

SOCIAL JOURNALISM: QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE APPROACHES

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ABSTRACT. The identification of frequency and of the way to approach social problems in media in the Republic of Moldova becomes important for determining the functions and the role of social journalism in contemporary media environment. Moreover, this offers research opportunities of the current potential of the print media that covers social issues and of its development trends, which allows the implementation of media practices, whose goal are to make the role of social journalism more efficient in the process of forming public perceptions about social problems and in the orientation of the social attention in relation to them.

The study of social journalism is especially important in the context of major social changes, when all the social attentions and the existing system of values in society are changing, or, exactly this type of journalistic product influences all individuals and social groups, as well as all the fields of their social activities. The research of social journalism is an up-to-date problem that is motivated by the fact that in the Republic of Moldova all the changes continue to be manifested in all the fields and at all the levels of our life.

Keywords: *social journalism, radio station, TV station, periodical publication, news portal, analysis.*

Social journalism is a multidimensional media phenomenon that provides, for different categories of public, information, explanations, opinions, analyses etc. regarding the events and phenomena that occur in everyday life; regarding the social norms and principles of the social individuals or social groups; regarding the whole system of social values existing in a society. It is an environment that determines the individuals to report on the surrounding reality, thereby ensuring their social integration. Moreover, social journalism

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is an activity that gives the possibility to highlight the ability of mass media to make the individuals have a common cause and to create social consensus through its media products. The links among the social individuals and those of social individuals with their own societies in which they live are generally based on the information and the knowledge that has been acquired from mass media. Similarly, their perceptions about the events, everyday problems of specific social groups and communities, to which they do not belong to or which they cannot directly observe are mainly shaped by social journalism that provides knowledge from and about the society.

The importance of social journalism lies in its power to approach problems of interest for the entire population, regardless of the affiliation to groups or social strata; and to distribute functional information, which is necessary for human activity as a social being. The functional nature of social journalism ensures citizens' co-participation in the decision-making process, their integration into social life, the promotion of social strategies, the improvement of the legislation in this particular field etc. The information flow in social journalism is a multiple process that involves several basic activities, including:

- the assessment of the potential informational amount;
- the selection of the event to be publicized;
- the production and distribution of the media product;
- the assimilation of the media product that changes knowledge and social behaviors;
- the supplementation of the potential informational amount with new events – feedback and actions that come from the public in accordance with social reality, due to the effects of media coverage.

Being selected by journalists, the new events go through the same path, as mentioned above, forming a continuous and uninterrupted flow of information. Being in permanent connection, these activities cycles form the information flow in social journalism.

The journalistic flow, that forms the information flow in social journalism, includes two types of products: informative and analytical materials on the social field – elements of a general interest media product and media products specialized in the social field. The research object of this study consists of social materials integrated into general interest media products that, compared with specialized products, have a far greater frequency and impact on the consumer of media products. However, because they exist in an extraordinarily

high number, we decided to research the products of three media institutions, representative for the four components of mass media system: television, radio, print press, news portals. Thus, in order to analyze the TV social product, we selected the information flow from the following TV channels: *Moldova 1*, *Jurnal TV* and *Publika TV*; in order to analyze the radio social product, we chose the information flow from the radio stations such as: *Radio Moldova*, *Radio Vocea Basarabiei* and *Radio Chișinău*; in order to analyze the social product from the print press, we selected these general interest newspapers: *Moldova Suverană*, *Jurnal de Chișinău* and *Timpul*; in order to analyze the social product placed in the flow by news portals, we selected: *Noi.md*, *IPN.md* and *Ziarulnational.md*.

The qualitative analysis was carried out using the following variables: the message of the journalistic material, the age that is being informed about, the characters' genders, and the environment in which the event occurred.

These 12 media institutions have been monitored between January 1st – June 30th 2015.

In six months, the media institutions mentioned above produced 15 719 journalistic materials in the social field, including:

- news – 10 548;
- interviews – 113;
- features – 4 463;
- analytical materials – 595.

TV channels broadcast 5 335 materials, including news – 3 302, interviews – 6, features – 2 047, analytical materials – 0.

Radio stations broadcast 3 848 materials, including news – 1 966, interviews – 0, features – 1 882, analytical materials – 0.

Newspapers published 1 667 articles: news – 918, interviews – 52, features – 329, analytical articles – 368.

The information flow of portals included 4 849 materials, from which: news – 4 362, interviews – 55, features – 205, analytical materials – 227.

The message of the journalistic material is the first variable according to which the messages of the materials can be divided symbolically in: materials that approach to social problems, those that are based on “news in brief” and materials that promote positive practices. The analysis showed that most journalistic materials tackle social problems. TV channels broadcast 3 702 social based materials, news portals – 2 609, radio stations – 1 980, newspapers – 625.

Talking about TV, the most materials of the three types mentioned above were broadcast by *Publika TV* – 1 886, followed by *Jurnal TV* with 1 008, and the third place is occupied by *Moldova 1* with 808 materials. We find that the largest number of materials that address social problems is at *Jurnal TV* – 77% out of the total, then *Publika TV* – 75% and, finally, *Moldova 1* – 53%.

Regarding radio stations, the primacy belongs to *Radio Moldova* with 778 materials, which represents 39,3%, followed by *Vocea Basarabiei* with 701, which is 35,4%, and, finally, *Radio Chişinău* with 501 materials, which is 25,3% out of the total of 1980 materials.

In print press, the situation is as follows: the most materials focused on social issues were published in *Timpul* newspaper – 241, then in *Moldova Suverană* – 200, and the fewest – 184 – in *Jurnal de Chişinău*. We note, however, that the largest percentage of materials that address to social problems out of the total of products goes to *Jurnal de Chişinău* newspaper with 44%, followed by *Timpul* with 38%, then *Moldova Suverană* with 33%.

The materials that focus on social problems placed on news portals are distributed as follows: *ZiarulNațional.md* – 1 068 social media products, *Noi.md* – 906, *IPN.md* – 635. We conclude that the percentage of materials that pay attention to social problems out of the total of products of *IPN.md* is 62%, out of the total of products of *ZiarulNațional.md* – 61%, and out of the total of products of *Noi.md* – 44%.

“The news in brief” materials occupy the second place, which fall within the so-called social entertainment category. Therefore, we got:

- in TV journalism, most of this type of materials were broadcast by *Moldova 1* – 462 materials, followed by *Publika TV* with 416 materials, and on the third place is *Jurnal TV* with 160 materials;
- in radio journalism, the primacy belongs to *Vocea Basarabiei* with 458 materials, followed by *Radio Chişinău* with 424 and, finally, *Radio Moldova* with 337 materials;
- in print press we have the following data: *Moldova Suverană* published 310 materials, *Timpul* – 299, and *Jurnal de Chişinău* – 139;
- in online journalism, the news portal *Noi.md* contains 861 materials, *ZiarulNațional.md* – 484, and *IPN.md* – 283 materials.

The fewest materials are those that publish and promote positive practices, they constitute 11% out of the total of analyzed TV products, 17% out of the total of analyzed radio products, 18% out of the total of analyzed print press products and 13% out of the total of analyzed portals products.

This demonstrates that our society is facing major problems that cannot be solved unless the entire society gets involved, and social journalism is one of the most effective tools to disseminate this type of information and socialize with the masses. At the same time, the small number of materials that promote positive practices, we believe, is caused not only by their absence, but also by journalists' huge interest in sensational events. We note that in this period of time only *Radio Moldova* broadcast more or less, events that promote positive practices, which constitute about $\frac{1}{4}$ of the total content of the radio broadcast product. This research confirmed our idea, set out in previous chapters, which claims that social journalism is a priority, the journalism that focuses on social problems and the ways to solve them. It's important to mention that out of all 12 analyzed media institutions, only 2 – *Moldova 1* (TV channel) and *Radio Moldova* (radio station) ensured a satisfactory balance among materials that address social issues, materials that are called “news in brief” (entertainment) and materials that promote positive practices.

The age category about which is narrated has been another variable which allowed us to discover that most journalistic materials on social field refers to the adult population. Of the 5 355 of TV products, 3 245 are materials in which is being stated about the adult population, they represent 61% out of the analyses materials. Radio stations broadcast 2 207 materials about adult population which represents 57% out of the total. Newspapers published 1 121 materials, which constitute 67% out of the total of 1 667 materials, and news portals – 2 809, which represents 58% out of 4 849 materials.

Materials that do not refer to any age category are on the second position. Most of them consist of information that do not involve the human factor and fall into the category of useful and warning information.

We highlight the fact that children and pensioners rarely become the protagonists of the journalistic materials. The percentage of the materials that belong to this category is:

- in TV journalism – 9% and 3% of the second one;
- in radio journalism – 9% and 6 % of the second one;
- in print press – 8% and 2% of the second one;
- in online journalism – 6 % and 1% of the second one.

Usually, these categories of population are tangentially approached, in the context of events in which it is mainly spoken about adults. Materials, whose protagonists are children and pensioners, in most cases, report about unusual situations: rapes, homicides, suicides, murders, robberies, burglaries

committed by them, physical and sexual abuse etc. The local mass media almost totally lacks positive materials about under agers and pensioners, except the materials made on June 1st – International Children’s Day, and also materials that retold about various positive practices implemented by certain people of the third age.

Next variable is *characters’ gender*. In all types of media: radio, TV, print press, news portals, the largest category proved to be the materials that do not refer to the protagonists’ gender. Neutral media coverage is used most often either for events without direct human involvement, or when media coverage has an informative-general purpose: either when protagonists’ gender has no value for the story of the event, or they are representatives of various professions, occupations, religions, national and sexual minorities etc. Therefore, out of 5 355 TV products, 2 285 do not refer to the protagonists’ gender which represents 43% of the analysed materials.

Radio stations broadcast 1 435 materials, which represents 37% out of the total. Newspapers published 744 materials that constitute 45% out of the total of 1 667 materials, and news portals – 1 914, which is 40% out of 4 849 materials.

If in TV journalism, online and print press, on the second place there are the materials that tell about men, on the third place – materials that tell about both men and women, and the fewest materials are about women or the ones that talk about their problems, in radio journalism the second place is occupied by materials involving both women and men, third place – materials that focus on men as their protagonists, and the fewest materials are about women.

This analysis reveals that out of the total of products, the materials involving men constitute:

- on TV channels – 32 %;
- on radio stations – 23 %;
- in print press – 25 %;
- in online – 36 %.

Whereas, materials involving women constitute:

- on TV channels – 7 %;
- on radio stations – 7 %;
- in print press – 9 %;
- in online – 8 %.

This striking discrepancy between the percentage of materials involving men and the one involving women shows that gender equality is not a professional value yet in local mass media. The situation is far from being a good one not only quantitatively but especially in terms of quality, since men are presented, first of all, as active citizens, professionals, experts or promoters of positive practices, while women are mainly the protagonists of the materials with a negative message, that retell about cases of domestic and sexual violence, robberies, burglaries, child abandonment, murders etc. Therefore, women as active social actors are disadvantaged in local media products, as well as the problems they face.

Although there are very few, the materials with a positive message tell about educational system or in which women appear as mothers, housewives. Thus, the contemporary woman in local journalism appears to be either a mother, a teacher, a victim of abuse, or a criminal. We note the fact that women's marginalization in mass media is not so much the result of journalists' attitude towards this category, but the consequence of the social marginalization phenomenon of women in the Moldovan society.

The accurate evaluation of the potential informational amount in order to find out the most current and important events, the selection and systematization of the collected factual material based on its social value and the interest and expectations of the society are activities that ensure a qualitative media coverage of social problems. Although they have a short-term horizon, these activities give meaning to the act of creation and allow media discourse to get adjusted to the magnitude of the problem.

The last variable is *the environment in which the event occurred*. The analysis of the TV product on social field has proved the fact that most materials broadcast both by *Publika TV* and *Moldova 1* do not refer to the environment in which the event occurred or protagonists' living environment. These TV channels broadcast 1 022 (*Publika TV*) and 800 (*Moldova 1*) materials. From a quantitative perspective, materials about urban events are on the second place, 818 were broadcast on *Publika TV*, and 447 on *Moldova 1*. Materials that focus on rural events are on the third place: *Publika TV* with 673, and *Moldova 1* with 289 materials. According to this variable, we ascertain:

- the total product of *Publika TV* includes: 41% of materials that do not refer to the living environment, 32% retell about urban areas, and 27% about rural areas;

- the total product of *Moldova 1* includes: 52% materials that do not refer to the living environment, 29% retell about urban areas, and 19% about rural areas.

The situation is different at *Jurnal TV*. Most materials that have been broadcast by this TV channel for six months focus on events that occurred in urban areas – 868, then in rural areas – 270, and, finally, the materials that do not make any reference to the living environment – 168. We ascertain that the total product of *Jurnal TV* includes 66% of materials that focus on events occurred in urban areas, 21% rural areas, and 13% of materials that do not refer to the living environment.

This difference can be explained by the area of media coverage and of the territory that is covered by these TV channels. Therefore, *Jurnal TV* is a local TV channel and it mainly focuses on urban reality, especially the one in Chisinau, whereas *Publika TV* and *Moldova 1*, that have national coverage, broadcast diverse materials from all over the country. It is important to say that most materials that do not refer to protagonists' residence environment or the environment in which the event took place contain information that concerns the whole country or they are materials that talk about national social problems and fall into the category of useful and warning information. Most analytical materials do not focus on environment, but on the analyzed tendency, phenomenon or problem.

The analysis of the radio product highlighted the fact that most events that have been broadcast are those that occurred in urban areas – 1 474 materials, with an insignificant difference of 90 materials it is followed by materials that do not locate the problem and do not refer to protagonists' residence environment. Materials that focus on events that took place in rural areas are on the third place, with 990 materials.

Radio Chișinău and *Vocea Basarabiei* mostly broadcast in this period of time materials that do not refer to the living environment – 489 (Radio Chisinau) and 520 (Vocea Basarabiei) materials. Materials that reflected the urban reality are on the second place – 476 (Radio Chisinau) and 450 (Vocea Basarabiei), and on the third place there are materials referring to rural areas – 111 (Radio Chisinau) and 357 (Vocea Basarabiei).

The situation is different at *Radio Moldova*. Most materials that have been broadcast for six months by this radio station contain events that occurred in urban areas – 548, materials that retell about rural areas are only with 26 less, which means 522 materials, and 375 materials do not refer to the living

environment. The research has proved that Radio Moldova is the only media institution that tackles equally both urban and rural realities, and the correlation among these three types of materials is balanced and successful.

In print press, the situation is as follows: in *Timpul* and *Jurnal de Chişinău* newspapers, in quantitative terms, the primacy belongs to materials that do not refer to the environment in which the event occurred or to protagonists' living environment – 339 out of 632 materials (*Timpul*) and 189 out of 420 (*Jurnal de Chişinău*). In *Moldova Suverană* newspaper, the primacy belongs to materials about events that took place in urban areas – 290 out of 615. The second and third place, in *Timpul* and *Jurnal de Chişinău* newspapers, are occupied by materials that focus on the events that occurred in urban areas and those in rural areas. In *Moldova Suverană*, materials that do not refer to the environment in which the event took place or protagonists' living environment are on the second place, but on the third, there are the materials that focus on rural areas.

The products published on news portals are distributed as follows: most materials do not refer to the environment in which the event took place or protagonists' living environment. There are 1 111 materials out of 1 744 on *Ziarulnaţional.md*, whereas *IPN.md* and *Noi.md* gave priority to events that occurred in urban areas. Therefore, *IPN.md* published 696 materials out of 1 030, and *Noi.md* – 1 310 out of 2 075. On the second place, on *Ziarulnaţional.md*, there are materials about urban reality, but on *IPN.md* and *Noi.md* – materials that do not refer to the living environment. The third place goes to materials that focus on rural areas, the same as in other mass media elements mentioned above.

We conclude:

- materials that reflect the urban reality in TV journalism constitute 40% out of the total; in radio journalism – 38%; in print press – 36%, and in online journalism – 50%;
- materials that reflect the rural reality represent in TV journalism 23% out of the total, in radio journalism – 26%, in print press – 17%, and in online journalism – 8%.

These data demonstrate that mass media focuses its attention, primarily, on the urban reality, especially on the one in Chisinau and this is because, first, the intensity of producing social events is higher in the capital than it is in any other city/ town, district or village in the Republic of Moldova. Secondly, most of the central institutions are in Chisinau, which are responsible for

social policies, as well as the institutions empowered to manage or solve social problems, these are the institutions which mass media often calls to get official information. Thirdly, most of the national media institutions are in Chisinau, therefore the media coverage of the events in this environment is quicker and has a lower cost of production.

Social journalism, since it gets involved in social life and has a huge influence on human consciousness and behavior, earns an increasingly big territory of being distinguished because it is a strong promoter of ideas and can quickly integrate a large number of people, can create a certain mood in the community, can form attitudes and public opinions, can make the social individuals organize and carry out their social activities. Therefore, social journalism research, in order to identify the problems it faces at the moment, to determine solutions to these problems and to make it more efficient, becomes a priority in contemporary communication sciences.

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