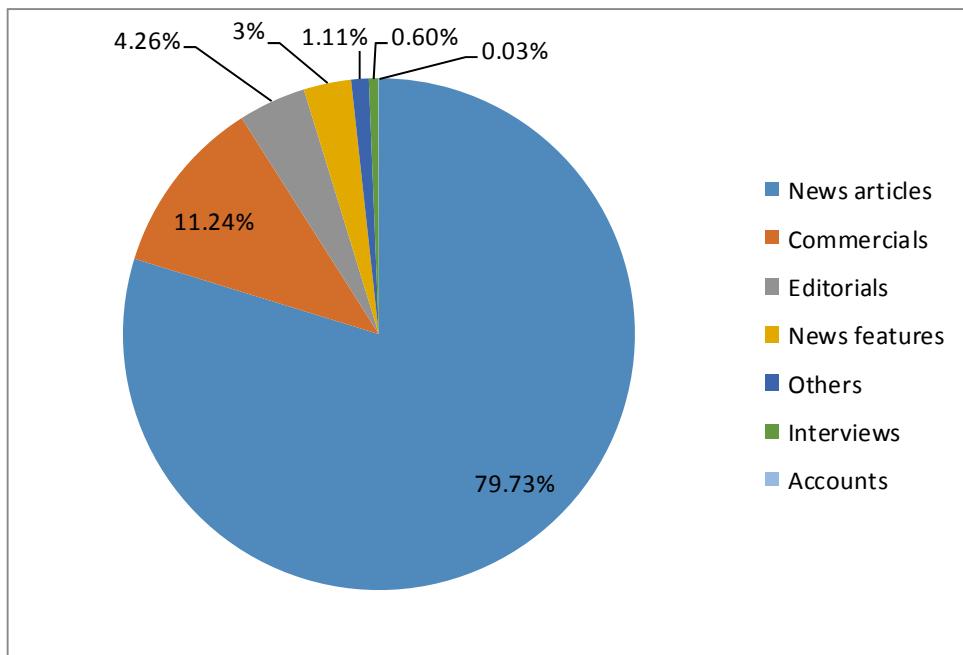
Annex 10: Articles' genre from *Făclia de Cluj* local newspaper
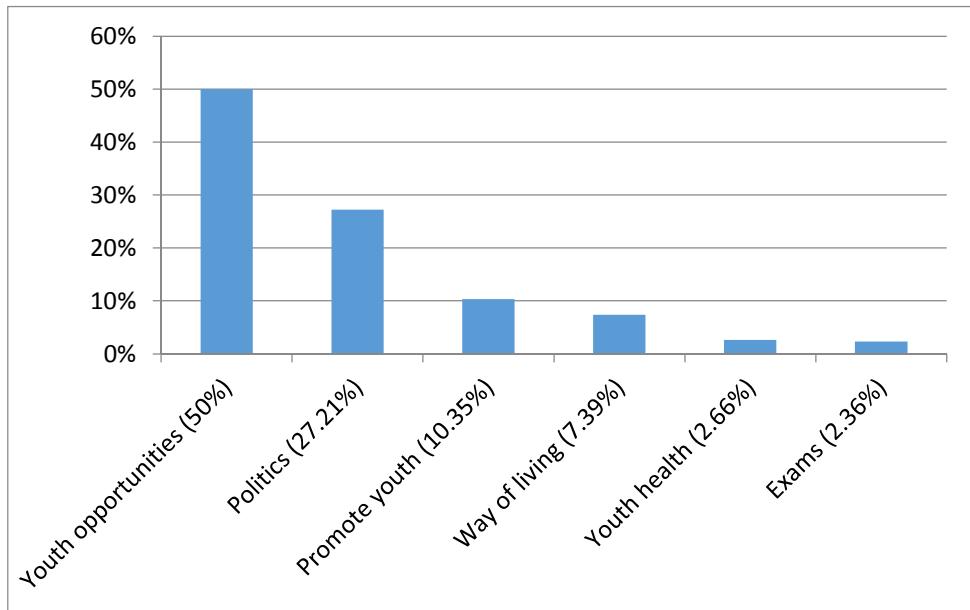
Annex 11: Youth articles' main theme in *Făclia de Cluj* local newspaper
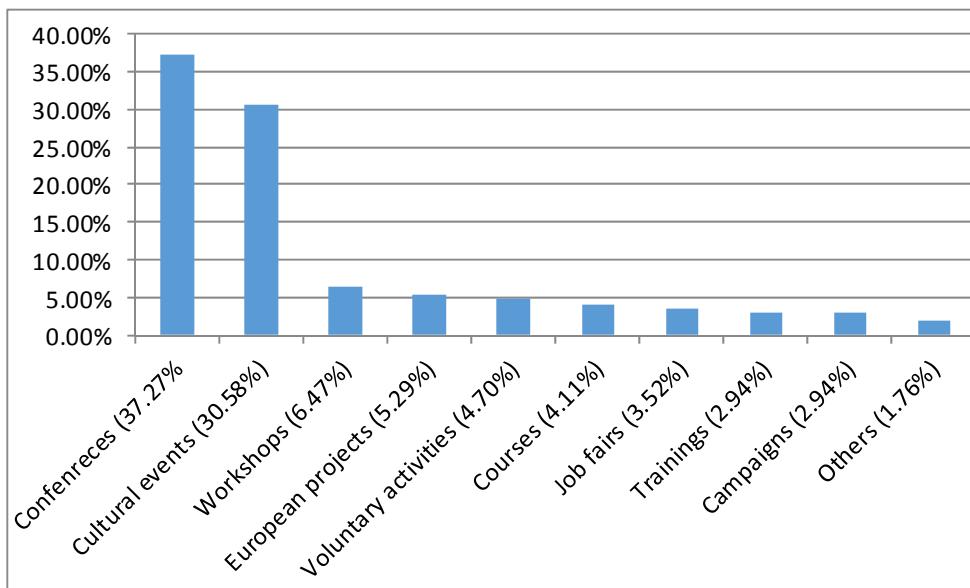
Annex 12: Types of events for young people in *Făclia de Cluj* local newspapers
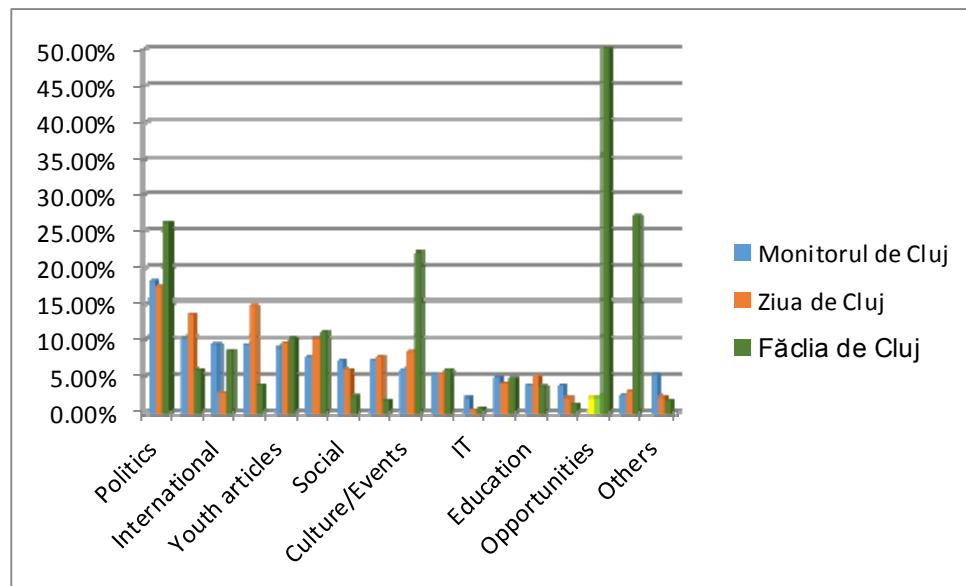
Annex 13: Comparison between *Monitorul de Cluj, Ziua de Cluj* and *Făclia de Cluj* regarding their agendas
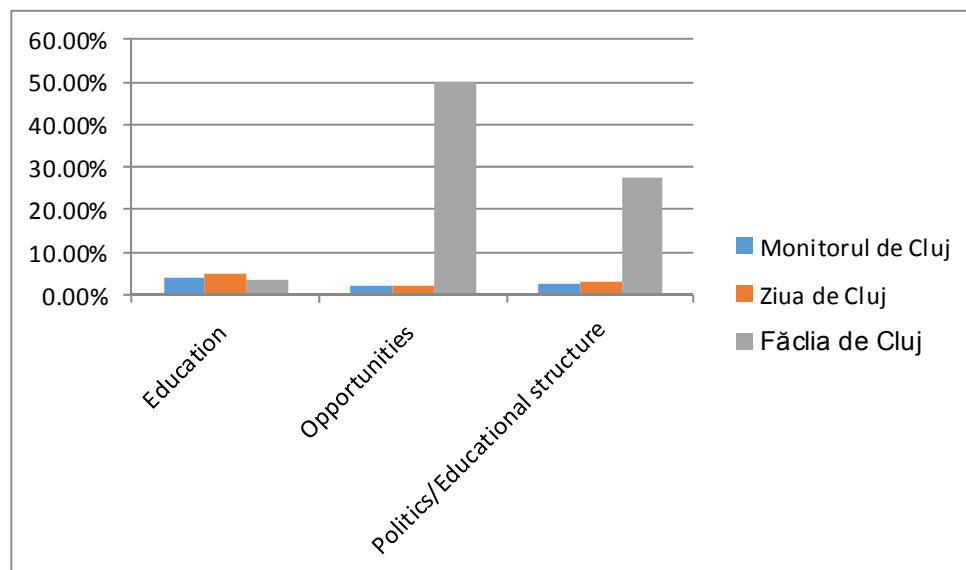
Annex 14: Comparison *between Monitorul de Cluj, Ziua de Cluj* and *Făclia de Cluj* newspaper articles

THE STRUCTURE AND DYNAMICS OF MEME AGGREGATORS

FLAVIA ȚĂRAN[1]

ABSTRACT. This research paper examines the way Netizens, web developers and web entrepreneurs relate to meme culture in the context of meme aggregator platforms, websites that serve as repositories and creation hubs for internet memes. The meme, the cultural equivalent of the biological gene and the trademark of internet popular culture, is showcased as the staple of an emergent economy, where memes are collected and disseminated at an incredible pace, the link becomes the substitute for a number of things (answers, examples, emotions) and the time spent in pursuing memes is being monetized. This papers sets off to determine the most popular meme aggregators of the moment, deconstruct them, identify the most common and popular features and create a taxonomy of said sites. In this context, we comprised a top 30 most popular meme aggregators within a complex scientific framework and applied a binary analysis grid constructed around technical features. Using formal concept analysis and subjective criteria we isolated four modules based on major actions (browsing, contributing, creating, uploading/submitting URLs) and several criteria clusters. We defined these clusters as units for understanding how certain technical features (or lack thereof) reflect on the way internet memes are consumed, aggregated, disseminated or created. This endeavor of constructing a taxonomy of meme aggregators based on architectural features is the first of its kind, offering a framework that can be adjusted and expanded in order keep up with web developers, web trends and meme culture.

Key words: internet memes, meme aggregators, digital culture, Reddit, formal concept analysis.

Introduction and context

Internet memes can be perceived as valid indicators of the state of popular culture and staples of an emergent culture of convergence and dissemination.

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In the context of current online social practices, where the content is gathered and spread at a very alert pace, meme aggregators (MAs) become the focal point for meme activity. The rising number of web platform constructed to meet these new consumptions habits, sustaining and popularizing this particular brand of culture are a rather novel research territory. Our understanding of how MAs work, the relation between the technical layer and the cultural layer is scarcely explored in today's meme research. This inquiry in the structure and dynamics of meme aggregators is a pioneering effort and targets two major aspects: platform popularity (what are, currently, the most popular MA platforms) and technical implementation of features.

This increasing prevalence of meme aggregator sites, as demonstrated by web ranking (alexa.com is the authority for web metrics) raises new and troubling questions about the part Netizens play in a popular culture decision making-process: what are the memes that people will share in the near future? The endeavors of web entrepreneurs to urge and mobilize people to participate can be reflected in the way meme aggregator platform are constructed and managed.

Alexis Ohanian, co-founder of reddit.com, a largely popular news and entertainment site, also an aggregator of many things, among which memes, repeats in an almost mantra-fashion that "All links are created equal." Considering this an axiom of the internet, our investigation sets to deconstruct popular meme aggregators and isolate the building blocks, creating a unique taxonomy. Given that websites are a commodity, we propose a not too narrow, not too wide approach when it comes to dissecting websites, and concentrate more on larger modules of features, than on very specific characteristics. This research sets the groundwork for a comprehensive visual representation of meme aggregator modules and criteria clusters implemented in the most popular platforms, explaining in detail how a MA platform is constructed.

This research is designed within a theoretical framework of meme culture, the jump to the internet and importance in a postmodern society, shaping popular culture in a previously unimaginable fashion. Our conclusions are derived from a very intricate research strategy that combines large sets of data, collected with a screen scraper, successive rounds of automated and manual filtering, formal concept analysis for clustering criteria and a hands-on interaction with all the websites taken into consideration, for applying a complex analysis grid.

Marshall McLuhan points out that the medium does not only shape the message, but also its content and, ultimately, its meaning, changing the way we communicate in a fundamental way. The meme aggregator is the new medium and mapping its inner workings creates a new level of understanding, for both the life cycles of memes and for the pro-active audiences. In this sense, the taxonomy we propose starts from the premise that meme aggregators are constructed with various amounts of technical know-how, and while some features are present in some high-ranked platforms, that does not necessarily mean that implementing those features will bring instant traffic to the website.

We established that internet memes are converged (aggregated) and diverged (shared and re-posted) as a response to the needs of the audiences: today's Netizens have broadband, Wi-Fi, smartphones, speak the vernacular tongue and fuel the meme creation engines. They need platforms where they can create, debate, decide, and from where to gather and share. As any other site on the internet, the meme aggregator is the result of a fusion, between the concept/money-making idea and the technical implementation. To be the owner of both the idea and the technical skills is the dream scenario. If this is not possible, capital and a team of developers are needed. The idea and the technical skills cannot and should not be separated, these two creating the major framework through which the platforms will be analyzed.

It must be mentioned and taken into account that a terminological shift has propagated within meme aggregators and the broader internet. While, in scholarly terms, a meme is a very complex cultural phenomenon, the internet language has reduced it to a structured type of content: the image macro. Image macro memes (which make up the sole content on meme generator sites, discussed in detail in this research as a subgroup of MA platforms), describe images with witty captioned messages or catchphrases. While these can become memes, they must not be interpreted as the epitomes of meme culture. This misunderstanding is very visible in meme aggregator sites that have special section for "memes", which might seem redundant, but reflect the current state of this terminological issue. Throughout this research paper we will not be using this meaning, but always refer to image macro memes to describe that type of content

Meme aggregators are the artificial nurseries of internet memes, and while scholars have dedicated a great interest in studying memes, the need to see how they are raised and treated, what makes them circulate and end up on our Facebook wall becomes important, for both those involved in meme studies and, to some extent, for web entrepreneurs and audiences worldwide.

Theoretical Framework

Discussions about memes usually start from the 1976 book *The Selfish Gene*, written by the now increasingly famous British evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins. He introduced the concept of meme as an extension to his theory of gene replication in the case of cultural phenomena. Music, religion, catchphrases, fashion, the way we make pottery – all these cultural trademarks act similarly to genes, being the units that carry cultural ideas and behaviors. Memes are introduced as the cultural analogues to genes, memes are for culture what genes are for evolution, given that they self-replicate, mutate and undergo natural selection. Their ability to replicate, "to produce copies of themselves, and thereby spread and increase in numbers" (Heylighen, 1996) is, arguably, not necessarily beneficial for society (history can provide examples from religion, politics), but intrinsically in their nature. A meme is successful if it is imitated and refined, under the pressure of evolutionary adaptation and it is rendered dead if it stops spreading and evolving.

In the late 1990s, mid 2000smemes became associated with internet culture. Cole Stryker, journalist and scholar with a keen interest in the image board 4chan, talks about internet memes as "cultural currency", which became "synonymous with weird, cool, and silly web stuff" (2011, p. 23).In a 2010 interview for NPR, Richard Dawkins revealed that even though he was computer-literate at that time he introduced the meme, nobody, not even himself, could have predicted that the internet would become "the perfect ecology for memes", describing it as "one, great, memetic ecosystem" (Do Youz Knowz What I Meme? Interview with Richard Dawkins, 2010). The jump to the internet meant the jump to another medium, and while the meme is a meme, regardless of it shape or form, becoming a new media object, as described by Lev Manovich in *The Language of New Media*, came with changes, some terminological (as described earlier with the image macro issue), some structural and behavioral.

This memetic ecosystem Dawkins references is the meme pool, a "cultural soup" (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013, p. 18) where memes grow and fight for attention. Stryker theorized a phenomenon he called the Meme Life Cycle (2011, p. 205), admitting that it is loosely defined and although it can be applied on a large scale, it is not universally valid. In his view, the life of a meme looks like this: (1) *birth* (the original source material is uploaded on the internet), (2) *discovery* (the material is manipulated/remixed within a underground/small/select community), (3) *aggregation* (the newly-born meme jumps to the broader internet, usually to a content aggregator, it is promoted,

gets to the top, for a broader audience to see), (4) *word of mouth* (it takes to social media), (5) *blog pickup* (it is discover by culture blogs in an attempt to add context), (6) *mainstream exposure* (if the content is negative, it becomes a news story, if not, miscellaneous "wacky" internet content), (7) *commercialization* (rarely, it starts making money), and (8) *death* (it does not actually die, but becomes obsolete and no longer talked about).

This life cycle outlines two directions of propagation. The horizontal propagation, within a single platform is a "variations on a theme" approach, until it is picked up by an aggregator and the vertical propagation starts, from platform to platform, growing in popularity. Horizontal and vertical propagation can function simultaneously, and on many levels, implying a rate of success that can rarely be explained or predicted. Belgian cyberneticist and meme enthusiast Francis Heylighen ventured in this grey area of meme probability, but his mathematical models produced inconclusive data, due to the fact that many assumptions had to undergo a simplification process, making very important indicators, like "specific social, psychological, linguistic and cultural factors that influence the propagation of a meme" impossible to incorporate (Heylighen & Chielens, 2008, p. 17).

Heylighen mapped out several criteria, which, if met, could ensure a longer lifespan for memes (1993). These criteria and Stryker's life cycle try to offer an understanding of how memes circulate, within meme aggregators and in the context of sharing content via social networks. At this rate of propagation, the main challenge for MAsis not, necessarily, to identify the emergent memes, but to create platforms which dispose of ways to "grow" memes locally, aggregating everything and giving the public the correct tools to sift through the meme pool and help surface-out the next internet sensations.

On the internet, memes are pieces of free-flowing "interactive entertainment" (Stryker, 2011, p. 86), circulated by the power of the link. The insight of internet meme creation and circulation patterns is valuable for site developers. They created platforms that would cater to a complex experience, the universal platforms where people could browse, create and contribute. Throughout this paper we draw a clear distinction between *creating* and *contributing*: creating refers to the act of producing new content online, with the means offered by the platform (integrated picture editors, rage comics builders, image macro meme generators), while contributing refers to commenting and voting.

This shift from passive audiences to active participants has greatly changed the media industries. From Alvin Toffler's *prosumer* (Toffle, 1980) to Henry Jenkins' participatory culture approach (Jenkins, 2006)scholars describe a world where people browse and create, show casing their products, adding meaning and context through discussion and interaction. Branded entertainment greatly profits from this change, if the content and the contributions are read as a market study: what does the audience like/dislike, what is the audience interested right now.

In *Spreadable Media* (2013) Jenkins et al. focus on the shift from distributing content to circulating it, "in ways which might not have been previously imagined" (p. 2).Marshal McLuhan points out that on several occasions that technological innovation and popular culture trends are interdependent. In this context meme aggregators can and must exist, becoming a prerequisite for the way people interact on their social networks. Jenkins's readability covers both the aggregation and the sharing strategies which make it possible for memes to be re-aggregated and re-shared, remixed and, at one point or another, die due to lack of votes or shares.

The need to aggregate internet meme comes from the vortex created by the participatory culture framework, where the barriers for artistic expression are low or none at all and where civil engagement mixes with the quest for the "lulz" (here behaving like a measuring unit for a meme's success). The need to aggregate is a response to the needs of the audiences: to converge and to spread, a pulsating motion that keep the meme-sphere and the internet alive, where the consumers become "hunters and gatherers pulling together information from multiple sources to form a new synthesis" (Jenkins, 2006), this synthesis being the aggregator.

On the internet, the meme is the poster child for popular culture, it is a text constructed from the various meanings appointed by the audiences (Fiske, 2000), which makes reading popular texts a multi-layered cultural experience, where a solid cultural background, competences and the correct discursive skills are required. Popular culture stopped wearing the stigma of inferior culture when the postmodern turn abolished the binary division between high and low/popular culture. Electronic media and remix culture, in the context of the postmodern aesthetics of popular culture formed the petri dish for meme culture.

While the audiences' incentives for create and circulate memes are personal – it gives meaning to one's day to day life (Fiske, 2000)–, meme aggregator platforms create a commodification cycle, where feuds like

"«You're stealing our memes!» screams 4chan. «You're profiting off our hard work!» cries Reddit." (Stryker, 2011, p. 170) are not uncommon (we will not discuss copyright infringement and online legislation on meme aggregators, but it could be the subject of an extended paper). Websites like Know Your Meme and Encyclopedia Dramatica are often criticized for deconstructing, explaining and adding context to memes, arguing that the pleasure of the meme lies in the decrypting, using one's personal popular culture reference arsenal.

While platforms like 4chan are creation hubs that provide the cultural context, meme aggregators are perceived as nurseries, artificially created platforms that want to commodify the memes.

A plea for Reddit: relevancy and inner workings

In June of 2005, web developer Steve Huffman and internet entrepreneur Alexis Ohanian set out to build a new kind of website, where the readers would decide what content is relevant and worthy to be featured on the front page, rendering the position of editor obsolete. People would submit links and then vote, creating a democratic news bulletin board system called Reddit.

Reddit is a community creating engine for different areas of interest, rather than a single community, manageable through subreddits. Each subreddit is a distinct community, with its own purpose, rules, standards, readership and leadership, something of a free information market, where the creator of a subreddit becomes its moderator.

Ohanian described the Reddit venture as hard to manage within the given architecture of the platform: "When you're trying to build a community from scratch, you need a simple system to encourage participation" (Ohanian, 2013). They implemented an array of features that would determine people to spend time on the site: rewards for active redditors (karma points, trophies), comment section (adding context and humor), freedom to create (almost) any subreddit, friend lists and more. Reddit is open source, so anyone can contribute with features, translations or fix bugs. All the secreate a platform where people want to spend time, the alexa.com rank standing proof: 59 global rank and 24 US rank (April 2014).

As a meme aggregator site, Stryker considers Reddit interesting and important for three reasons. (1) "It acts like a gateway between 4chan and the rest of the internet." 4chan's content is ephemeral and unedited, sometimes unpleasant and on the edge of legality, so redditors take upon themselves to

sift through 4chan. (2) "It's a place where the mainstream media has recently gone to routinely scrape through content for news". This is a direct reference to what we stated earlier, that platform like Reddit, with their two-directional voting systems, can be read like a market study (what are people most interested at this moment, news wise). (3) "It facilitates meme creation that rewards users in a way that 4chan doesn't", rewards that can take various forms. In some aspects, Reddit behaves like the anti-4chan. While both are anonymous, Reddit enforces some standards and a reddiquette, something unheard of on 4chan (no trolling and attacks, no personal information leaks, no insults, constructive criticism).

Reddit is a platform situated halfway between the genuine meme creation hubs, like 4chan, and the mainstream media, enforcing its authority as a highly important social news and entertainment platform, with a crucial role in meme creation, aggregation and popularization. Its architectural features and user-driven democratic style of functioning render Reddit and the meme subreddit as one of the most important and interesting place on the internet to study memes in their natural habitat, recommending it as the perfect starting point for this reseach.

Research Design

We are witnessing an emergent type of economy, that of sharing content via meme aggregator sites, an economy based on this loosely defined currency of the "lulz" and where the memes embody the cultural capital. Creating an abstract taxonomy of the platforms that host content that carries, intrinsically or not, the very sought after "lulz" can emphasize our current knowledge of popular culture and how it circulates, what makes internet users prefer certain platforms (in an "all links are created equal" virtual world) and, maybe, become a reference point for those who are ready for a venture in the business of aggregating and monetizing content.

Data regarding how meme aggregators work and behave is very limited to none, Netizens are rarely told upfront where the content comes from (given that many platform tend to appropriate the content they aggregate, applying watermarks) or in what way the content is curated and arranged, or what are the users actually giving up (personal data-wise) for being a living part of the community that will decide what people will share in the next period of time.

Some architectural feature of the platforms that take upon themselves to suggest, structure, popularize and later monetize internet memes are closely related to the manner in which the content is spread, appreciated or remixed. These features consist the starting point for creating a taxonomy of meme aggregators characteristics, circumscribing them in a manner that will suite virtually any such platform on the internet. Creating this classification is the main goal of this research, and in doing so we (1) identified the most popular meme aggregator, (2) isolated a set of criteria that characterize such platforms and (3) made a classification of meme aggregators based on said criteria. In this sense, this research paper endeavors to answer the following questions:

(RQ1) Which are the most popular and relevant meme aggregators?

(RQ2) What are the main and most common features of meme aggregators?

(RQ3) To what extent can people browsing meme aggregators decide what content should get more attention?

(RQ4) Which architectural features are more appealing to internet users?

Methodology

In an aforementioned section on Reddit we presented the relevancy of this particular platform, how the content is structured and edited, and by whom. Acknowledging reddit.com as an important aggregator, the subreddit /r/memes has been selectedas the starting point for this research. Furthermore, it must be reiterated that a conceptual change in the meaning of the term "meme" has occurred over time. While all content can become memetic, in many virtual places this term solely describes image macro-type memes. The research interest is on internet memes, and while it cannot be denied what the internet understands through "memes", this must be taken into account when interpreting the results.

Having established this terminological issue, we proceeded with a screen scraper (automated data collection tool, Helium Scraper version 2.4.0.2) that collected the URLs of 500 meme thumbnail trending on /r/meme in March 2014. Using the same software we created a script that would automatically insert each URL in the Google Images search engine. This retrieved similar images from around the internet and web results for pages

that include matching pictures[2], automatically omitting if an entry appeared in repeated forms on the same page, eliminating duplicate entries. If this automated filtering would not have existed, the final platform tally could have been partial to meme generators (a site typology explained in more detail in the analysis section), which usually have a large number of entries on the same image macro, on multiple webpages. It must be also mentioned that in the cases of memes based on famous or iconic images (screen captures from movie, portraits, logos et cetera), which might have appeared on non-aggregator sites, these results were eliminated in a threshold filtering and a manual filtering, detailed below.

After introducing the 500 URLs in the image search engine we retrieved a database of over 26,000 entries. Consecutive series of refining and filtering condensed the previous database to a factor of 63%, the final webpage count being 9,616 unique websites, with different occurrences indicators, showing the number of times those sites were listed as featuring memes (for example reddit.com had an indicator of 762, while almost 70% of the sites had an indicator of 1).

From top 80 to top 52, and to the final 30

At this point, we considered the occurrence threshold to be 30, further shrinking the work database to 80 websites, from the total of over 9,600. The next step was a manual screening process, to exclude top sites that could not be circumscribed as meme aggregators (video sharing sites, social network sites). At this point, the work database contained 52 platforms.

Taking into consideration that certain anomalies could have occurred in the image search process, given that some meme aggregators host their content externally and are not indexed by search engines, thus not showing up in the database with their real occurrence indicator, we decided on a normalization process that would include a quantifiable indicator of their relevancy, namely their internet ranks. Alexa.com is considered the authority in the field of web metrics and traffic indicators, providing a daily updated rank that shows an estimate of the site's popularity. This is calculated using as prime indicators the average daily views of the site and page views in the last three months.

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[2] For more information on how Google Images search by URL functions, you can consult the Google support entry on this topic.
support.google.com/websearch/answer/1325808?p=ws_images_searchbyimagetooltip&rd=1

The Alexa rank for the top 52 platforms by number of occurrences (spanning from 762 to 31) were retrieved using the same screen scraper. Top 52 was rearranged according to those ranks and given new ID numbers accordingly (from 1, the best ranked to 52). These 52 most important platforms had, at this point, two ID numbers (occurrence ID and alexa.com ID), and in order to normalize the top, we calculated the average of the two IDs and then arranged them in ascending order[3]. After this final operation, we created a top 30 most relevant meme aggregators, which would now be subjected to a new level of analysis.

The analysis grid

We isolated a collection of criteria (technical features) that would largely suite any such platform, constructing a binary analysis grid (1 if the characteristic in met by the platform, 0 otherwise). These features were grouped in, what we considered to be, six key focus points, building blocks of meme aggregator platforms, describing major actions like:

(1) *Browsing*: features concerning how the content can be navigated;
(2) *Content*: what form of content is being aggregated (images, image macros, GIFs, videos);
(3) *Contributions*: comments, voting systems for both comments and content;
(4) *Authentication:* what must a user give in order to become a part of the decision making process;
(5) *Account and community shaping*: features that go beyond those of solely aggregating content, referring to the platforms that provide the means for users to interact with other users, establishing social connections and also proposing a loyalty bond with the platform.
(6) *Creation*: content creating means implemented on the platform (re-caption module for image macros, picture editor or any other specific meme builder).

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[3] Here is an example, to better understand the process. In top 52, the site cheezburger.com had an occurrence number of 88, which made it have an occurrence ID of 22 (it is the 22nd site if using the number of occurrences as ordering criteria). According to alexa.com, it had a global rank of 1,007 (the 1,007th popular site on the internet), giving it a rank ID of 4 (the 4thsite if using the Alexa rank as ordering criteria). The average of the two IDs is 13 (22 and 4). If using this average ID as ordering criteria, cheezburger.com holds the 9th place in our final meme aggregator top.

These are the six criteria on which the taxonomy is based, condensed later in four modules. We interrogated the 30 meme aggregators, one of the early results being a clear divide on the basis of two needs, creation and browsing: ten creation oriented platforms (meme generators) and twenty browsing oriented (these do not dismiss the creation process, but it is not the main feature).

Formal concept analysis (FCA). Lattice Miner

Formal concept analysis (FCA) is part of the interdisciplinary filed of information studies and a branch of applied mathematics, with a practical use for data analysis and knowledge processing. The result of FCA is a concept hierarchy derived from a collection of objects and their attributes/properties (Ganter & Wille, 1999). We will not submerge in the mathematics of FCA, but briefly explain how it is used as a data analysis tool.

The basic data type for FCA is called a formal context, visualized as a table, the rows are objects (in the case of this research, the sites) and the columns are the attributes/properties (here the technical features of the sites). Between the objects and attributes a binary relation must exist (in the form of ones and zeros, for example), but not every object-attribute pair needs to be related (creating a partial order). The formal context is transformed into a concept lattice, a mathematical structure. The visualization method for a finite partially ordered set is the Hasse diagram (Figure 1).
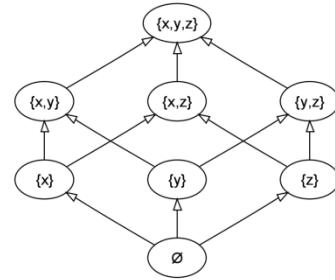
Figure 1: A Hasse diagram[4] with a three element set {x, y, z}.

Pairs of formal concepts can be partially ordered by the relations between their sets of objects and attributes, with an end result of sub-concepts and super-concepts, forming a concept hierarchy, formally called a concept lattice or Galois lattice. In order to visualize and explore these lattices we used Lattice Miner, a tool that would construct and draw lattices. However, if a

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[4] Image retrieved from Wikipedia Commons.
  http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hasse_diagram_of_powerset_of_3.png (April 22, 2014)

large dataset with many relations must be manipulated, this kind of visualization becomes unreasonable to display, this being the main argument for which the initial set of technical features was broken down into six subsets, creating a number of smaller conceptual landscapes. Using Lattice Miner to isolate re-occurring features, we formalized criteria clusters, a syntagm that will be often used throughout the paper, which represents nothing more than a lattice sub-concept, with complementary fine tuning if needed. We nested and arranged these sub-concepts, creating a tree diagram, the taxonomy of criteria clusters for meme aggregator sites, with examples for every cluster. A taxonomy of meme aggregators could be arranged if the criteria clusters would be further grouped. However, this approach would create a very specific taxonomy of architectures, which we predict could describe a minute number of platforms for every block of features, rendering this theoretical model unusable for a large number of meme aggregators.

Limitations and advantages

When working with automated data collection tools and large datasets, anomalies and errors can occur, and sometimes they are hard to trace and eliminate. Even though we closely and sometimes manually screened, filtered, normalized, made corrections and adjustment to the dataset, a small error margin is expected. Furthermore, we greatly relied on the Google Images search engine, even though it is known that some platforms host their content externally and that content is not always indexed by search engines, explaining our effort to normalize our findings using somewhat objective and impartial data (alexa.com) in order to create our list of most relevant meme aggregators. The top 30 created to serve as a sample for this experimental research was created on the basis of our needs and critical decisions, and it should not be taken as the absolute top of meme aggregators.

When creating the taxonomy, the main focus was to create criteria clusters that are both not too general and not too specific, so that the end result would apply not only on one platform, but on a larger number. With this in mind, we decided on a more characteristics/modules-based approach, rather than on a clear architectural mapping of sites, considering that, maybe, some website are not the results of punctilious planning, but of some compromises, or are cost related.

However, because we used automated data collection and analysis tools we manages to work with large datasets in a more objective manner, in an attempt to create a larger picture of what is happening on the web and in the realm of memes. Furthermore, using formal concept analysis tools we managed to create comprehensive conceptual landscapes for describing meme aggregators.

Analysis

The visual representation of the taxonomy of criteria clusters for meme aggregators (Figure 2) utilizes, in a compact and methodical way, the six criteria pillars outlined in a previous section, showcasing a balancing act between intentional site features and amateurish endeavors of monetizing memes, content and code, browsing and creating.

The last level of the tree diagram offers examples of sites that illustrate a certain set of criteria, but the examples are not singular (a platform can illustrate several sets of characteristics). This is the result of our not too narrow, not too wide approach on clustering the criteria. If the criteria would be grouped in a too specific, the result would be a narrow description of a singular platform, while a two loose grouping would leave a lot of space for interpretation. Factoring all these in our analysis, we created a taxonomy of meme aggregator characteristics, rather than a taxonomy of meme aggregator sites, allowing adjunctions to this framework.

The six pillars were condensed in four modules (as visualized in Figure 2), and while all four can be found in several sites, meme aggregators can exist with only some of them, with possible compromises in thefunctionality sector, as we will highlight in the sections below. These modules reflect specific actions that one can engage when on a meme aggregator: (1) browse, (2) contribute, (3) create and (4) upload or submit URLs. Combinations of these modules denote flexibility and a keen interest of the web developers to give the users the correct tools and features to engage with the content. The following analysis dissects some of the criteria clusters, branch by branch, in an effort to explain what makes a platform more enticing that another.

Figure 2: The Taxonomy of meme aggregators (criteria clusters approach)
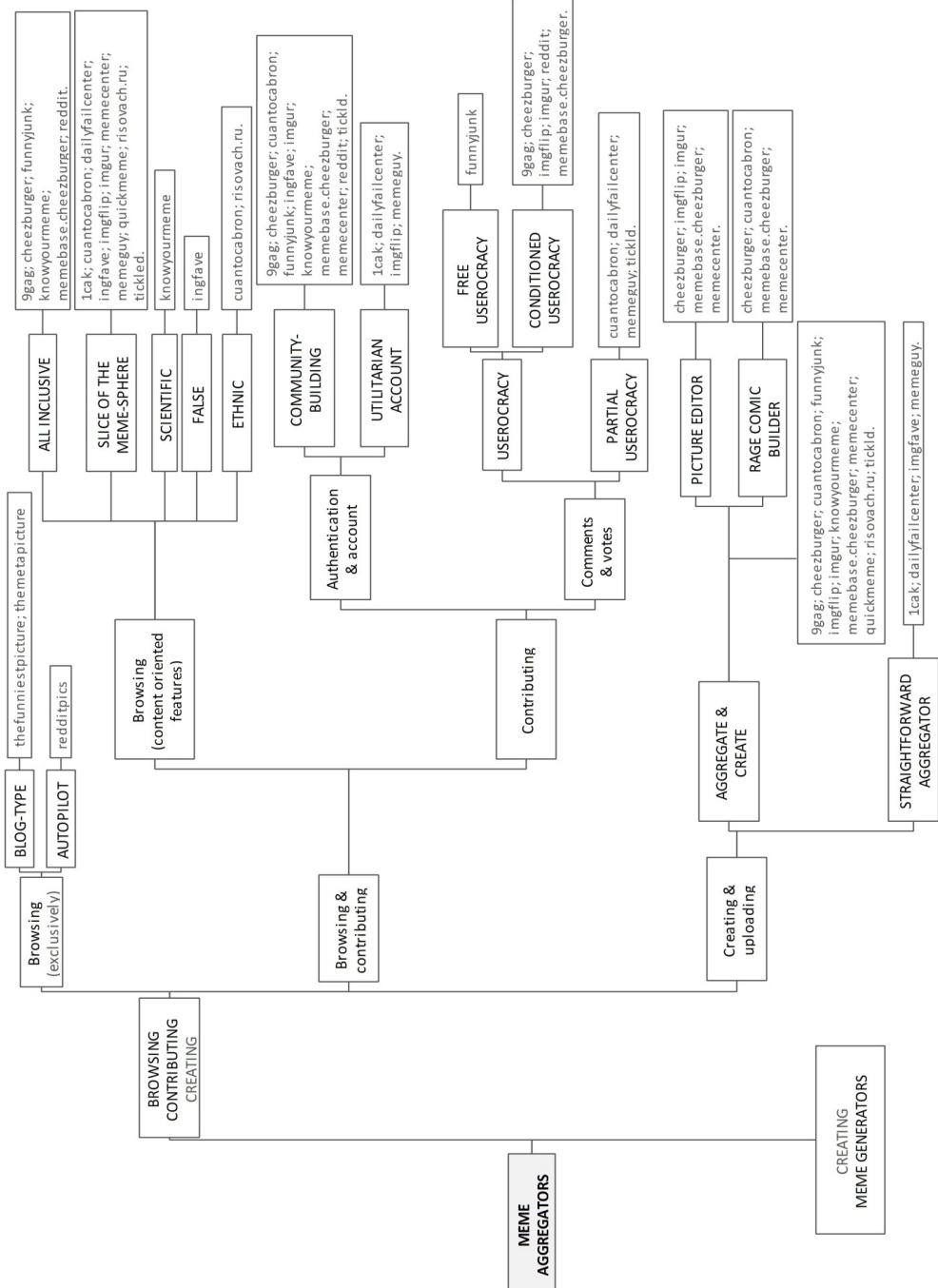
Table 1: Description of the criteria clusters from Figure 2

Criteria cluster	Description
Blog-Type	The content is arranged in reverse chronological order, provided by one/several moderators. One cannot create or contribute; it behaves much like a blog, where the content can be browsed and interaction equals commenting.
Autopilot	It runs autonomous, automatically aggregating content from one/several sites; no moderation and interaction with the content is limited or none.
All Inclusive	Diverse content forms (images, image macros, videos, GIFs) for a complete meme intake.
Slice of the Meme-Sphere	Provides only some forms of memes.
Scientific	Memes are aggregated, researched and explained (in a scientific manner).
False	Aggregates various content, with a popular meme/funny category; not a meme aggregator *per se*, but a content aggregator with a popular meme section.
Ethnic	Memes in other languages, with content specific to a certain nation/ethnic group; a specific cultural background is sometimes needed.
Community Building	Tools for 2nd level interaction: private messaging, chat, following activity, creating a profile; loyalty towards the platform is being repaid: karma, trophies, achievements.
Utilitarian Account	The optional/mandatory account serves solely as an activity dashboard, monitoring votes, comments, content.
Userocracy	The users are given the tools to up/down vote, like/dislike content, comment and up/down vote the comments; the best memes and the most popular opinions rise to the top.
Free Userocracy	Creating and contributing is anonymous/no account; prone to cyber-attacks, which can result in artificial vote pumping.
Conditioned Userocracy	An account is needed in order to create and contribute
Partial Userocracy	Users can vote, one/two directional system(may or may not be conditioned to create an account).
Aggregate & Create	Main focus on aggregating and browsing, but features basic tools for creating content (usually an image macro builder).
Picture Editor	Includes a more or less complex picture editor (crop, color correction).
Rage Comic Builder	Includes a builder for rage comic-type memes.
Straightforward	Content can be uploaded/submitted via URL; no builders of editors.
Meme Generators	Specialized in creating image macro-type memes; not very browsing friendly, the landing page usually feature image macro templates, watermarks are added, authentication not usually needed, interaction with the content (vote, comments) limited or none.

The Relative Popularity Criteria Indicator (RPCI)

The top 30 most relevant meme aggregator sites was constructed using a rather complex algorithm, data collected automatically, manual filtering and a normalization process using objective metrics provided by alexa.com. Considering this process thorough and the end result relevant, we produced a relative popularity indicator for cluster criteria. The goal of this indicator is to add context to someof the criteria clusters. We consider the indicator relative because the popularity of a certain platform is not necessarily the result of a set of implemented features. The RPCI is an average of the ID numbers belonging to the platforms in the example boxes. The smaller the RPCI, the more popular the criteria cluster is, being represented by high ranked platforms with high occurrence numbers for popular memes (see Table 2). Given the intrinsic relative nature of the indicator, it will only be used to create context for binary divisions of criteria (All Inclusive vs. Slice of the Meme-sphere, Userocracy vs. Partial Userocracy). The scarcely used throughout the paper and the need to create such an indicator can be explained by the need to contextualize the popularity of certain platform with a metric unit.

Table 2: Relative Popularity Criteria Indicator (RPCI)

Criteria cluster	RPCI	Criteria cluster	RPCI
Blog-Type	24.5	**Userocracy**	7.4
Autopilot	27*	**Free Userocracy**	5*
All Inclusive	7.3	**Conditioned Userocracy**	7.8
Slice of the Meme-Sphere	15	**Partial Userocracy**	21.25
Scientific	7*	**Aggregate & Create MA**	10.7
False	10*	**Picture Editor**	9.6
Ethnic	22	**Rage Comic Builder**	15.5
Community Building	10.1	**Straightforward MA**	19.75
Utilitarian Account	20.2		
the average is the rank of a single platform			

Of content and forms (Browsing, content related features branch)

In order for a meme aggregator to be profitable, people must spend time on the platform, creating or consuming, time converted in advertising revenue. The Internet Zeitgeist is not sensitive to the form of the meme – image, image macro, video, GIF or text –, but the Netizens and the devices used by them are. If comparing the RPCIs of the cluster criteria for content

forms, the All Inclusive MA, with its variety of meme forms appears to be more popular than the Slice of the meme-sphere MA (7.2<15). A complete meme-intake experience would include memes of all forms, shapes and sizes, and in the context of platform which "discriminate" on the basis of form (due to lack of interest or technical know-how) could be considered a shortcoming of the platform. 9GAG, a very popular MA platform, has evolved over time so that it can cater to any type of content. 9gag.com was initially image-oriented, then script to support GIFs was added, and it later launched 9gag.tv (with video links on 9gag.com), creating a well-rounded experience, to name one example.

When the criteria clusters referencing a platform's content were too specific to formalize and integrate in the aforementioned criteria cluster, we created what seem to be exception (illustrated with a singular entry), like knowyourmeme.com and imgfave.com. These, however, are not anomalies or exceptions, but two very distinct cases of platform, where not only the form, but the also the structure are considered relevant. Even though so far we have not identified a platform similar to knowyourmeme.com, in content, architecture, structure and inner workings (submitting content procedure for example), the entry remains open for additions. Imgfave.com, a very structured image repository, nudged its way to our final platform count due to rather popular sub-sections/community with funny content and GIFs, earning the title of False MA, but an MA nonetheless.

Browsing and mobility (not featured in Figure 2)

The decision not to feature these browsing and mobility patterns (explained in detail in Table 3) comes as a result of the not too narrow, not too wide take on website features. While it is important for a user to browse through the content in a comfortable manner, this is too closely related to the forms of content and the way they are stored (Reddit is a link aggregator, so it will always link externally, thus making browsing slowly on the desktop version, while the mobile application behaves in a very different manner). Even though these features are too specific for the criteria cluster taxonomy, they need to be mentioned as characteristics of meme aggregator sites.

The mobility option within a platform can reflect the form, even the content of some memes. For example, some have created memes that would work only if the content would be scrolled, with the punch line at the end of the scrolling process. This type of content would die if featured in a wall of thumbnails. Browsing-sensitive content is a new reality of internet memes, so browsing options can make the difference in a meme's life.

Table 3: Browsing and mobility patterns*

Pattern	Description	examples
superficial & meme-by-meme browsing	Two ways of browsing the content: superficially scanning thumbnails of browsing through every meme, previous-next.	funnyjunk.com memeguy.com
meme-by-meme browsing	Scrolling through memes (infinite scroll or numbered pages) and previous-next browsing (a more thorough approach).	9gag.com imgfave.com dailyfailcenter.com
slow browsing	Each entry is a separate page/external link, resulting in a click &back button browsing, inherently slow.	reddit.com knowyourmeme.com tickld.com 1cak.com

* the examples are from the 20 browsing oriented platforms, minus the two Exclusively browsing ones

The trade-off (Contributing branch)

This is the branch where the staple barter of the internet happens: personal data for access. When creating an account, the amount of personal data asked of users can vary. It is very common for Sign Up forms to include Facebook, Twitter or other social media integration, usually as an option to entering your e-mail address (see Table 4). The trade-off translates into access to the decision-making table: what will the most popular memes be, what will people share on their social networks in the near future. This trade-off can be more or less favorable for the user.

Table 4: Data on sign up features*

Feature	%
Facebook integration	33.3%
Twitter integration	16.6%
Google+ integration	16.6%
Yahoo! integration	3.3%
E-mail address	46.6%
E-mail and at least one social network integration	30%
Only e-mail address (no other integration)	16.6%
Username and password	13.3%
Only Facebook integration	quickmeme.com
More information (birthdate, sex)	10%
No sign up required	36%
From which are meme generators	63.6%

*calculated from the total of 30 platforms

We must consider the next two levels of human interaction within platforms that (may or may not) require sign up. The 1st level of interaction refers to co-commenting on the same post or replying to a comment, a form of interaction visible and open to everyone. The 2nd level of interaction is closely tied to community-building features implemented on the platform (create a profile, chat or send private messages to other users, create a friend list) and the features for creating a loyalty bond with the platform (karma points, trophies, awards, badges). In this sense, we evaluated the authentication process in two ways: the one that leads to community shaping and a deeper connection with the platform, and the one that leads to a utilitarian account (this account is used as an activity dashboard).

Community building can determine users to spend more time on the platform, engaging in both meme consumption and creation, while socializing with other meme enthusiasts. Platform like FunnyJunk and Reddit have large followings due to these 2nd level interaction features, transforming them in genuine creation and debate hubs.

The decision-making process (Contributing branch)

People accessing meme aggregator sites do it for several reasons: to browse (with the possibility of sharing memes on their social networks), engage with the content and with other users (through comments and votes), or to create new content. Contributing with comments and votes is the most mobilizing and often most clear and quantifiable aspect when describing meme aggregator sites. The comments add context and humor to the meme, and if the comments, as well as the posts can be up/down, the most popular content and the most popular opinions will always rise to the top, even spawning new memes.

This creates a democratic-like system within the meme aggregators: the *userocracy*. The users are in control, while their power and willingness to be a part of this process shape, in a fundamental way, the life of internet memes. The *Partial Userocracy* is an oxymoron: if the operations are limited (only voting features implemented), then it defies the meaning of the userocracy. Regardless, within this complete/incomplete binary division, preferences can be formalized (RPCI 7.4 < 21.5) and reveal important features of MAs, shaping the bigger picture. We must emphasize that these number are relative and not necessarily a result of these criteria clusters: sites are rebuilt, some architectural features become the norm, so we cannot interpret the relation between some features and popularity, but we can speculate and re-arrange the criteria to create broader contexts for popular sites.

The creating & uploading branch

The human is often lost in the process of contributing with content to a MA platform. While commenting is nominal to some extent, the meme as a volatile cultural product and the bond with the original creator can easily be severed. Appropriation happens when a platform (automatically or not) adds a watermark to the content or does not offer the original source, if there is one. This can have serious repercussions (a number of web comics and photographers have sued aggregators for copyright infringement), but for the regular user, this is not usually the issue.

In this scenario, some meme aggregator sites try to embellish the experience one has on the platform by offering creative tools on the go. The Aggregate & Create sites may put to the user's disposal image-macro builders, picture editor with a variable number of functions or rage comic builders. This enhances the experience and can determine people to spend more time on the platform, creating new content. The Straightforward MA is the platform where one can only upload content or provide the URL. This can reflect on the time spent on the platform and on the ratio of novel and exciting content to second-hand memes (RPCI 10.7< 19.75).

Even more so, when uploading original content on MAs or when remixing visual content, the author is asked to provide a title for the creation, a bate to attract people into clicking. When the content is uprooted and re-aggregated, the title, which may contain a catchphrase or the punch line can be lost. Having the tools for binding the text and the image in the upload/submit form could be considered an advantage, for both the creator and for the life of the meme.

The Meme Generators

The Meme Generator platform behaves in a very distinctive way. Even though we see the MG as a separate part of the meme aggregator family, the aggregation is a minute part, a side effect of the creation process. The meme generator is a platform that offers a single form of content: the image macro meme and it aggregates templates. Netizens can add new captions to already existing templates or provide their personal visual content. What the meme generator platform has to offer is a large database of visual content and a module for adding text, upper and lower caption, usually with the default Impact font.

A possible life cycle of an image macro meme could be the following: somebody add an image with a witty caption on a MA site, the image is stripped of its original caption and remixed, but still using the original caption as a pattern, the template is uploaded on a MG site where people try to produce the most enticing and humorous remixes, these are picked up by MAs (completing a circle), the new image macro is studied by Know Your Meme, waiting for a status: Confirmed or Dead Pool.

From a functional standpoint, MGs are more rudimental than MAs, using very little or none of the features from the browsing and contributing modules, being specialized in few things: uploading/submitting URLs and adding captions. We extracted the next reoccurring characteristics (some explained in more detail and with examples in Table 5), in order to create a better understanding of these platforms:

- not very contributing oriented (the comment section is a rarity);
- not very browsing-friendly;
- sign up is rarely required, especially when it comes to re-captioning memes (may be required for uploading templates);
- voting system and sorting by popularity options may exist (Democratic MG);
- some platform may explain the origin of the template and the pattern the caption should follow (Explanatory MG);
- some platforms are stripped from any other functionalities and only serve as a template database with a re-captioning feature (Pure MG).

Table 5: Meme Generator characteristics and examples

Characteristic	Explanations	Examples
Ethnic	Captions mostly in other languages; some image macro templates and text are specific to a certain ethnic group/country.	haciendomemes.com; memegenerator.es
Explanatory	The caption pattern is explained, so that the memes are consistent.	haciendomemes.com; makeameme.org; memegenerator.net.
Democratic	Feature a voting system, also more browsing friendly.	diylol.com; memecrunch.com; memegen.com; memegenerator.net; troll.me.
"Pure"	Sole purpose to create memes (no comments, votes, account).	haciendomeme.com; livememe.com; makeameme.org; memegenerator.es.

Meme generator sites are tools used to produce content that will usually end up on a meme aggregator because, in some cases, the MA does not have a built-in re-caption feature or the user is not aware of that feature. Regardless, meme generators are a subsection of meme aggregator sites, with own rules and audiences, keepers of a very specific brand of internet memes.

We refrain from a clear statistical overview for this section of the taxonomy due to the small size of our sample (only ten platforms), and even though we feature them as highly specialized meme aggregators, their architectural features are much more intricate and need a proper analysis framework, different from the MA one we created for this research. An extended paper on the structure and dynamics of meme generators could look into the specifics of the technical layer of such platforms and how they are used in the context of the "complete meme aggregator site", which features all four modules.

Discussions and conclusions

The clustering criteria approach, subjective as it might seem, brought us closer to understanding the structure and dynamic of meme aggregator sites, closer than a narrow but more precise description of architectural styles. Our taxonomy of characteristics is modular, providing a framework ready for adjustments and adjunctions. The broader discussion regarding this taxonomy is closely related to the two layers of every new media object: the technical layer and the cultural layer. The cultural production (the actual memes, but also the opinions and catchphrases born in the comment sections, the votes that propel or drown the memes) can only happen if the web developer implements features to encourage these online behaviors. Meme aggregators are part of the industry – IT and cultural –, capital is invested, used for development or studies, in order to minimize the gap between the money-making idea and the actual implementation, gaps profoundly visible on sites with a lower rank, trapped in the vicious circle of popularity and revenue gained through popularity.

Given that websites can change and improve in functionality, the examples chosen to illustrate our criteria cluster taxonomy are not set in stone and can become obsolete at any moment in time. Pundits would argue about the relevance of this rather ephemeral taxonomy, but we know that apart from being a tool for identifying the most popular and sought after characteristics, modules and meme aggregator sites, it raises new and troubling questions about our browsing and consumption habits, web presence and comfort

patterns (feeling at large on a specific platform, creating and nurturing a social network associated with a meme aggregator), only to name a few of the research opportunities this paper opens.

Furthermore, the algorithm created to determine the most popular and relevant meme aggregator sites of the moment (complete list plus Alexa ranks in the Annex section, Table 6), can be improved and extended for other types of visual content. The final tally of the most popular 30 meme aggregator and meme generators sites is the result of automated and manual processing, and while the endeavor to create such a top using an automated and self-made tool could have left space for errors and anomalies to infiltrate, this is the first such classification ever made, based on a research inquiry.

Our modular taxonomy defines meme aggregators as web platform where people can ca do one, all, or a combination of the following: browse memes, contribute (with votes and comments), create (with the means offered by the platform) and upload content/submit URLs (original creations or not). These four actions assure meme creation and aggregation, and empower people to be part of popular culture. These actions can be broken down into criteria clusters, but going all the way to the molecular level, to the exact features and the specifics would render this model unusable. And so, to answer RQ2, the most common features of meme aggregator sites reference (1) content and content forms, (2) browsing patterns and mobility, (3) sign up implementation, (4) commenting and voting features, (5) creating opportunities. These are the building block we isolated in our analysis of meme aggregators, even though not all are implemented on all platforms, so this knowledge can be used to identify a platform's shortcoming.

To answer the third research question, regarding the extent to which users can comment and vote, we identified that this brand of contribution entails a trade-off: data for access. While the type and amount of data one must trade depends on what the web developer/web entrepreneur wished to accomplish, on 30% of platforms one can choose from creating an account by providing an e-mail address or by logging in with another account (Facebook, Twitter, Google+ and others). However, MAs built on complete anonymity, apart from most of the meme generators, can exist, funnyjunk.com being the prime example, and a rather popular one (Alexa rank 2,321). But to answer the questions, the userocracy and the partial userocracy are the extents to which users can contribute, providing that the platform has the required features implemented.

While site popularity can be quantified using proper metrics, like time and number of pages viewed (the way alexa.com is approaching this), quantifying the popularity of certain architectures of meme aggregators is impossible with the data we gathered. This impossibility is explained, again, by the potential gaps between the cultural and the technical layer. The Relative Popularity Criteria Indicator is a rather weak metric because it is based on small samples and indicators of site popularity, so the popularity of the site and the popularity of the criteria cluster cannot be separated, that is why the RPCI is not used as a prime indicator in this research, but as a context constructing one. In this case, we cannot pinpoint the most popular meme aggregator site architectures, but what we can do is to see what modules are implemented on high-ranked sites and draw individual conclusions (an extended version of this paper would include questionnaires for MA users and contributors).

Rehashing an idea emphasized throughout this paper, the problem with meme aggregators is that they are, like the majority of websites, created as revenue making machines, and for this to happen they need to create interest. Even though some MAs could seem very nurturing for popular culture and interested in mobilizing people into having a hands-on meme experience, at the end of the day, the comments, votes, content uploaded or created is money. But aside from this, understanding the structure and dynamic of meme aggregators in an abstract manner, leaving aside the lines of code and like buttons and embracing it as a Habermasian public sphere for all that is memetic, not only adds meaning to our lives (in the words of Fiske), but constructs a radiography of how we relate to internet content, out internet communities, critical thinking and memes as a means to understand and shape society.

To conclude, this paper on the inner workings of meme aggregator has brought into perspective the technicalities of creating such a platform, the features people have grown accustomed in their meme intake and an innovative way of creating a top of the most popular MA sites. Combining the rather subjective divisions with formal concept analysis tools, web metrics and screen scrapers we comprised an extensive overview on how the technical and the cultural layers intertwine in the field of meme studies.

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Annex

Table 6: Top 30 meme aggregators

ID	Occurrence ID*	alexa.com rank**	Website	Main action
1.	762	62	**reddit.com**	browse
2.	383	1,237	**quickmeme.com**	browse
3.	146	51	**imgur.com**	browse
4.	459	5,503	**memegenerator.net**	create
5.	271	2,124	**funnyjunk.com**	browse
6.	118	280	**9gag.com**	browse
7.	227	2,383	**knowyourmeme.com**	browse
8.	192	4,135	**memecenter.com**	browse
9.	83	1,007	**cheezburger.com**	browse
10.	167	10,801	**imgfave.com**	browse
11.	355	26,442	**memecrunch.com**	create
12.	123	11,111	**imgflip.com**	browse
13.	261	43,826	**troll.me**	create
14	77	13,139	**makeameme.org**	create
15.	134	30,716	**risovach.ru**	browse
16.	48	1,007	**memebase.cheezburger.com**	browse
17.	57	1,610	**tickld.com**	browse
18.	248	109,818	**memeguy.com**	browse
19.	138	70,106	**diylol.com**	create
20.	40	1,157	**livememe.com**	create
21.	63	14,108	**dailyfailcenter.com**	browse
22.	104	75,552	**memegen.com**	create
23.	316	706,923	**thefunniestpictures.com**	browse
24.	127	238,416	**haciendomemes.com**	create
25.	64	50,957	**memecreator.org**	create
26.	34	1,300	**themetapicture.com**	browse
27.	114	310,868	**redditpics.com**	browse
28.	49	28,095	**memegenerator.es**	create
29.	34	8,280	**cuantocabron.com**	browse
30	37	14,151	**1cak.com**	browse

*Number of times the website was listed as featuring memes, after the Google Image Search step.
** Data collected from alexa.com in March 2014

THE LISTICLE: AN EXPLORING RESEARCH ON AN INTERESTING SHAREABLE NEW MEDIA PHENOMENON

BRAM VIJGEN[1]

ABSTRACT. These days the internet hosts an interesting phenomenon individuals tend to fall in love with, the so-called listicle; a portmanteau of 'list' and 'article'.[2] Although the concept of the listicle in its own right is not new, it got booming in the digital era. This exploring research on the article-as-numbered-list, in which 720 listicles during a period of two weeks were analysed on Buzzfeed.com, reveals that the popularity of the listicle in terms of success and shareability is easily explainable. The key lies not only in the power of the format in and by itself, but also in 'shareable factors' that are related to the individual listicle. In other words, the success and shareability of a listicle depends on the extent to which the following factors are present: the suggesting of authority, the capacity to eastablish existence and structure, the level of seduction and the simplicity of recognition and content, but also its public range, originality/diversity and the four factors of the concept of shareability that were in an earlier stadium composed by professor Harry Jenkins.[3]

Keywords: listicle, exploring, shareability, BuzzFeed, success

Introduction:

4 Awesome Reasons You Should Start Reading This Article Right Now

    1. An interesting new media phenomenon will be introduced. A rather popular one, because it's shared fairly often, especially on social

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[2] Friedgen, Andrew. '12 Reasons Why the Listicle Format is Great'. *University Wire (Carlsbad)*, January 08, 2014.

[3] Jenkins,Henry; Li, Xiaochang; Domb, Ana – With: Joshua Green. 'If It Doesn't Spread, It's Dead: Creating Value in a Spreadable Marketplace'. *The Convergence Culture Consortium*, p. 6. *http://convergenceculture.org/research/Spreadability_doublesidedprint_final_063009.pdf*

network sites, mostly because of its accessible format and easy content, but also due to its triggering titles (clickbait) such as '17 Ways Disney Movie Scenes Could Have Gone Way, Way Worse'[4] or '21 Things You're Doing Wrong In The Bathroom'.[5]This phenomenon is called a '*listicle*', a portmanteau of 'list' and 'article'. Although the concept of the listicle (an article in the form of a list) is not new, it was already picked up by the traditional media in an earlier stage, and got booming in the digital era; the concept went viral on the internet. It was the birth of a new media phenomenon.

2. Following a new, hidden path. Because the listicle in itself is a new phenomenon, at least in a new media environment, there is a lack of significant academic research on the topic. Thus, the listicle still holds quite a lot of secrets. For example, where does the phenomenon come from? And how can we properly define it? But the most important question of this exploring article on the matter of the listicle will be: *What makes the listicle so successful, but mostly shareable?* Beause if one already refers to these times as 'The Listicle Era'[6], a proper research on this particular phenomenon is most welcome.

3. Suitable research and ditto tools ensure it's a very lively kind of article. In order to comprehend the success and shareability of the article-as-numbered-list the research will be concentrated on BuzzFeed.com, a website that made a name for itself by providing listicles on a daily base. In the used research design, 720 English-written listicles were analyzed during a period of two weeks. This was done by scraping, a technique in which a computer program extracts data from human-readable output coming from another program[7], the individual listicles one by one- this in combination with *content analysis* and *observation*.

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[4] Yapalater, Lauren. '17 Ways Disney Movie Scenes Could Have Gone Way, Way Worse'. *BuzzFeed*, January 30, 2014. Accessed January 30, 2014.
http://www.buzzfeed.com/lyapalater/ways-disney-movie-scenes-could-have-gone-way-way-worse

[5] Lee Yandoli, Krystie; Wang, Kimberly; Flaherty, Keely. '21 Things You're Doing Wrong In The Bathroom'. *BuzzFeed*, January 30, 2014. Accessed January 30, 2014.
http://www.buzzfeed.com/keelyflaherty/things-youre-doing-wrong-in-the-bathroom.

[6] Marshall, Jack. 'The Listicle Era is (Sadly) Here to Stay'. *Digiday*, August 15, 2013. Accessed January 22, 2014: *http://digiday.com/publishers/listicle-era/*.

[7] Wikipedia. 'Data Scraping'. Accessed January 30, 2014.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Data_scraping

4. And all that in a easy, accessible article. Just to avoid reactions as 'TLDR' (Too Long Didn't Read), since most individuals tend to have a short attention span in this internet era. Studies show that the time one can hold its focus has decreased rapidly in the last ten years; dropping from twelve to around five minutes.[8] To meet the needs of the average readers, this article will be easy and to the point.

Literature:

The irresistible magic of the list

'*The list is the signature form of our time*'[9], the magazine The New Yorker stated last year. It underlines the meaning of lists (a non-syntactic formation of items[10]) in daily life. Because if there is one thing that has become clear over time, it's the fact that the list in itself has a prominent place in our society: think of shopping lists, simple to-do-lists, but also the Yellow Pages, encyclopedias and the world wide web. Thus, the concept of the list is important for us. And that's because it helps to make sense of the world around us. "*The list is the origin of culture*", said Italian novelist and semiotician Umberto Eco in an interview with the German magazine Der Spiegel.[11] "*What does culture want? To make infinity comprehensible. It also wants to create order -- not always, but often. And how, as a human being, does one face infinity? How does one attempt to grasp the incomprehensible? Through lists.*"

And the connection between human and lists got even stronger with the introduction of the world wide web. Or as professor Dennis Hall stated: '*The World Wide Web has fueled this human passion for lists, with an unprecedented technical leverage and democratic spirit*'.[12]At some point in this digital age'*the list*

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[8] Plumridge, Nicole. 'Is the internet destroying our attention span?' *Psychminds*, August 1, 2013. Accessed January 30, 2014. *http://psychminds.com/is-the-internet-destroying-our-attentions-span/*

[9] O'Connell, Mark..'10 Paragraphs about lists you need in your life right now. *The New Yorker*, August 29, 2013. Accessed January 17, 2014. *http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/books/2013/08/10-paragraphs-about-lists-you-need-in-your-life-right-now.html*

[10] Delbourgo, James;Staffan Müller-Wille. 'Introduction.'. In *Isis*, vol 103, No 4 (December 2012)

[11] Beyer, Susanne; Gorris, Lothar. 'Interview with Umberto Eco: "We Like Lists Because We Don't Wanna Die".' *Der Spiegel,* November 11, 2009. Accessed January 17, 2014. *http://www.spiegel.de/international/zeitgeist/spiegel-interview-with-umberto-eco-we-like-lists-because-we-don-t-want-to-die-a-659577.html*

[12] Hall, Dennis. 'Listomania: The List as Popular Culture Icon'. In *Studies in Popular Culture*, vol 28, No. 1 (October 2005), p. 50.

mated with what we used to call a "news article"[13]and the result was **the listicle**. More and more offsprings followed, mostly featured by titles as *'13 Life Changing Ways To Eat Food'*[14] and *'Top 10 Badasses of the World's Special Forces'*.[15] So far it looks like the listicle is here to stay indeed: because there are even whole sites dedicated to the concept of the article-as-numbered-list: Listverse.com, TheListicles.net, Cracked.com and many more. The listicle became the 'lingua franca' of the new media.

But despite the tight relationship between the listicle and the new media, the format itself is not new. The traditional media already picked it up before individuals were instantly sharing it on the internet. In the eighties for example the British daily The Sun had quite some success with the '10 things you didn't know about'-concept[16]. The only difference was, though, that the format at that time was nameless. The article-as-numbered -list can actually be found through all the history of mankind. Think for example about Martin Luther's 95 Theses. One could even – with a bit of imagination – say that God itself, with a little bit of help from Moses, created the listicle, in the form of the Ten Commandments: because these perfectly fit the generally-accepted definition of a listicle in most available literature on the subject: that of *a portmanteau of "list" and "article".*[17]

The definition of the listicle

This line of thinking comes back in most of the definitions of the listicle that appear in the available articles that circulate on the internet: the same can be said for online dictionaries. In official, written dictionaries the term can, till today, not be found. Only the *Official Dictionary of Unofficial English* made room for the digital phenomenon: *listicle n. a (newspaper, magazine, web site, etc.) article consisting primarily of a list. Media. United States.*

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[13] Cadwalladr, Carole. '35 Reasons Why I Hate Lists: If You Haven't Heard of the Listicle Craze, here are the Things You Should Know'. *The Observer*, December 22, 2013, p. 34.

[14] Stopera, Dave. '13 Life Changing Ways To Eat Food'. *BuzzFeed*, June 1, 2012. Accessed January 30, 2014. *http://www.buzzfeed.com/daves4/13-life-changing-ways-to-eat-food*

[15] Frater, Jamie. 'Top 10 Badasses of the World's Special Forces'. *Listverse*, January 11, 2010. Accessed January 30, 2014. *http://listverse.com/2010/01/11/top-10-badasses-of-the-worlds-special-forces/*

[16] Greenslade, Roy. 'How Digital Revolution Gives Power to the People'. *Evening Standard*, November 06, 2013, p. 41.

[17] Friedgen, Andrew. '12 Reasons Why the Listicle Format is Great'. *University Wire (Carlsbad)*, January 08, 2014.

[list + article] This term is often used in a deprecating way, to describe an article or news story that required very little effort to produce.[18]

But this definition simplifies the listicle too much. There are so many more sides to the matter, in terms of structure, origin and characteristics. The definition given by Wikipedia for example is notably wider: *In journalism and blogging, a listicle is a short-form of writing that uses a list as its thematic structure, but is fleshed out with sufficient verbiage to be published as an article. A typical listicle will prominently feature a cardinal number in its title, such as "10 Ways to Warm Up Your Bedroom in Winter", or "25 Hairstyles of the Last Hundred Years", with subsequent subheadings within the text itself reflecting this schema. The word is a portmanteau derived from list and article.'[19]*

Although this definition is rather good, it's still a questionable one. Firstly, because of the term 'short-form of writing', since that's a bit outdated nowadays. Of course, the listicle is seen as easy content to read, the so-called 'McNews'[20], but there are also a lot of these article-as-numbered-lists that wouldn't fit the description 'short'. Secondly, the 'sufficient verbiage' can be specified more explicitly into: 'visual (images), and mostly on the internet, audiovisual content (gifs, videos)'. Give that hose types of 'sufficient verbiage' are basically the ones that are being featured in these listicles. And finally, there is still some substantial information missing in regards to its origin, since there is not mention of that origin at all.

In regards to the origin of the listicle, the American etymologist Barry Popik comes up with a nice addition to the definition given by Wikipedia. He says that the '*term "listicle" has been cited in print since at least 2001 and was popularized on the Gawker website'.[21]*That's important to mention: not only to make explicitly clear that the specific term is rather new, but also to emphasize that the format of the listicle was (re)discovered by the new media and got popular in this digital environment.

In conclusion, one could say that a combination of Wikipedia's definition, Popik'setymologian approach of the word listicle, plus a bit of clarification would give us a quite fitting definition of the listicle: *In journalism and blogging, a listicle is a **form of writing** that uses a list as its thematic structure, but is fleshed out with sufficient verbiage,* **in combination with visual (images) and, on the internet,**

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[18] Barrett, Grant. 'Listicle'.In *The Official Dictionary of Unofficial English*, 2006, p. 216.

[19] Wikipedia. 'Listicle'. Accessed January 17, 2014. *http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Listicle*

[20] Shenzhen Daily. 'Listicles'. June 10, 2013.

[21] Popik, Barry. 'Listicle (list+article)'. *The Big Apple*, July 22, 2013. Accessed January 17, 2014. *http://www.barrypopik.com/index.php/new_york_city/entry/listicle_list_article*

even audiovisual content (gifs, videos), *to be published as an article. A typical listicle will prominently feature a cardinal number in its title, such as "10 Ways to Warm Up Your Bedroom in Winter", or "25 Hairstyles of the Last Hundred Years", with subsequent subheadings within the text itself reflecting this schema. The word is a portmanteau derived from list and article.* **The term "listicle" has been cited in print since at least 2001 and was popularized on the Gawker website.**'

The list: popular characteristics

The list is undeniably an important part of the listicle in itself. Thus, it's an interesting approach to take a closer look at the characteristics of a list. Except for the general features that go hand in hand with the format of the list, **the suggesting of authority** and it's **capacity to establish existence and structure** to one's life, there are some special features that make the listicle such a strong format, starting with the title of the listicle. Any such title is mostly **seductive,** because its goal is to lure the reader into the story. Or as journalist Mark O'Connell stated it in the magazine The New Yorker, they use '*all the interventionist urgency and narrative propulsion that implies*' to do so.[22] With this he is referring to the fact that most listicles are too irresistible to ignore, since they give one the impression that one would miss out on anything of importance if one doesn't click on it; clickbait. Thus, the listicles use 'sensational headers' to underline this importance.

Another characteristic that needs mentioning, is the listicles' **'easy recognition' factor**, especially in a new media environment. Because of the fact that the titles of the listicles are constructed so differently in comparison to other available content online, they stand out in an otherwise anonymous stream of content, states the Russian-American journalist and writer Maria Konnikova[23]. A number for example will be quite easily seen in a marl of words and images, like the news feed of Facebook.

The listicle also gives one the impression it's an **easy piece of content to read**. Firstly, because the format of the list is perfectly made for the way we tend to read on a screen. Studies have shown that internet users tend to read

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[22] O'Connell, Mark..'10 Paragraphs about lists you need in your life right now. *The New Yorker*, August 29, 2013. Accessed January 17, 2014.
http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/books/2013/08/10-paragraphs-about-lists-you-need-in-your-life-right-now.htm l

[23] Konnikova, Maria. 'A List of Reasons Why Our Brains Love Lists'. *The New Yorker*, December 02, 2013. Accessed January 17, 2014.
http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/elements/2013/12/a-list-of-reasons-that-our-brains-love-lists.html?utm_source=tny&utm_campaign=generalsocial&utm_medium=twitter

digital content in an F-shaped pattern[24], which perfectly suits the list form. Secondly, because listicles exactly tell individuals how much time it will take to finish them. '*The more we know about something – including precisely how much time it will consume – the greater the chance we will commit to it. The process is self-reinforcing: we recall with pleasure that we were able to complete the task (of reading the article) instead of leaving it undone and that satisfaction, in turn, makes us more likely to click on lists again – even ones we hate-read*', explains Konnikova.[25] That's what psychologists refer to as the '*paradox of choice*'[26] – the more options one tend to have, the worse one feels. In that case the listicle is an easy pick, since the reader already knows what to expect. Thus, it's clear that '*in the current media environment, a list is perfectly designed for our brain. We are drawn to it intuitively, we process it more efficiently, and we retain it with little effort.*'[27]

Another playground; a digital one

The fact that the new media environment is partly responsible for the fact that the listicle can exploit its full potential of its characteristics is easily explainable. The change of scenery from a printed playground to a digital one, the world wide web, was one for the greater good of the listicle itself. Mostly because, as stated by Lev Manovich[28], the available content on the internet is presented as a **database**; an unordered list of items. In comparison, in the old days the information was (mostly) presented in the form of a narrative (in which the information is ordered). And although new media objects, like a news article, can present themselves as narrative or something else, underneath they are all databases, states Manovich. '*In new media, the database supports a range of cultural forms which range from direct translation (i.e a database*

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[24] Nielsen, Jakob. 'F-Shaped Pattern For Reading Web Content'. *NN/g Nielsen Norman Group*, April 17, 2006. Accessed January 17, 2014. *http://www.nngroup.com/articles/f-shaped-pattern-reading-web-content/*

[25] Konnikova, Maria. 'A List Of Reasons Why Our Brains Love Lists'. *The New Yorker*, December 02, 2013. Accessed January 17, 2014. *http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/elements/2013/12/a-list-of-reasons-that-our-brains-love-lists.html?utm_source=tny&utm_campaign=generalsocial&utm_medium=twitter*

[26] Messner, Claude; Wänke, Michaela. 'Unconscious information processing reduces information overload and increases product satisfaction'. In *Journal of Consumer Psychology,* vol 21, No. 1 (January 2011), p. 09-13.

[27] Konnikova, Maria. 'A List of Reasons Why Our Brains Love Lists'. *The New Yorker,* December 02, 2013. Accessed January 17, 2014. *http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/elements/2013/12/a-list-of-reasons-that-our-brains-love-lists.html?utm_source=tny&utm_campaign=generalsocial&utm_medium=twitter*

[28] Manovich, Lev. '*The Language of New Media*'. MIT Press (2001), p. 225.

stays a database) to a form whose logic is the opposite of the logic of the material form itself – a narrative. More precisely, a database can support narrative, but there is nothing in the logic of the medium itself which would foster its generation.'[29]

Another aspect that is worth mentioning is that the **shareability** of popular content is also being accelerated within a new media environment, since the replication of the original idea (in this case a listicle) gets '*transformed, repurposed or distorted*' more easily then when they pass from hand to hand.[30] That's logical because in this new media landscape the world is like a tiny, global village. Thanks to the presence of online social networks it's way easier to share interesting content with a large audience, whether we transmit the orginal meaning or just interpret it in a totally different way.

Consumers play an active rol in this process, since they decide if something goes viral on the web. According to Jenkins and co there are three factors that play a part in the consumers' decision whether or not to spread content: *To bolster camaraderie and articulate the (presumably shared) experiences and values that identify oneself as belong to a particular community ("bolstering their identity"); To gather information and explain difficult to understand events or circumstances; To establish the boundaries of an "in–group".*[31]That's not all, though: the shared content also has to fulfill certain criteria: *the appearance of humor/ parody; the way in which way it triggers us to seek out more information; hey are incomplete without our active participation; they express themes of community and nostalgia which are central themes of the gift economy*.[32]

Methods

Research Design

One could conclude that the listicle is a promising phenomenon in a new media environment. Therefore it's interesting enough to explore what exactly makes the listicle so successful on one hand, and above all shareable

[29] Manovich, Lev. 'Database as a Genre of New Media'. *AI & Society*, vol 14, No. 2 (2000), p. 176.

[30] Jenkins,Henry; Li, Xiaochang; Domb, Ana – With: Joshua Green. 'If It Doesn't Spread, It's Dead: Creating Value in a Spreadable Marketplace'. *The Convergence Culture Consortium*, p. 2. *http://convergenceculture.org/research/Spreadability_doublesidedprint_final_063009.pdf*

[31] Jenkins,Henry; Li, Xiaochang; Domb, Ana – With: Joshua Green. 'If It Doesn't Spread, It's Dead: Creating Value in a Spreadable Marketplace'. *The Convergence Culture Consortium*, p. 71. *http://convergenceculture.org/research/Spreadability_doublesidedprint_final_063009.pdf*

[32] Jenkins,Henry; Li, Xiaochang; Domb, Ana – With: Joshua Green. 'If It Doesn't Spread, It's Dead: Creating Value in a Spreadable Marketplace'. *The Convergence Culture Consortium*, p. 6. *http://convergenceculture.org/research/Spreadability_doublesidedprint_final_063009.pdf*

on the other. To give a significant answer to that question the research was performed according to the standards of a **case-study**, performed on BuzzFeed.com. This website was selected not only because it offers many listicles, but also because the '*social news and entertainment company*' provides, in their own words, '*the most shareable breaking news, original reporting, entertainment and video across the social web to its global audience of 100M*'.[33] That means BuzzFeed.com is in terms of reliability a good case to investigate the success and shareability of these article-as-numbered-lists.

Research Sample

During a period of two weeks, between **January 2nd 2014 and January 15th 2014** an amount of **720 English-written listicles** have been investigated. This period has been chosen because it gives a proper indication about the way in which listicles get popular and shareable. Ideally, it would have been better to take a bigger time window, but due to time constraints and lack of manpower that wasn't possible. In addition to this all, it's important to state that the research has been done on the 25th of January 2014; ten days after the last date of the chosen time frame. This has been done on purpose, so as to allow the content to become successful and shareable over time.

Research Tools

Subsequently, all the 720 listicles were firstly subjected to a *quantitative research* tool: **scraping**. All the data that was relevant in terms of the popularity (success) and shareability of the listicle was scraped: the publishing date, title, author, category, (most prominent) number in the title, the amount of shares on Facebook and the amount of tweets. Scrapeable content such as Facebook likes, views and comments have been left out of the research; because they - at least to some extent – largely depend on the amount of shares. The same goes for comments.

The quantitative research provided a bunch of general data – and indications – in regards to listicles. It proved helpful to construct a top-10 of the most shared listicles on two massive social network platforms: Facebook and Twitter. This particular data has been used to make a comparison between the 'average' data and the top-10 lists; this was done by performing a mix of **observation** and **content-analysis** on the earlier scraped data and the individual content of the most shared listicles.

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[33] BuzzFeed. 'About'. Accessed January 30, 2014. *http://www.buzzfeed.com/about*

Results

During the researched period all (English) listicles were scraped on relevant data. This resulted in the following results, starting with some generalities. In these two weeks the users and actual staff members of BuzzFeed.com provided an average of 51,4listicles a day. This average was almost reached every day, except for the first Tuesday and every Saturday and Sunday. That the particular Tuesday didn't meet the expectations, was mostly because it was an extraordinary day; the day after New Years Day (thus, not really representative for an average Tuesday). The Saturday and Sunday are no exceptions, rather more a trend.

The above mentioned trend could be explained by the fact that many contributors (especially the users) in the weekends most likely have a lot of (social) commitments. However, it's also a fact that the total production of content of BuzzFeed.com drops rapidly in the weekends. So considering the percentage of the total amount of content, the weekend' drop is negligible. To illustrate this point, on January 4th 19 listicles were posted on BuzzFeed, on a total of 54 articles; that means that 35,18 percent of the total content was a listicle. While on the 8th of January of the 186 articles that were posted on the site, 70 of them could be termed as a listicle; so that makes that 27,45 percent of the total content was a listicle. In terms of percentage in the weekends, apparently there are even more listicles posted than on working days.

Of the 720 listicles 314 were contributed by users of BuzzFeed.com and more than half (406) were produced by individuals that are related to the crew of the site, whether in the role as 'Staff Member' or 'Contributor'. What stands out immediately, is the fact that staff-related listicles get more attention and (positive) feedback of the audience. This is not only because of the fact that the 'knowledge' of the BuzzFeed' staff is estimated higher than the average community user (the principle of 'authority'[34]), but most of all because of the fact that the crew of BuzzFeed is assumed to come up with '*creative and shareable content to produce*'[35]- they are even trained for that. In that light it's quite hard for a user to come up with a brilliant listicle in the stream of the BuzzFeed-content.

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[34] Hall, Dennis. 'Listomania: The List as Popular Culture Icon'. In *Studies in Popular Culture*, vol 28, No. 1 (October 2005), p. 53.

[35] BuzzFeed PR. 'BuzzFeed: The social news and entertainment company'. *Youtube* (Video), December 18, 2013. Accessed January 30, 2014.
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YZTQoEIiGEs
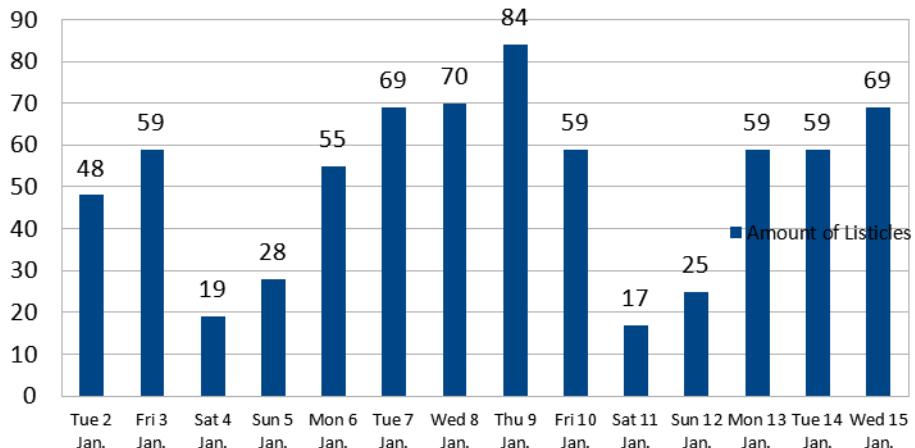
Listicles A day


The Users That Post Listicles:
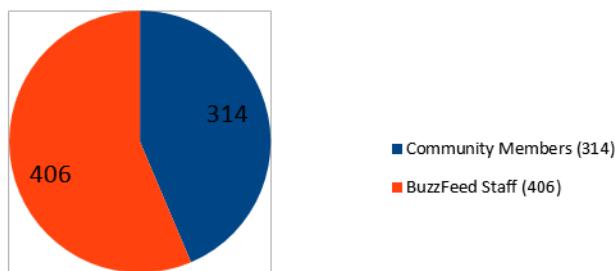
More important to the actual research, were the results that came out of the scraping of the titles of the listicle. The title of a listicle, namely, plays undoubtedly a major role in the decision making process that takes place prior to a member of the audience's decision to actually click, and (maybe) later share, a listicle. From that point of view some extra focus on the title of the article-as-numbered-lists was totally explainable. That resulted in some interesting points in regards to the way the titles of listicles are constructed.

First of all it's notable that some of the lists do not contain as many bullets as the number of the title suggest (although the author sometimes completely forgets to construct his content by actually numbering those

bullets), but in general the number in the title is the same as the amount of bullets that appear in the actual content. Of more importance to the research is the fact that the number 10 (58 times) is by far the most common one to feature in the title of a listicle, followed at a respectful distance by 19 (42 times) and 15 (41 times). Moreover, in particular the numbers between 5 and 25 are popular; 81,25 percent of the total amount of the titles of the listicles contains such a number. Listicles of less than 5 or more than 30 bullets are the exception rather than the rule. And lists as '*The Definitive Ranking Of All 131 Baby-Sitter's Club Cover Outfits*'[36] are absolutely unique in and by themselves.

Furthermore it was interesting to take a closer look at the ratio between odd and even numbers, since for long it was – according to BuzzFeed Editorial Director Jack Shepherd - a persistent superstition in the branch of listicle making to prefer an odd number above an even one.[37]
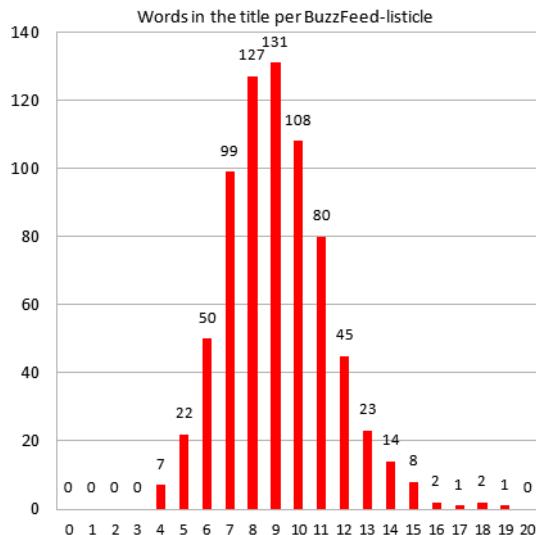
Most 'prominent' nouns in the titles:
- 'Things' (Things That.., Things You.., s.o.s.f): 114x
- 'Reasons' (Reasons To.., Reasons Why.., s.o.s.f): 86x
- 'Signs' (Signs That.., Signs You're.., s.o.s.f): 44x
- 'Ways' (Ways To.., Ways We.., s.o.s.f): 39x

Most seen adjectives in the titles:
- Best: 15x
- Worst: 12x
- Awesome: 10x
- Great(est): 8x
- Amazing; Delightfull; Beautiful(ly): 5x

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36 Anne, Burton Summer. 'The Definitive Ranking Of All 131 Baby-Sitter's Club Cover Outfits'. *BuzzFeed*, January 9, 2014. Accessed January 30, 2014.
http://www.buzzfeed.com/summeranne/the-definitive-ranking-of-baby-sitters-club-cover-outfits

37 O'Donovan, Caroline. 'The 3 Key Types of BuzzFeed Lists To Learn Before You Die. *Nieman Journalism Lab*, October 11, 2013. Accessed January 17, 2014.
http://www.niemanlab.org/2013/10/the-3-key-types-of-buzzfeed-lists-to-learn-before-you-die/

Nowadays that idea seems to be rather outdated. This is illustrated by the fact that the difference between the odd and even numbers that feature the titles of the listicles is practically negligible: 49 percent (even) and 51 percent (odd). Furthermore, of these 720 listicles 620 have the number directly in front of the title; the best place to get recognition in a steam of content.

But the title of a listicle is constructed by more than only a number, there is also text involved. To the average reader the number that features prominently in the title of the listicle in combination with the related words provide an interesting indication in terms of what to expect of it, indeed. Most likely, the actual text element is even more important in ones decision making process; whether an individual will actually click on the listicle or not, let alone share the listicle. Thus, the title, just as the content, has to be seductive, to lure the visitor into reading the text.

Based on the general trend a title an average listicle contains between 8 and 9 words. Some authors even try to use as many words as the corresponding number would suggest. Thus, in the case of 12 Vintage Photos Of NYC In Winter That Will Warm Your Heart'[38] the contributor used 12 words. Still, this is rather more exception than rule. More interesting in this context, though, is the way the various authors try to lure individuals into reading there listicles by the way they construct their titles. In general the majority of the listicles, they are being presented as factual truths or so-called 'factoids', as former US journalist and writer Norman Mailer called the phenomenon of presenting 'unverified or inaccurate information as factual' in contemporary journalism.[39]

To emphasize the previous, the authors tend to use a rather direct, personal approach to 'sell' their listicles to the audience. This is mostly done through a combination of strong nouns and adjectives that apply a sense of value and authority, even though they leave a lot of room for interpretation. For example, '*21 Delightful Reasons To Have More Sex*'.[40] This title not only

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[38] Epstein, Leonora. '12 Vintage Photos Of NYC In Winter That Will Warm Your Heart'. *BuzzFeed*, January 2008, 2014. Accessed January 25, 2014.
http://www.buzzfeed.com/leonoraepstein/vintage-photos-of-nyc-in-winter-that-will-warm-your-heart

[39] Tung, Angela. 'A Brief History of Newspaper Lingo'. *Wordnik*, September 18, 2013. Accessed January 17, 2014. *http://blog.wordnik.com/a-brief-history-of-newspaper-lingo.*

[40] Chen, Tanya. '21 Delightful Reasons To Have More Sex'. *BuzzFeed*, January 13, 2014. Accessed January 25, 2014. *http://www.buzzfeed.com/tanyachen/delightful-reasons-to-have-more-sex*

contains a strong noun (reasons (to)), but also an adjective that gives a sense of value to the noun: delightful. Similarly adjectives such as: hilarious, bizarre, etcetera. The author always tries to imply a certain form of authority via the title of the listicle. The only way to check if this authority holds up, is to browse through to the listicle itself. Thus, quite a bit of active participation is being asked from the reader's side

Therefore, a general conclusion would be that the title of an average listicle is seductive and contains the following characteristics:

- A prominent number, situated at the front, most likely one between 6 and 25;
- Approximately constructed by the use of nine words;
- Following a direct and personal approach by using strong nouns and adjectives that apply a sense of value and authority.

Bearing this in mind, it was rather interesting to draw a comparison with the most shared BuzzFeed-listicles on Facebook and Twitter, mainly to find out in which way these particular listicles are different from the other ones. According to the scraped data there are only three differences between Twitter and Facebook when it comes to the most shared listicles. Where users of Facebook share '*33 Things You Probably Didn't Know About Disney Parks*', '*27 Unspoken Suit Rules Every Man Should Know*' and '*21 Things That Inevitably Happen When You Work In An Office*', Twitter's users chose '*12 Spectacular Acts Of Wikipedia Vandalism*', '*28 Beautiful Quotes About Libraries*' and '*21 Things That Happen When You Don't Eat Meat*'. Besides these differences, there is also some variety in the ranking they get in the top-10 of the different social media platforms. For example, '*36 White People Who Need To Be Stopped*' scores a 9th place when it comes to the most shareable content on Facebook, but on Twitter it scores a 4th place. This could be explained due to the fact that the Twitter and Facebook platforms are different as well as the people that uses them. Despite these differences there, one thing is absolutely clear:'*16 Books To Read Before They Hit Theaters This Year*' is by far the most shareable listicle of them all.

Most shared BuzzFeed-listicles on Facebook – amount of shares & readability score:

1. 16 Books To Read Before They Hit Theaters This Year – 131.000 / 6.
2. 31 Insanely Clever Remodeling Ideas For Your New Home – 91.000 / 5.2.
3. 21 Truly Upsetting Vintage Recipes – 83.000 / 5.

4. 33 Things You Probably Didn't Know About Disney Parks – 81.000 / 7.4.
5. 28 Things That People With Big Boobs Can Simply Never Do – 62.000 / 4.6.
6. 35 Foods From Your Childhood That Are Extinct Now – 58.000 / 2.8.
7. 27 Unspoken Suit Rules Every Man Should Know – 55.000 / 6.6.
8. 21 Things That Inevitably Happen When You Work In An Office – 43.000 / 5.7.
9. 36 White People Who Need To Be Stopped – 41.000 / 3.9.
10. 25 Things You Didn't Know About The Movie "Fight Club" - 34.000 / 9.1.

<u>Most shared BuzzFeed-listicles on Twitter - amount of shares & readability score:</u>

1. 16 Books To Read Before They Hit Theaters This Year – 7414 / 6.
2. 12 Spectacular Acts Of Wikipedia Vandalism – 3817 / 6.1.
3. 21 Truly Upsetting Vintage Recipes – 3489 / 5.
4. 36 White People Who Need To Be Stopped – 2614 / 3.9.
5. 31 Insanely Clever Remodeling Ideas For Your New Home – 2592 / 5.2.
6. 28 Beautiful Quotes About Libraries – 2590 / 0*.
7. 28 Things That People With Big Boobs Can Simply Never Do – 2580 / 4.6.
8. 25 Things You Didn't Know About The Movie "Fight Club" - 2522 /9.1.
9. 21 Things That Happen When You Don't Eat Meat – 2070 / 6.
10. 35 Foods From Your Childhood That Are Extinct Now – 1800 / 2.8.
*Readability couldn't be measured.

Another aspect that stands out is the readability of the most shared listicles. On a scale from 6 (easy) to 20 (hard), based on the Gunnig Fox (FOG) index, almost all get an easy score. Six of the most shared listicles score even lower than a six, what indicates that the readability of these particular listicles is even easier than easy. In general, though, one can say that the most shared listicles score 'easy' on readability, making them **easily accessible** to a wide audience.

Discussion

With all of the above in mind, one can state that what makes a listicle successful is a mix of many things. First of all it's about the way a listicle is built up, cause the title is an important part in the decision making process

of the reader to actually click on the article-as-numbered-list and get in touch with the actual content, to actually share it. Based on the results the most shared listicles – on Facebook as well as Twitter – follow mainly the same pattern as the other listicles. There is only one major difference, the most shared ones distinguish themselves in terms of **originality** and **diversity**. Most of the successful listicles, in terms of shareability, don't contain an average number in the title (5-25) and if it they do, that number isn't one of the frequently used ones (10, 15, 19). Besides, it's remarkable that none of the most shared listicles contains one of the most used adjectives in the title. The use of adjectives in the most shared listicles is in general rather low (3 out of 13). Most listicles titles do not even contain the most frequently used nouns (5 out of 13). In this light it's not strange that '*16 Books To Read Before They Hit Theaters This Year*' tops the list(s), since it's original in many ways and in a stream of content one is more likely to click on things that are different, in regards to the mainstream.

This in an by itself could be seen as a logical explanation for the listicle's success in terms of views, but in terms of shareability there is more behind the matter. Another aspect to point out, namely, is the ***public range*** of the most frequently shared listicle, which is a result of one of the four factors that Jenkins gives to shareable content: the way they express themes of community and nostalgia. If the public range of a listicle is bigger, the shareability factor will logically-speaking also be bigger, because more people feel able to identify with it or feel any form of affinity with the subject. If we for example look at the listicle with the most shares '*16 Books To Read Before They Hit Theaters This Year*', not surprisingly also the one with the most views (!), it might appeal to a big group of people: individuals who like movies, people that fancy reading, people that are planning a visit to the cinema this year, and so on. In fact the scope of the listicle is quite extensive, given that there are not many people who neither read nor watch movies.

Except for these two aspects the factors of the concept of shareability of Jenkins also play a major role in the active process that takes place prior to a listicle becoming successful in terms of shareability. If one takes a closer look at the content of the most shared listicles, it would appear that all of them score high on one or more of the four factors that Jenkins gives to shareable content: the appearance of humor/parody; the way in which way it triggers us to seek out more information; they are incomplete without our active participation; they express themes of community and nostalgia. Again, it's not that strange

that '*16 Books To Read Before They Hit Theaters This Year*' turned out to be the most popular listicle, since it complies with almost all of the afore-mentioned factors. Besides, it follows the two additional factors of originality/diversity and public range.

Conclusion

In conclusion one can state that what makes a listicle successful and shareable is: **the combination of the power of the format of the listicle in general and the shareable factors that are given to the individual listicle.** The general characteristics of a listicle make the article-as-numbered-list in itself an interesting phenomenon to begin with, but every author of a listicle can raise the shareability-factor by paying more attention to certain individual aspects. Thus, the success and shareability of a listicle depends on the following factors and the extent to which it's present):

General factors:
- The suggesting of authority;
- The capacity to establish existence and structure;
- The level of seduction;
- The simplicity of the recognition;
- The simplicity of the content, in terms of readability

Individual factors:
- Originality/Diversity;
- Public Range;
- The four factors of the concept of shareability (the humor/parody factor; the way in which it triggers us to seek out more information; they are incomplete without our active participation; they express themes of community and nostalgia)

However, since this conclusion is only based on a research project that sampled a time window of two tweeks, it's recommend to do more research on the topic, given that it's most likely that these factors are not the only ones that have influence on the way a listicle becomes popular in terms of shareability. Besides, in general the listicle deserves more attention from

researchers in the field of communication science, since the format is most likely here to stay. '*As long as listicles keep performing, publishers will keep churning them out. Until the data says otherwise, there's a backlash against them, or a better alternative comes along, that's not going to change any time soon*'.[41]

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