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**Cuprins**  
**Contents**

- Unity in Differences: Multiculturalism and Ethnic Identity .....5**  
Ali GUNES
- Roles and Values of Qualitative Methodology in Communication Studies: Application on Media Convergence Research.....21**  
Rodica Melinda SUTU
- Building Legitimacy during the 2012 Romanian Parliamentary Elections. The Normalization of Online Political Discourse..... 47**  
Cătălina GRIGORAȘI, Florența TOADER
- We are not Entering an Era of Minimal Effects – Towards a Sleeper Effect Approach..... 77**  
Raluca BUTUROIU
- International Mobility of Football Players and its Effects under Challenge of Globalization Process in Turkey..... 93**  
Zelha ALTINKAYA
- The Correlations Between the Economic Higher Education, Marketing Science and the Knowledge-Based Economy..... 105**  
Gabriela Iuliana MUNTEANU, Neluța MITEA
- The People and their Networks:  
Social Media and the Development of Public Space..... 129**  
Camelia GRĂDINARU



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Pag. 5-20

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**Abstract:**

*This paper discusses the interacting concepts of multiculturalism and ethnic identity in a general way. In so doing, first, it defines multiculturalism and ethnic identity, along with the ways in which multiculturalism and ethnic identity were perceived before World War II. Secondly, the paper examines in what manner multiculturalism, with its practices, has developed in Western World and elsewhere and debates that there has been close relationship between culture and ethnic identity. Finally, the paper explores the future of multiculturalism and multi-ethnic identity and suggests the ways of how unity in differences of cultures and ethnic identities may be achieved through the practices of what Fabienne Doucet and Carola Suarez-Orozco call "Transcultural identities" or through what Homi K. Bhabha coins the "Third Space of enunciation". Even though there is no ideal place where "Transcultural identities" or the "Third Space of enunciation" are fully practiced, this view of culture and ethnic identity liberally intends not only to destroy the old homogenous hierarchal "purity" of relationship and assimilation of cultures and ethnic identities but also to create multiple spaces for manoeuvring multiple cultures, roles and identities in ambivalent, flexible and vacillating ways with mutual understanding and recognition of cultural, economic and political rights of ethnic and minority groups within the dominant indigenous society and culture in the contemporary period.*

**Keywords:**

*Multiculturalism, ethnicity, transcultural identity, third space, culture*

## **UNITY IN DIFFERENCES: MULTICULTURALISM AND ETHNIC IDENTITY**

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The migrations of modern times. . . have transplanted themselves according to some social, religious, economic or political determination, or some peculiar mixture of these. There has therefore been something in the re-movements analogous in nature to religious schism. The people have taken with them only a part of the total culture. . . . The culture which develops on the new soil must therefore be bafflingly alike and different from the parent culture: it will be complicated sometimes by whatever relations are established with some native race and further by immigration from other than the original source. In this way, peculiar types of culture-sympathy and culture-clash appear. (Eliot, 1949, pp. 63-4).

The 1950s and 1960s underwent radical social, political and cultural changes in Western World, particularly in America and Britain, not only blurring and challenging the traditional notion and construction of concepts such as politics, nation, state, culture, ethnicity, race and identity but also giving rise to the construction of new concepts to represent these changes or what Gregory Jay argues “global shifts of power, population, and culture in the era of globalization and ‘post-colonialism’” (2011, p. 1. See also Bhabha, 1996; Kymlicka, 2002; Doucet and Suarez-Orozco, 2006 and Kymlicka, 2007). Two of these new concepts, often interchangeably and collaterally used in the debates, are multiculturalism and ethnic identity, yet these concepts are not peculiar only to Western world, where people from different cultures and ethnic backgrounds have been a reality for some time, but it is a reality that “most countries today are [also] culturally diverse”, and “the world’s 184 independent states contain over 600 living language groups, and 5000 ethnic groups. In very few countries can the citizen be said to share the same language, or belong to the same ethno-national group” (Kymlicka, 1995, p. 1. See also Nielson, 1985; Gurr, 1993 and Laczko, 1994). As a result of this new phenomenon as well as the recent growing demand of multicultural and ethnic groups for the recognition of their cultural differences and identities through political consensus, many countries

across the contemporary global world have had to re-optimize their domestic politics, even though there is still long way to go for stopping these debates and settling a plausible ground for these hot issues.

This paper will discuss these interacting concepts of multiculturalism and ethnic identity in a general way. In so doing, first, it will define multiculturalism and ethnic identity, alongside how multiculturalism and ethnic identity were perceived before World War II. Secondly, the paper will examine in what manner multiculturalism, with its practices, has developed in Western World and elsewhere, together with the inseparable relationship between culture and ethnic identity. Finally, the paper will explore the future of multiculturalism and multi-ethnic identity and will suggest the ways of how unity in differences of cultures and ethnic identities may be achieved through the practices of what Fabienne Doucet and Carola Suarez-Orozco (2006) call “Transcultural identities” (p. 180) or through what Homi K. Bhabha (1996) coins the “Third Space of enunciation” (p. 37). Even though there is no ideal place where “Transcultural identities” or the “Third Space of enunciation” are fully practiced, this view of culture and ethnic identity liberally intends not only to destroy the old homogenous hierarchal “purity” of relationship and assimilation of cultures and ethnic identities but also to create multiple spaces for manoeuvring multiple cultures, roles and identities in ambivalent, flexible and vacillating ways with mutual understanding and recognition of cultural, economic and political rights of ethnic and minority groups within the dominant indigenous society and culture in the contemporary period.

Multiculturalism and ethnic identity, like many others, are multi-faceted, ambivalent, flexible and fluid concepts to define, even though they immediately denote the perception of different cultures and identities coexisting side by side in larger societies across the world. In *OED*, multiculturalism is defined as “relating to or containing several cultural or ethnic groups within a society”, and ethnic minority as “the fact of belonging to a particular race” or “a group of people from a particular culture or of a particular race living in a country where the main group is of a different culture or race” (Hornby, 2010, p. 500). Likewise, Edward Quinn (2006) considers multiculturalism “a contemporary movement” which includes “ethnic and minority groups” and cultures in a given society (p. 270). Moreover, Will Kymlicka (2012) views multiculturalism and ethnic

identity almost in a parallel way to *OED*, yet he also classifies the types of multicultural or ethnic groups which move and reside in certain societies. For him, “the term ‘multicultural’ covers many different forms of cultural pluralism, each of which raises its own challenges”, and “cultural diversity [or differences] arise from the incorporation of previously self-governing, territorially concentrated cultures into a larger state” as in Canada, and Kymlicka calls “concentrated culture” “**national minorities**”, which wish “to maintain themselves as distinct societies alongside the major culture, and demand various forms of autonomy or self-government to ensure their survival as distinct societies” (p. 10). The next multicultural and multi-ethnic diversity, Kymlicka asserts, results from “the individual and familial immigration [particularly after World War II]. Such immigrants often coalesce into loose association”, which he calls ‘**ethnic groups**’”, and he argues that these ethnic groups “typically wish to integrate into the larger society, and to be accepted as full members of it. While they seek greater recognition of their ethnic identity, their aim is not to become a separate and self-governing nation along with the larger society but to modify the institutions and law of the mainstream society to make them accommodate their cultural differences” (pp. 10-1). Kymlicka also adds **labour workers** or what he calls “**guest-workers**” to the list of multicultural or ethnic groups, who “were originally seen as only temporary residents have become *de facto* immigrants. For example, Turkish guess workers in Germany have become permanent residents, with their families, and Germany is often the only home known to their children (and now grandchildren)” (pp. 17-9). In their “Introduction” to *Democracy, Nationalism and Multiculturalism*, however, Ramón Máiz and Ferran Requejo (2005) have a different approach to multicultural and ethnic groups and relate them to “human freedom” and mutual benefit which each culture gets through their interacting “dialogues”: that is what Máiz and Requejo call “intercultural dialogue”, which enables psychologically and physically the members of each particular multicultural or ethnic group to cross the borders of their own cultural enclosure:

Multiculturalism is basically a theory about human freedom and well-being and rests on a distinct conception of the good life. It is grounded in the three-fold belief that human beings are culturally embedded, that every culture represents a limited

vision of the good life and benefits from a dialogue with others, and, finally, that a good society should foster conditions of intercultural dialogue and should ideally be dialogically constituted. While appreciating that human beings are culturally embedded and need a stable cultural home, multiculturalism also stresses the importance of active engagement with other cultures. For it human beings need both stability and openness, both a culture of their own and access to other cultures. It values intercultural dialogue not as a way of coping with the *fact* of cultural diversity, but rather to exploit the *value* of cultural diversity and to reap its ontological, epistemological, moral and other benefits. (pp. 16-8. See also Alibhai-Brown, 2000; Hewitt, 2007; Putnam, 2007 and Uberoi, 2008)

Máiz and Requejo are not alone in their views of multiculturalism and ethnic identity, but Will Kymlicka also has almost similar views within the context of social democracy in which “multiculturalism is characterized as a feel-good celebration of ethno-cultural diversity, encouraging citizens to acknowledge and embrace the panoply of customs, traditions, music, and cuisine that exist in a multi-ethnic society” without being subjected to racism, discrimination and assimilation (Kymlicka, 2012, p. 4). I agree with these last views as well in the sense this mutual-benefit-relationship does not intend to assimilate one culture entirely, which will eventually lead to the complete loss of a particular culture and identity, yet it is based upon the perception of how to enrich the understanding of life and thus enlarge the borders of liveable common space.

Multiculturalism is not a recent phenomenon, but it is as old as human history since different people and different cultures have always found throughout history the ways of living together in the same place or at the same time in peaceful ways, and respect for diversity, ingenious flexibility, and resiliency was familiar features of many historic empires such as the Ottoman Empire (see McCabe, 1912; Locke, 1955 and Barkey, 2008). After the geographical discoveries in the fifteenth century, I think, the volume of contact between multicultural and ethnic groups increased particularly when European traders and merchants travelled to other parts of the world and communicated with other cultural constructions and ethnic people, and this contact enriched European cultural and ethnic spaces

and vice versa, even though the geographical discoveries also brought about the beginning of modern colonialism, imperialism and slavery based on the assumption of otherness.

Prior to the Second World War, there was a negative attitude towards multiculturalism and ethnic identity particular in the wake of the French Revolution in 1789, which fostered powerfully the idea of individual liberty, independence, nationalism, national culture and eventually nation-state as the devotion to the interest and culture of a particular nation. The ideology of “nation-state” nurtured the view and policy of seamless nation and national culture or what Homi K. Bhabha (1994) terms “the essentialized or idealized Arnoldian notion of “culture” as an architectonic assemblage” (p. 54) because cultural and ethnic diversity was perceived as a threat to the unity of national identity, culture and order. In addition, it is also possible to see this kind of assimilative policy of cultures and ethnic identities in the America’s traditional metaphoric concept of “**melting pot**” with a huge meaning behind it. In general, the American “melting pot” policy aimed at creating “a common New World Culture” through “oppressive assimilation” or a “dominant or ‘hegemonic’ white culture” in a hierarchal way (Jay, 2011, p. 2). As to the American “melting pot” policy, for example, Gregory Jay gives the following information:

The United States’s Naturalization Act of 1789 declared that only “white” immigrants could eventually become citizens. In fact, admission to the socio-cultural pot of acceptance was restricted at first only to certain European ethnic groups (the English, Dutch, German, French, and Scandinavian), so that others such as the Irish, the Jews, the Italians, the Greeks, and the Slavs all experienced discrimination in the process. Hotels, clubs, and housing developments routinely advertised ethnic discrimination against these groups; just as Jim Crow segregation was seen in the ubiquitous “white” and “coloured” signs placed on water fountains, waiting rooms, theatres, and parks. (pp. 2-3)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Jim Crow is a character created by English comedian Thomas Rice in 1828. In Rice’s representation, Jim Crow is a black character who is idiot, primitive, and he is thus exposed to humiliation. While representing character, Rice blackened his face with coal. Moreover, there was also the Jim Crow law in America which enforced racial discrimination and segregation in the south between 1877 and 1965.

As seen in the discussions above, before World War II, political attitudes towards multicultural, ethnic identity and diversity in the West were characterized very much by “wholesale assimilation” into a sense of unique national identity such as Britishness or into a pure “white” identity as in America (Bentley, 2008, p. 17). This policy was obviously related to “a range of illiberal and undemocratic relationships of hierarchy, justified by racist ideologies that explicitly propounded the superiority of some peoples and cultures and their right to rule over others” (Kymlicka, 2012, p. 5). As Will Kymlicka (2012) argues, “these ideologies were widely accepted throughout the Western world and underpinned both domestic laws (e.g., racially biased immigration and citizenship policies) and foreign policies (e.g., in relation to overseas colonies)” (p. 5).

In the wake of World War II, however, there have been strong reactions against the pre-war politics of “wholesale assimilation” of multicultural and ethnic identity into a single, unified, and fixed subject and culture as in a “nation-state” or against racial segregation and discrimination when multiculturalists have thoroughly committed themselves to “the instantiation of social and cultural differences within a democratic socius” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 5) or to what Homi K. Bhabha (1996) calls “the liberal dialectic of recognition”, “the presumption of equal respect” for cultural diversity” and “a non-differential concept of cultural time” (p. 56). This new post-war situation has clearly necessitated alternative policies and approaches or “a new ideology of the equality of races and peoples” to achieve the purpose of unity in differences regardless of the background of any ethnic identity, culture and religion (Kymlicka, 2012, p. 6) since as Nicos Poulantzas (1978) plainly points out, the old policies of the nation-state or ethnocentrism homogenizes cultures and differences by mastering social time, “by means of a single, homogeneous measure, which only reduces the multiple temporalities...by encoding the distances between them” (p. 110). Before debating this “new ideology of the equality of races and peoples”, it will be useful to look briefly at the causes behind this radical shift of perception in the way

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The term became a disparaging epithet for black and a designation for their segregated life.

multicultural and ethnic identity was viewed until the Second World War.

One of these causes is the development of democratization and liberal movements across the world particularly across the Western world after the Second World War, which have aimed at “attaining and sustaining a satisfactory level of political equality among the citizens of a democratic country” without regard to drawback of cultural and ethnic differences. As a political system, is new in its full practices, even though there were tentative experimentations. Robert A. Dahl (1998) maintains:

In 1900, democratic political systems existed in only six countries –and in all but one, New Zealand, the suffrage was restricted to male citizens. What is more, in the southern United States, most African-Americans were, in practice, excluded from voting, and would remain so until the mid-1960s. By 1930, the number of democratic countries had increased to twenty one, although in three –Belgium, France, and Switzerland–women were still excluded. By mid-century the democratic countries numbered twenty five– several of which would collapse into dictatorship. By the end of the century, out of 191 countries in the world, more than seventy were democracies and they included almost half the world’s population. (p. 52)

In *OED*, democracy, whose origin goes back to the ancient Greece, is simply defined as “a system of government in which all the people of a country can vote to elect their representatives” and undertakes to protect “fair and equal treatment of everyone in an organization, etc., and their right to take part in making decisions” (Hornby, 2010, p. 388). Likewise, Joseph A. Schumpeter (2003) argues that democracy enables people “to produce a government, or else an intermediate body which in turn will produce a national executive or government”, and he succinctly defines a democratic system at its basic as “that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote” (p. 269). Furthermore, Robert A. Dahl (1971) gives seven key criteria that are vital for a democratic system, or what he prefers to use the concept “polyarchy”: 1) control over governmental decisions about policy constitutionally vested in elected

officials; 2) relatively frequent, fair and free elections; 3) universal adult suffrage; 4) the right to run for public office; 5) Freedom of expression; 6) access to alternative sources of information that are not monopolised by either the government or any other single group and 7) freedom of association (i.e. the right to form and join autonomous associations such as political parties, interest groups, etc.). Finally, For Guillermo O'Donnell points out:

A truly accountable political system requires three components. One is *democratic*, enabling citizens to choose their rulers in free and fair elections and to participate and express themselves in other political processes. The second is *liberal*, limiting the power of the state to encroach on the basic rights of the person, and thus affirming civil liberties and minority rights. The third is *republican*, providing a rule of law and good government through institutions of horizontal accountability that check and balance executive (and other forms of) power, while holding all actors, public and private, equal before the law. When these three normative goals are combined, we have the second, higher threshold of democracy, what I call *liberal democracy*. (Qtd in Dahl, 1998, p. 52. See also Fishkin, 1998; Menocal, 2007 and Chan, 2002).

As the discussions above indicate, democratic system definitely challenges and questions the very basis of authoritarian, monarchic and oligarchic systems based on the discrimination, marginalization and exclusion in the power-sharing and decision-making processes of a society. Moreover, the increasing growth of liberal democratic values has also undermined the very basis of the old policies of race and skin-colour, along with the segregationist and discriminative policies and attitudes towards different cultures, ethnic groups and identities, even though there is still a long way to go in this direction. As seen today, however, those systems or people, who had established and validated their identities, cultures, world views and supremacy in relation to their moribund policies based upon ideological hierarchy, race and skin-colour, gradually go out of play, leaving their places to freedom, equality and what Will Kymlicka (2012) calls “a single undifferentiated model of citizenship on all individuals” (p. 6). Eventually, the post-war development of democratic and liberal policies in many countries has contributed positively to the extension

of fundamental political rights to those groups, notably women, racial and ethnic minorities, who had been excluded in the past from these intrinsic rights: it is a kind of egalitarian world view as human identity in general.

The second cause behind the development for “a single undifferentiated model of citizenship on all individuals”, multicultural and ethnically diverse identity is the legacy of the Second world War which virtually crumbled the undisputable power of Western empires and colonizers, “beginning with India/Pakistan in the immediate post-war years [on 15 August 1947], and spreading across the entire globe over the next three decades” (Morrison, 2003, p. 13). As Gregory Jay (2011) argues, the dismantling of Western empires and colonizers has obviously resulted in “global shifts of power...in the era of globalization and ‘post-colonialism’” (p. 1). What is more important about the legacy of World War II as well as about the wholesale repulsion of European colonialism from Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean is that Western countries, particularly Britain, have started receiving many immigrants from their former colonies just after the years following the Second World War. As Nick Bently (2008) points out, for instance, “From the 1950s onwards Britain has developed into a multicultural nation as groups of people moved from parts of the Caribbean, South East Asia and Africa (as well as other parts of the world) and settled in Britain, often in communities that gathered together in Britain’s urban areas” (p. 17). This new pattern of immigrations has shifted not only the demographic make-up of British society but also its culture and historical consciousness in profound ways - the ways in which histories, cultures and multi-ethnic identities have unprecedentedly intermixed with each other, influenced and benefitted each other and created free space for each other not only to manoeuvre physically and psychologically as Steven Connor (1996) argues in his book *The English Novel in History 1950–1995*:

The conditions of extreme cultural interfusion, with the meetings and conflicts of cultural traditions brought about by large-scale migrations as a result of war and post-colonial resettlements, have combined with the growth of an ever-more interdependent global economy to create a splintering of history in the post-war world, a loss of the vision of history as one and continuous. But these very same conditions of mutual impingement have acted to make it impossible to maintain any

form of local or individual history in isolation from all the other histories, and in doing so have enlarged the scope of the conversation and collective memory that is constructed in the narration of histories. In a sense it has become impossible to reflect on one's condition other than historically. (p. 135)

As Steven Connor writes in the quotation above, the transformations and immigrations of post-war population and culture have brought about a whole range of cultural exchanges and hybridisations and made it “impossible to maintain any form of local or individual history in isolation from all the other histories, and in doing so have enlarged the scope of the conversation and collective memory that is constructed in the narration of histories” once there is “extreme cultural interfusion”.

However, the idea of maintaining “any form of local or individual history in isolation from all the other histories” as well as of “extreme cultural interfusion” has been under attack for some time, particularly since the attacks of September 11, 2001 on New York and Washington from Western politicians such the former French President Nicolas Sarkozy and Angela Merkel, the Chancellor of Germany as well as a Norwegian fundamentalist Christian terrorist, Anders Breivik, who attacked on 22 July 2011 and killed over seventy young people at a youth camp, declaring that “he condemned ‘multiculturalism’ and the immigration of non-white, non-Christians to Europe’ (Jay, 2011, p. 4). Moreover, British Prime Minister David started a new international debate on 5 February 2011 with his speech at the Munich security conference in which he, like Anders Breivik, condemned “Islamist extremism” and in part blamed its rise in England to “state multiculturalism”: “Under the doctrine of state multiculturalism, ‘he said’, “we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and apart from the mainstream. We’ve failed to provide a vision of society to which they feel they want to belong. We’ve even tolerated these segregated communities behaving in ways that run completely counter to our values.” He argued that “the Islamic communities of Britain have been a breeding ground for ‘terrorists’...to the extent that these communities do not assimilate to the majority culture’s ideology of ‘universal human rights’ and secular democracy”, and eventually Cameron claimed that “their separatism shows the failure of multiculturalism” (pp. 3-4). Critics have seen the discourses of both

Cameron and Anders Breivik in a way that they underpinned “Islamophobia” across Europe.

In my view, there may be two reasons behind such discourses. First, the words of Sarkozy, Merkel, Cameron and even Breivik do not change the reality that Western societies, like many other non-Western societies, are already multicultural and multi-ethnic, so that their words are just rhetoric and political. Instead of dealing properly with the roots of dissatisfaction in their countries such as poverty, assimilation, racism and segregation, they just give message to their domestic voters and raise their patriotic and nationalist feeling, which obviously brings both psychological and physical division. The second one is linked to international policies of Western countries towards Islamic World in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine and so on. Although they live in Western countries, ethnic groups do not forget fully their cultures and identities of their origin. When it is a religious issue, it is very strong not only among Muslims but also among Christians and Jewish, and in this respect, Western countries should look once again through their international policies. Hence it is not multiculturalism but the politic of some Western counties has failed as multiculturalism still seems an alternative way of coexisting and living in peace and harmony.

Thus, what is obviously needed is to enlarge in good faith “the scope of the conversation and collective memory” of multicultural and multi-ethnic ethnic groups (Connor, 1996, p. 135), or to achieve what I call unity in differences of multicultural and multi-ethnic ethnic groups in the contemporary global world. In this direction, the post-war period witnessed a number of struggles in America and Europe from the end of World to the 1970s, and these struggles still continue in different ways across the world. Eventually these struggles for decolonization and multicultural, ethnic and minority rights as well as the struggle against racial discrimination and polarization have eventually compelled many countries such as America, Australia, Canada, and Britain not only to expand further the boundaries of liberal democratic citizenship and multi-ethnic identities – “cultural recognition, economic redistribution, and political participation” (Kymlicka, 2012, p. 8) - in their countries but also to envision a new social structure and relationship “with many different cultures living equally and side-by-side” and puts “an emphasis on the separate characteristics and virtues of particular cultural groups” by eradicating radically “the former culture of white supremacy, a culture of

legalized bigotry and discrimination” - ethnic and racial hierarchies and prejudices, gender exclusion, and so on (Jay, 2011, p. 3).

This new social structure, relationship, strategy and perception, which make multi-ethnic and minority identities not only more visible and representable in social, political and economic realms of society without being subjected to any discrimination but also more flexible, ambivalent, and adaptable to different cultures and identities, may be defined as what Fabienne Doucet and Carola Suarez-Orozco (2006) call “Transcultural identities” (pp. 180-1) or what Homi K. Bhabha (1994) terms the “Third Space of enunciation” or “hybridization” of multicultural, ethno-relationships and spaces (pp. 37-9). In this new positing of life, different cultures and identities are visibly mobilized not only to destroy to some extent old homogenous and stringent hierarchical relationships and assimilation of cultures and multi-ethnic identities but also to create spaces for “transcultural [ethnic] identities” when there is a fusion of “aspects of two or more cultures” – the fusion of the culture and identity of origin and “new culture or cultures” of the larger society as in Canada (Doucet and Suarez-Orozco, 2006, p. 181). In so doing, ethnic groups project and “synthesize an identity that does not require them to choose between cultures: rather, they are able to develop an identity that incorporates traits of both cultures, all while fusing additive elements” (p. 181). Fabienne Doucet and Carola Suarez-Orozco (2006) view “the transcultural identities as the most adaptive” of multicultural-identity politics “in this era of globalisation and multiculturalism. They blend the preservation of affective ties to the home culture with the acquisition of instrumental competencies required to cope successfully in the main stream culture. This identity not only serves the individual well, but it also benefits the society at large” (p. 182), and Everette V. Stonequist (1937) finds “such transcultural individuals” the best suited to become the “creative agents who might “contribute the solution of the conflict of races and cultures” (p. 15).

Finally, it seems in the discussions above that multicultural and multi-ethnic ethnic groups become more confident and aware of their cultures and multi-ethnic identities than before; they want their cultures and identities recognized; they want to share equal economic distribution and participate in liberal democratic decision-making processes of the country where they live, so that old assimilative, discriminative and ethnocentric culture and identity politics of nation-states are no longer feasible today. The key to successful adaptation of

multicultural and multi-ethnic identities is to achieve unity in differences, to develop the culture of coexistence and tolerance and create a language of tolerance and respect without non-discriminative discourses. Those who are at ease in this diverse social, cultural and political setting will be the most successful and will be able to accomplish higher levels of integration and adaptability as well as unity in difference. I would like to finish my paper with a proverb: "Greetings, I am pleased to see we are different. May we together become greater than the sum of both of us."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Traditional Vulcan Greeting, Star Trak by Surak in the Savage Curtain Episode of Star Trek. Star Trek is an American science fiction entertainment franchise created by Gene Roddenberry and currently under the ownership of CBS and Paramount. Retrieved October 26, 2013 from <http://www.slideshare.net/cowboyMontana/what-did-you-say-a-tutorial-on-intercultural-communication>

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Pag. 21-46

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**Abstract**

*The article describes how qualitative methodology earned a privileged place in social science research, due to its particular traits and unique strengths. The specific features of qualitative research are thoroughly examined in the corpus of this article, with reference to the relevant literature. The paper looks at the various methods of conducting qualitative inquiry such as case study, in depth interview and participant observation, and explains their importance in the research of mass communication, as well as their appropriateness and specific roles in the study of media convergence.*

**Keywords:**

*qualitative methodology,  
interview, case study,  
observation, mass  
communication,  
media convergence.*

**ROLES AND VALUES  
OF QUALITATIVE  
METHODOLOGY IN  
COMMUNICATION  
STUDIES:  
APPLICATION ON  
MEDIA CONVERGENCE  
RESEARCH**

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## **1. Introduction**

Qualitative research does not provide us with easy answers, simple truths or precise measurements; “it can be controversial, contradictory and ambiguous”. However, “it can be insightful, enlightening, emancipatory and fascinating”. Its methods are particularly relevant to answering media related communication research questions. The most appropriate theoretical framework for qualitative research is that offered by the cultural studies (Brennan, 2013: 2).

Paraphrasing Marshal McLuhan, according to whom “The Medium is the Message” (1965), the author of this article argues that the topic dictates the appropriate methodology. Therefore, when studying latent practices and phenomenon, the attempts of identification, measurement and adjustment to specific statistics, which quantitative traditional methodology does, might not bring positive results. The qualitative inquiry analyzes the subjective meanings and the social production of events and practices, by collecting non-standard data, and analyzing texts and images, rather than numbers and statistics. As referring to its relevance to the study of social sciences, the qualitative inquiry is considered a type of long time field observation, carried out in the proximity of the chosen phenomena, in order to investigate new perspectives and social context forms. Through extension, qualitative methodology fulfills the role of highlighting the essential differences and distinctive features of the phenomenon under study (Van Maanen et all, 1982; Flick, 2009; Baran, Davis, 2000).

The definitions of convergence depend on the individual perspective and tend to be as many as the number of persons studying or practicing it. Professor Larry Pryor, from the University of Southern California, maintains that a definition is essential because a new concept needs a common vocabulary. For Pryor, convergence is what takes place in the newsroom as editorial staff members work together to produce multiple products for multiple platforms to reach a mass audience with interactive content, often on a 24/7 timescale (Haile, 2003). Convergence is indeed a revolutionary form of journalism which is evolving in many parts of the world; therefore it

may vary from country to country, from culture to culture both within countries and media companies. It is also influenced by the power of digital technology, and the legal and economic factors in various countries and media trusts.

Many definitions of convergence focus on technology, such as Henry Jenkins's or Burnett and Marshal's view of convergence as a blending of the media, telecommunications and computer industry, as a coming together of all forms of mediation technology, and an ongoing process occurring at different intersections of media technologies, industries, content and audience (Burnett, Marshal, 2003; Jenkins, 2001). Gordon and Dailey et al approached the different dimensions of convergences through a typology of ownership, tactics, structure, information gathering, and presentation, on the one hand, and through a continuum of converged cooperation between news platforms by cloning, competition, content sharing and complete convergence, on the other hand (Gordon, 2003; Dailey et al, 2005). Singer tried a more inclusive definition, looking at profession, technology and media content, in her view of journalism convergence as a combination of news staff, technologies, products and geography from previously distinct print, broadcast and online media (Singer, 2004).

## **2. Qualitative inquiry: specific features**

The nature of qualitative inquiry is usually descriptive and participant observation is the method qualitative researchers chose to employ when investigating the behavior of the relevant subjects. The purpose of the research is to understand the meanings people attribute to various instances and activities in a social context. The theoretical assumption is that people act according to the meaning they attach to themselves and the others, and the emphasis of the scientific investigation goes to the everyday life and socially constructed significations. At first, the researcher has to identify the relevant topics in the studied environment, then identify and theoretically define the essential concepts and operationalize the concepts through the application of qualitative methodology. The next step is to develop research questions and hypotheses, and test them through constant comparative method (Flick, 2009; Jensen, Jankowski, 2002; Lull, 1988; Glaser, Strauss, 1967). One distinctive feature of the qualitative

methodology is that the terms and concepts are mainly used to guide the empirical investigation, and not as theoretical constructs developed in order to be tested and measured, which is often the case of quantitative research. The theoretical assumptions are built, in qualitative inquiry, from the case studies, when the authors get an insider's perspective on phenomena and practices they research.

The methodology differs according to each particular case, as a result of the topic and purpose of the research. Social science scholars argued that the nature of the research subject points out the most appropriate methodology, and underlined the lack of productivity when it comes to debates on the absolute best method. In the study of organizations, the participant observation was employed as empirical inquiry, but it was not sufficient to collect relevant data, and needed additional methods for a better analysis and discussion of results, such as semi-structured interviews or focus groups (Bulmer, 1984; Zelditch, 1970; Denzin, 1989). When researching media organizations, the most cited sources indicate participant observation as the main methodology for gathering relevant data from television newsroom or newspapers (Gans 1979; Tuchman 1978; Lester 1975; Fishman 1980).

In the last three decades, qualitative methodology proved its utility in mass communication research, either when investigating journalism education or practices and roles in newsrooms: selection and information gathering, production or delivery of the news. Furthermore, the work of qualitative social scientists have led to establishing various cultural environments appropriate for studying the new media practices which are developing in the context of the new technologies. As a matter of fact, the qualitative inquiry was the main method used in the last decade when examining the implications of adopting and implementing media convergence. When studying the adoption of convergence in a single ownership company with various media platforms, or the merger of different ownership companies, or through comparing multimedia newsrooms using new technologies in different countries, the researchers used one or mixed qualitative methods: case studies, observation, semi-structured or focus group interviews (Dupagne and Garrison, 2006; Aviles et al, 2008; Singer 2004; Marjoribanks, 2003; Kung-Shankleman, 2003; Haile, 2003).

Michael Dupagne and Bruce Garrison chose to investigate the effects of media convergence of different platforms on the journalists at Tampa News Corporation using non-participant observation and

semi-structured interviews, Timothy Marjoribanks focused on the relationship between convergence and workplace reorganization at newspaper holdings of News Corporation in the UK, Australia and the US, through case studies, interviews, field observation and document analysis, while Lucy Kung-Shankleman comparatively discusses, through in depth interviews and document analysis, the changes in the organizational culture of the BBC and CNN, as a consequence of globalization, digitalization and convergence (Dupagne, Garrison, 2006; Marjoribanks, 2003; Kung-Shankleman, 2003).

Before the explosion of the new technologies, the factors leading to qualitative methodology development were the social changes and the diversification of life style, which generated new cultural contexts and opened new perspectives. The research methods employing deductive theories, traditionally used in social science inquiry, proved to be inappropriate and insufficient to answer to the new challenges in social research, so that the scientist had to use inductive strategies instead.

In the traditional research design based on deductive theory, the first step in research is establishing a set of premises, as a result of rational reasoning. After establishing theoretical assumptions, logical consequences are deduced and subsidiary concepts are developed. The deductive theory is used to generate hypotheses and research questions, which are tested and may lead to scientific explanations for certain phenomena and laws (Dubin, 1978; Bryman 2004). Contrastively, inductive theory is built as a result of field observation and inquiry. Data and hypotheses are based on facts and situations observed during research. Essentially, the author of the research builds or uses the theories which most obviously explain what is known about a certain topic at a given moment. Afterwards, new tests are run, in the same way as if applying deductive theory (Godfrey-Smith, 2003; Dubin, 1978).

One of the schools of thought which use mostly qualitative methodology and inductive theory is constructivism or constructionism. The constructivists assert that people are actively involved in constructing reality, which they study as a social product of interaction and negotiations between various actors and institutions. According to constructivist epistemology, the reality and knowledge are the result of both social and cognitive processes (Flick, 2009; Bryman, 2004; Godfrey-Smith, 2003). Furthermore, sociologist Thomas Schwandt and media researcher Bonnie S. Brennan consider

that the reality is socially constructed and they support the active role of the social science scholars who, through their experience and contextual accounts, guide those who read their studies to construct their knowledge about the world. The scientists who use qualitative methodology rely on connotative meanings and language interpretations, through which they understand and explain concepts related to human experiences (Schwandt, 2000; Brennan, 2013). Under the same theoretical framework of cultural studies there is also the symbolic interactionism, a school of thought concerned with subjective meanings of facts and actions, and the way individuals attribute particular significations to their actions and their environment. Herbert Blumer is the initiator of this socio-psychological current, which was later developed in the American philosophical tradition by pragmatists Robert Park, Charles Horton Cooley and George Herbert Mead, representatives of Chicago School (Blumer, 1969; Flick, 2009; Baran & Davis, 2000).

In the case of the studies of mass communication, the constructivists approached the direction of systematic explanations of daily practices, through cultural interpretation. More precisely, the communication scholars insisted on the manner different social groups use cultural artifacts to construct a version of reality, to articulate and support a certain sense of identity or to point out certain forms of control or domination (Williams, 1983; Pauly, 1991). In the study of media convergence, researchers warned about the media monopoly as a result of media consolidation when big companies gain control of the supply of raw materials such as reports, stories and scripts, products such as newscasts and movies and distribution such as platforms of television, online or radio (Kolodzy, 2009; McChesney, 2003). They also pointed out the role of cultural differences in building the identity of the journalist working for new multimedia environment (Wilkinson, 2009; Kraeplin and Criado, 2005), the challenge of integration of the new skills and values generated by convergence journalism practice in the traditional media culture (Filak, 2009; Dupagne, Garrison, 2006), and the media managers' actions in shaping convergent news operations and creating new roles in the newsroom (Fisher, 2009; Kilbrew, 2005).

The main features of qualitative research list appropriateness of methods and theories, subjective perspectives of the participants, reflexivity of the researcher, variety of approaches and methods, the ability to understand the phenomena from the interior, construction of

reality, usage of text and language as an empirical material, and flexibility of the research design (Jensen, Jankowski, 2002; Flick, 2009; Babbie, 2013).

Critics of qualitative methodology argued that the author's reflexivity and reality construction from the perspectives of the participants in the study lead to lack of objectivity, which is a necessary requirement of scientific research, while in-depth inquiry of single cases prevent the replication and generalization of the study. Conceptually, the lack of validity, reliability and objectivity limit the value of qualitative inquiry, according to the critics of this methodology.

In traditional quantitative research, validity is the extent to which the results of the empiric investigation adequately reflect the meanings of the main concepts of the study. Specifically, the internal validity is the extent to which the results of the study correspond with the problem to be studied, while the external validity indicates the possibility of generalization of the results and to relate to similar studies. The reliability refers to the extent to which a particular technique, repeatedly applied to the same object of study, generates the same result every time (Brennan, 2013; Babbie, 2013).

The supporters of qualitative methodology tried to reformulate the traditional concepts of validity, reliability and objectivity, either by redefining them, from a qualitative research perspective, or by finding similar terminology, which relate semantically, but incorporate different conceptual dimensions. Therefore, the validity of the results of the qualitative study is regarded as a social construction of knowledge, a filter through which the credibility of observations, interpretations and generalizations are evaluated, but also as a reflexive rapport, which creates a strong connection between the researcher, the approached topics, and their constructed meanings. This complex procedure locates the validity in the scientific process and generates various relationships between the substance, interpretation and style of the research. So, the value of the research is influenced by the relationship between the observable elements, such as rituals and behaviors, the cultural, organizational and historical context in which the observation is carried out, the perspective from which the researchers approach the case, their degree of involvement, but also by the style of the research, which could be representational, rhetorical or authorial (Mishler, 1990; Altheide and Johnson, 1988; Wolcott, 1990). The alternative criteria to traditional quantitative

concepts such as validity, reliability and credibility are, in qualitative methodology, credibility, dependability, transferability, confirmability, authenticity, applicability and accuracy (Lincoln, Guba, 1985; Miles, Huberman, 1994).

### **3. Case studies**

The case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context and addresses a situation in which the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 1993: 59).

The scope of the case study is the precise description or reconstruction of a certain environment, which entails individuals, communities, organizations and institutions, a profound examination of particular instance of a phenomenon, for the purpose of the ideographical understanding of a particular case (Babbie, 2013; Regin & Becker, 1992). A significant advantage of the research employing case study as methodological tool is the opportunity to obtain detailed information, to analyze them in relation with other information, with the scope of visualizing the process or phenomenon in its integrity (Hartley, 1994; Sykes, 1990). The collected data are subjected to reflexivity and permanent reevaluation of the researcher, in order to look for new meanings, relevant to the study's results (Becker, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 2000). According to John Lofland, there are certain aspects of the social life which are appropriate to research as case studies: specific practices such as communication, instances of everyday life, interaction between two or more individuals, social roles and typologies, social and personal relationships, groups, organizations, subcultures life styles (Lofland, 2006).

The social scientists are equally concerned with the general elements and the particularities identified in the empirical investigation, but the final results of the case study emphasize the specific difference, and underline the salient and latent concepts as well as the particular meanings. The latter may result from the functional nature, the historical context, the economic, political, legal and aesthetical dimensions of the case study. The scholars start asking research questions, to follow certain themes, to interpret categories of data and to formulate hypotheses. In most of the cases the qualitative inquiry is oriented towards causal explanations, and the events are

sequentially perceived and contextually interpreted (Stake, 2006; Flick; 2009; Brennan, 2013).

The case study is the research method authors mostly use in organizational studies, when they investigate one or several organizations or groups inside the organizations; the purpose is to develop an in depth analysis on the context and processes of the phenomenon under study (Hartley, 1994). The studies of media organizations in the 70s show an obvious preference of communication scholars and sociologists for the case studies of one or several newsrooms; they investigated the motivations of the processes of news gathering and production, as well as the professional attitudes and values, practices and rituals of print and broadcast journalists (Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978; Lester 1975; Fishman 1980).

In the field of social sciences, getting significant results that can contribute to the understanding and explanation of a critical phenomenon relies heavily on choosing the right case study (Patton, 2002; Vaughan, 1992; Yin, 1989). Patton developed a typology of the case studies intentionally chosen by the researchers as relevant for their inquiry. The cases selected in purposive sampling are extreme or deviant; typical; those that show maximal variation of the sample; those selected according to the intensity of the interesting features, processes and experiences; the critical cases, which are particularly important for the functioning of a program; sensitive cases, those which are politically important; convenient cases, which are easiest to access under give conditions, and sometimes the only way to do an evaluation with limited resources of time and people (Patton 2002).

When it comes to new media technologies research, the cases chosen are typical to the phenomena of adopting and implementing media convergence in newsrooms that were separately structured when functioning as traditional platforms. The results of the field observation capture intensive phenomena and processes, both at organizational and individual level, caused by the challenges and difficulties of transition (Wilkinson, 2009; Dupagne & Garrison, 2006; Huang, 2006; Aviles, 2008; Singer 2004; Haile 2003).

The qualitative inquiry employing case study as the main method of scientific research is considered a useful tool of empirical investigation, suitable for description and analysis of the effects of complex phenomena, while researching a particular process in its own cultural and historical context, for the purpose of understanding complex social and organizational issues (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2003). As

a matter of fact, the case study, as principal investigative method, has been extensively used in the last ten years to examine the implications of media convergence in the newsrooms of various organizations in Europe and the United States, taking a multitude of approaches. They range from the example of successful convergence models such as the meaning and influence of convergence at the Tampa News Center, to the combined effects of globalizations and digitalization on the organizational culture of leading news media such as the BBC and CNN, to the changes in the organizational culture at the Orlando Sentinel, and to the comparative study of newsroom integration in Spain, Austria and Germany (Dupagne & Garrison, 2006; Huang, 2006, Aviles, 2008, Singer 2004; Marjoribanks, 2003; Kung-Shankleman, 2003; Haile, 2003).

The phenomenon of media convergence is relatively new in the mass communication literature. The case study method is particularly appropriate for the exploration of new social processes or behaviors that have been scarcely researched so far and yet have the potential to offer interesting themes and concepts that are difficult if not impossible to investigate quantitatively (Brennan, 2013).

### **3.1. Qualitative interviews**

In-depth or intensive interviews have been called one of the most powerful methods in qualitative research because they allow investigators to step into the mind of another person, to see and experience the world as they do themselves (McCracken, 1988:9).

The qualitative interview has been extensively employed in mass communication research, especially for the study of media organizations and their specific institutional procedures. When researching mass communication topics, the qualitative interview is a valuable methodological tool, which generates the necessary data for building research questions and hypotheses (Spradley, 1979; Briggs, 1986).

Gobrium and Holstein approached the study of social sciences from a constructivist perspective. They support the utilization of qualitative interview as a useful method to provide essential research data and argue that the in-depth interview is an active process of construction of reality, through circumstances that generate meanings that the interviewer might not be aware or willing to acknowledge (Gobrium & Holstein, 2002). Silverman place the interviewer and the interviewee on similar positions of providers of data and meanings for

the research project, equal partners in the process of construction of reality, through their direct contact with the environment and the context both the interviewer and the interviewee create by their interaction (Silverman, 1997).

Asking questions and write down the answers is a process specific to human nature, according to Babbie, because humans live in a society of the interview, as Fontana and Frey stated. They underline that the use of in-depth interview as main methodology to collect data in qualitative inquiry is an ideal choice in order to explain the concept of media convergence, as a phenomena in a continuous evolution, through different platforms and various media markets (Babbie, 2013; Fontana & Frey, 2000). In various studies carried out in the last years, the use of qualitative interview in researching media convergence had the role to facilitate the explication of the concept of media convergence and its implications for the work of journalists or newsrooms activities, to highlight the changes in the organizational culture and the professional identity of the journalists, to understand the challenges it brings to the values, roles and routines of media professionals.

Probably the most cited work in the case study of media convergence is the research Michel Dupagne and Bruce Garrison carried out at the Tampa News Center, in the United States. In the case study of the Tampa News Corporation, Michel Dupagne and Bruce Garrison selected a dozen of interviewees with different specializations in the newsroom, different types of news decision-making roles as well as those in news content development and news production roles. For balance of perspective, they chose respondents from each of the three news organizations in the News Center. Participants were able to tell their stories and discuss their involvement in detail, while in-depth interviews enabled the researchers to better understand the meaning of media convergence, the changes in the newsroom culture, and the necessary job skills at the News Center in Tampa (Dupagne & Garrison, 2006). On the other side of the Atlantic, in their research conducted inside British national media organizations, Saltzis and Dickinson conducted semi-structured interviews with journalists working in newsrooms at the BBC, Sky News, *The Guardian* and the *Financial Times*. They investigated the impact of convergence on the working practices of journalists, such as the trend towards news reporting in more than one medium in formerly single-medium organizations. Their article looks at the

changes caused by converged practices and describes the ways journalists are reacting to them (Saltzis, Dickinson, 2008). Tamara Walker interviewed 21 media experts, managers, editors and journalists in New Zealand, to provide insight into what is driving convergence and its impact on the quality of public interest journalism (Walker, 2009). Timothy Marjoribanks interviewed professionals from the newspaper holdings of News Corporation in the UK, Austria and the United States, in order to explore the relationship between technological innovation and the newspaper workplace through the perceptions, experiences and understandings of the participants (Marjoribanks, 2003). Lucy Kung-Shankleman approached the corporate cultures of two of the world's leading media organizations, the BBC and the CNN, during organizational change caused by digitalization and convergence, using as a research tool issue-focused long interviews with senior managers in each company (Kung-Shankleman, 2003). Thurman and Lupton conducted qualitative interviews with senior editors and managers from a selection of the UK's national online news providers to describe and analyze their experience adopting media convergences and using multimedia and video storytelling (Thurman, Lupton, 2008).

Briggs and Weiss's recommendation to the researchers interested in using the qualitative interview as their main research method is to develop a close professional relationship with their respondents before they enter the field. This way, the researcher has better chances to obtain relevant answers to the sensitive questions (Briggs, 1986; Weiss, 1994). A careful preparation of the qualitative interview is almost as important as the interview itself; as Beth Leech pointed out, what the author of the interview knows already is as important as she or he wants to know from their interviewee, because what you know determines the questions you want to ask, and what you already know will influence the manner you ask these questions (Leech, 2002:665)

The theoreticians of the qualitative interview have structured a typology of questions, according to the placement in the chronology of the conversation and the degree of preparation. So, the open questions and the general tour questions are chronologically placed in the beginning of the interview and have been previously prepared based on the author's knowledge and experience on the specific topic. These questions design a verbal tour of the interview, in general term, however directly applied on the concepts the authors intends to build

and then analyze in their research. The dialogue becomes more specific along with the questions soliciting exemplifications of the terms and situations resulted from the open questions or grand-tour questions. The structural and follow-up questions are generated by certain aspects of the previous questions, which call for clarifications. The main features of this type of questions are the spontaneity and promptness with which the author challenges his or her interviewee, as part of these questions have a confrontational dimension, when they call for critical examination of previously asserted concepts, in a contradictory or alternative manner. The questions that are theoretically prompted and have the power to generate hypotheses and research questions are placed later in the chronology of qualitative interview, but are essential in translating the implicitly assumed concepts and constructs, which help in advancing the research in the right direction. (Groeben, 1990; McCracken, 1988; Spradley, 1979; Flick, 2009).

At one of the ends of the continuum of the qualitative interview typology there is the unstructured interview, which is more like a conversation, when the topic is subject to change as the interview progresses. This type of interview is suitable for research when there is limited knowledge of the field, and the author looks for an insider perspective. However, it is not a consistent source of reliable data, and is definitely not suitable for hypothesis testing (Leech, 2002). Ethnographic interview is viewed as a series of friendly conversations into which the researcher slowly introduces new elements to assist informants to respond as informants. It is descriptive and structural, when showing how informant organize their knowledge about the issue, and advances contrast questions about the meaning dimensions used by informants to differentiate objects and events in their world (Spradley, 1979). The use of this particular type of questions and approach gave birth to ethnomethodology, the study of the routines of everyday life and their production. Harold Garfinkel is the founder of this school, which addresses the question how people produce social reality in and through interactive processes. Since the 1980 its main focus moved on the studies of work, analysis of work processes (Bergman, 2004; Garfinkel 1986).

On the other side of the continuum there are the structured questions, when the researchers have a lot of knowledge about a topic and want specific answers to very specific questions. The author

already knows a lot about the topic, and the only goal is to see how many people fall into each category of response. In this case, the structured interview with close ended questions is the most appropriate such as the example of surveys. Wimmer and Dominick argue that in the case of a structured interview, standardized questions are asked in a predetermined order, and relatively little freedom is given to interviewers to decide which information is necessary to obtain the critical data. In an unstructured interview, broad questions are asked, which allows interviewers freedom in determining what further questions to ask to obtain the required information. Structured interviews are easy to tabulate and analyze but do not achieve the depth or expanse of unstructured interviews (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006; Leech, 2002).

Situated in the middle of the continuum of the qualitative interviewing typology, the semi-structured interview integrated largely the features of the unstructured interview, while it also borrows from the unstructured interview elements such as a smaller sample of respondents. Unlike the survey, the semi-structured interview takes the shape of an interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee, where the author has a plan of investigation, is familiar with the topic, so that the conversation flows smoothly and naturally (Babbie, 2013). The researcher conducts the interviews in a setting previously settled, has a set of prepared questions, which are complemented with structural, follow-up or confrontational questions, according to the context and the content of the discussion. Not only that this perspective offers depth and detail to the phenomena under study, but also allows the scientist to build and test hypotheses and analyze the results (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000).

The qualitative interview is essentially a conversation in which the researcher establishes the general direction of the discussion and follows the specific topics, resulted from the answers of the interviewees, which are ideally supposed to fill in most of the allocated time, meaning that the questions of the interviewer should not rise above five percent of the (Babbie, 2013). Steiner Kvale used two metaphors which illustrate two opposite perspectives from which the research approaches the interview: the miner and the traveler. In the first situation, the author of the interview starts with the assumption that the respondent is in possession of specific information, useful for the interview, and his or her role, as miner-interviewer, is to dig deeply in order to reach to the essence of the

desired answers. The traveler-interviewer, on the other hand, explores wide territories of knowledge, contact many people and establishes rapports with various persons before selecting those specific individuals that have relevant information for his or her research project (Kvale, 1996).

The issue of selection or sampling occurs at different stages in the research process. In an interview study, it is connected to the decision about which persons to interview, namely case sampling, and from which groups these should come, meaning sampling groups of cases. Furthermore, it emerges with the decision about which of the interviews should be further treated, that is transcribed and analyzed, referring to material sampling (Flick, 2009).

In the case of the semi-structured interview, the selected respondents should have the necessary experience and knowledge for answering the question or for performing the actions of interest. Morse defines criteria for a “good informant” as someone who has the capability to reflect and articulate, time to be asked and observed, and ready to participate in the (Morse, 1998). There is no firm rule on a recommended sample size when selecting semi-structured interview subjects, but McCracken and Wengraf indicate that recruiting eight respondents is generally sufficient for many in-depth interview projects. (McCracken, 1988; Wengraf, 2001). An important advantage of using multiple informants is that the validity of information provided by one informant can be checked against that provided by other informants. Moreover, the validity of the data used by the researcher can be enhanced by resolving the discrepancies among different informants’ reports, which point out at the latent concepts that were less visible at the beginning of the research (Glick, 1990).

The expert interview is a specific form of applying semi-structured interviews, integrated in the study. They are relevant not as a single case, and important not as a person, but due to their capacities as experts in a certain field of activity. Expert interviews can be used for exploration and orientation in a new field in order to give the field a thematic structure, to generate hypotheses, and to collect context information complementing insights coming from applying other methods. Theory-generating expert interview are aimed at developing a typology or a theory about an issue from reconstructing the knowledge of various experts. Qualitative research theorists pointed out that both process knowledge and context knowledge can be constructed in expert interviews (Flick, 2009; Groeben, 1990).

The qualitative interview is integrated in the case study, allows continuous connections the researchers makes between his or her field notes and the data provide by the interviewees, a process specific to the circular design of the qualitative research, helps in building a clearer picture of the topic under study, and a better understanding of the direction the analysis should take. Steiner Kvale identified seven stages which are necessary to cover the entire interviewing process in qualitative research (1) the theme, meaning identification of the purpose of the interview and clarification of the concepts to be explored; (2) the model, meaning the building of the procedure through which the author is about to fulfill the purpose of the research; (3) the process of interviewing; (4) the transcripts of interviews, meaning the transformation of the language into text; (5) the analysis of the text, meaning the identification of the meaning connection between the collected data and the purpose of the study; (6) the verification of validity and reliability of the analyzed materials; (7) the presentation of the results of the research (Kvale, 1996).

### **3.2. Participant observation**

The primary purpose of participant-observation research is to describe in fundamental terms various events, situations, and actions that occur in a particular social setting (Jankowski, Wester, 2002: 61)

The studies that tackled various aspects of qualitative methodology pointed out at the necessity of using participant observation as a sum of multiple investigative methods, never as a single method. McCall and Simmons think that participant observation refers to a combination of investigative techniques used to study topics specific to particular societies, deviant subcultures, social movements or complex organizations. During participant observation, the researcher directly interacts with the environment, events and the subjects of his or her study, carries out informal interviews and analyzes documents and artifacts. This way, according to McCall and Simmons, those who consider participant observation as a single, standalone method, are led into error when reading such studies (McCall and Simmons, 1969). Denzin defines participant observation as a strategy of field research which simultaneously combines document analysis, interviewing of the selected subjects, introspection and direct participation and observation (Denzin, 1989). The Danish researcher Klaus Bruhn Jensen considers that it is wrong to refer to a single concept, participant observation, when using different

qualitative investigative methods such as in depth interviews, document analysis and unstructured observations (Jensen, 2002).

The author-observer takes part in daily activities of the organization under study, either by openly assuming the role of researcher or by disguising as a member for the group, a role that favors watching the natural behavior of the other participants, during a chosen time slot. Therefore, the two major stages of the process of participant observation are: gaining access to the object of the study and concrete and intensive involvement in all the relevant aspects for the hypotheses of the research (Becker & Geer, 1957; Flick, 2009). During participation in the daily activities of the group, the author makes observation sheets, structured to the extent of allowing detailed descriptions of the environment, so that all the activities and the situations that document the relevant data can be defined accordingly. Bergmann warned that the excessive use of structured sheets before the beginning of the study, called protocol sheets, may end up narrowing significantly the area of observation. The researcher is in danger of overlooking new perspectives that might otherwise bring new, relevant data for the final results (Bergmann, 2004).

The particular features and the advantage soft participant observation in qualitative research are outlined by Jorgensen in the context of the study of media organizations. The scholars can observe from a member's perspective but they can also influence what they observe due to their participation; special interest in human meaning and interaction as viewed from the perspective of people who are insiders or members of particular situations and settings; location in the here and now of everyday life situations and settings as the foundation of inquiry and method; a form of theory and theorizing stressing interpretation and understanding of human experience; logic process of inquiry that is open ended, flexible, opportunistic, and requires constant definition of what is problematic, based on facts gathered in concrete settings of human existence; in-depth, qualitative case study and design; involves establishing and maintaining relationships with the members of the media organizations; the use of direct observation along with other methods of gathering information (Jorgensen, 1989).

Regardless of the topic or the nature of the observation, the sociologists distinguished three phases in the process of participant observation: Descriptive observation, at the beginning, serves to provide the researcher with an orientation to the field under study, and

provides non-specific description and used to grasp the complexity of the field as far as possible and to develop, at the same time, more concrete research questions and lines of vision. Focused observation narrows the perspective on those processes and problems, which are most essential for your research questions. Selective observation, towards the end of the data collection, is focused on finding further evidence and examples for the types of processes and practices, found in the second step.

(Adler & Adler 1998; Denzin 1989; Spradley 1980).

In the literature of qualitative methodology, the intensity of the implication of the research in the life of the community under study has varied to different degrees. Adler and Adler (1987) developed a system of membership roles in participant observation, in order to show how this problem has been differentially treated in the history of qualitative research. At one pole is the position of the Chicago school, and their use of pure observation of the members of the field, open and well-directed interaction, active participation in everyday life. The dilemma of necessary distancing is: how much participation is needed for a good observation, how much is permissible in the context of scientific distancing? At the other end of the system is ethnomethodology, the complete fusing with the research object, by not disclosing their actual role, acting under cover, in order to gain insights that are as open as possible. For Adler and Adler, the Chicago's School's handling of this problem is too committed to scientific distancing from the object of research (Adler & Adler, 1987). Robert Park, John Dewey and Harold Lasswell are the most famous representative of the sociology department of the University of Chicago, those who created, in the first decades of the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the study of communication through empirical investigation, as urban ethnography, and initiated the method later on known as participant observation (Schramm, 1960). The theoretical directions they built and developed were pragmatism, symbolic interactionism and constructivism, all fitting into the theoretical frameworks of cultural and critical studies. The approach of knowledge is subjective, and the individual or collective role in the construction of reality is active, through the meaning making process.

Sociologists David Waddington, Earl Babbie and Marshal and Rossman identified various degrees of implication of the researcher in the setting under study, according to the intensity of the participation and the opportunity to build interactions with the members of the

community. According to Waddington's typology, there are three ways through which the author-observer chooses to collect the relevant data (1) complete participant, undercover as a member of the group; (2) participant -observer, who develops close relationships with the members, takes part in all the activities and does not hide the research intentions; (3) observer- participant, who only has superficial connections with the members of the group; (4) complete observer, who keeps distance from the field and only ear drops to what is going on (Waddington 1994). Earl Babbie prefers to use the concept "field research" instead of participant observation, saying that the scholars, although take part in the described activities, do not full involve every time (Babbie, 2013). Marshall and Rossman summed up the relevant literature and showed that the author of the investigative inquiry plays different roles entailing various degree of participation, in different phases of the research: at the one end there is the complete participant, adopting all the routines and practices of the field, and at the other end there is the complete observer, who does not interact with the members of the community under study and does not participate in any of their activities (Marshall, Rossman, 1995).

In mass communication research, the most relevant studies about the newsroom ethnography employed qualitative methodology and participant observation as one of the main methods of investigation (Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978; Lester 1975; Fishman 1980). These studies marked a significant progress from the previous research dedicated to the activities of the journalists, in the sense that the unit of analysis shifted from the individual cases to media organizations as complex institutions. By crossing the border between the sociology of the organizations and that of the profession, these studies have epistemologically challenged the essence of journalism activity (Tuchman, 2002). According to the typology Adler and Adler created, Gaye Tuchman and Herbert Gans chose to be more observers than participants, while Marilyn Lester and Mark Fisher placed themselves at the end of complete involvement in the participant observation, assuming their roles as journalists in the newsrooms they studied (Fishman, 1980; Lester; 1975; Adler & Adler, 1987).

#### **4. Conclusions**

The qualitative methods are particularly useful when studying latent practices and phenomena, when the researcher analyzes the subjective meanings and the social production of events and practices, by collecting non-standard data, and analyzing texts and images. In relation to its relevance to the study of mass communication, the qualitative inquiry is considered a type of long time field observation, carried out in the proximity of the chosen phenomena, in order to investigate new perspectives and social context forms. Through extension, qualitative methodology fulfills the role of highlighting the essential differences and distinctive features of the social processes in newsrooms, media organizations or media platforms under study. During participant observation, the scholars directly interact with the media organization environment and the journalist which are the subjects of their study; conduct informal interviews and analyze documents and artifacts. As the activity of the researcher as participant interacting with members of the groups under study is concerned with the active production of meaning and social construction of reality, the theoretical framework most appropriate for qualitative inquiry is that of the cultural studies. In their investigation of the media industries, newsroom activities, news policies, organizational values and practices, the social science scholars looked at the specific environments, activities and subjects through the theoretical lenses or constructivism and symbolic interactionism.

The phenomenon of media convergence is relatively new in the mass communication literature, and the social science researchers and media scholars have chosen qualitative methods for their investigation of the challenges new practices and technologies bring to the newsrooms and to the profession in general. In future research, qualitative inquiry remains more appropriate for the exploration of now social processes or behaviors that have been scarcely researched so far and yet have the potential to offer interesting themes and concepts that are difficult if not impossible to investigate quantitatively.

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Pag. 47-76

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**Abstract**

*This paper examines the discursive dimension of the normalization thesis regarding online political communication in Romania. The normalization paradigm challenges the assumption that online political discourse is less negative and personalized, as opposed to the political discourse used on traditional media. Using the dispositive analysis, a qualitative method employed to analyse radio and TV programs, we examine the discourse of four Romanian mainstream politicians during November 8<sup>th</sup> – December 9<sup>th</sup> 2012 on both Facebook and televised talk shows. The objective is to identify similarities and differences between the discursive practices used by politicians online and on talk shows. Previous research on normalization have found that online political discourse follows the same trends of personalization and negativity as on talk shows. However, the specific characteristics of each communication medium require the employment of different strategies of personalization and negativity. Our goal is to identify this kind of strategies and their effect on building legitimacy and positive image capital.*

**Keywords:**

*Romania, Facebook, politics, normalization, dispositive, personalization, negativity*

***BUILDING  
LEGITIMACY DURING  
THE 2012 ROMANIAN  
PARLIAMENTARY  
ELECTIONS.  
THE NORMALIZATION  
OF ONLINE POLITICAL  
DISCOURSE***

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## Introduction

After the Second World War, global media landscape went through important changes. Mass communication outlets diversified, a large number of private media have emerged leading to an increased competition. As a consequence, audiences went through a process of fragmentation, and the need of capital lead to media commercialization and the rise of infotainment. In this context, television played an important role in the socialization of the public with politics. Television was first used in an electoral campaign in 1952 by Republican candidate Dwight D. Eisenhower (McAlister, 2007, p. 6). The rise of the new communication medium favoured optimistic expectations regarding its capacity to contribute to the enrichment of democratic debate by enlarging audiences for electoral campaigns and promoting debates based on rational arguments (Blumler, 1970; Scupham, 1976). In time, politicians learned to use television in their own advantage. It became the battlefield for political actors who relied on attacks towards opponents in televised ads, press conferences, talk shows or public discourses. In the same time, television promoted a shift of attention from parties to politicians as individuals leading to the personalization of political communication (Campus, 2010; Caprara & Zimbardo, 2004; Garzia, 2011; Hermans & Vergeer, 2012; McAllister, 2007; Van Zoonen & Holtz-Bacha, 2000).

The recent years brought a new challenge to the media landscape with the rise of the Internet as a means of political communication. The emergence of World Wide Web translated into a new form of media consumption. Traditional mass-communication outlets lost their gate keeping role. Citizens can access information from multiple sources at any time, and politicians have the opportunity to communicate their messages in a non-mediated way with the help of personal websites, blogs, or Social Network Sites (SNS). In this context, a new wave of technical optimists has arisen, endorsing the *innovation* theory of political communication (Bimber & Davis, 2003; Gibson et al., 2003; Kaid, 2006; Klotz, 1997; Schweitzer, 2008). According to this theory, online political communication promotes a better quality of debate, through positive arguments and a less candidate focused approach. Therefore, online

political communication gives more space for the debate of political issues, concerning community as a whole. This theory is rejected by the advocates of *normalization* (Foot & Schneider, 2006; Margolis & Resnick, 2000; Resnick, 1998; Schweitzer 2011), who assert that traditional forms of political communication are also used online. The focus of political discourse is still on politicians rather than parties and political issues, and the negative trend is maintained. Normalization can be identified at several levels (Schweitzer 2011, pp. 311 – 314): a *functional* level, through which politicians' online platforms become more sophisticated, but lack interactive tools; a *relational* level that translates into the maintaining of traditional cleavages between politicians with greater resources and the ones with low resources; a *discursive* level through which communication practices used on traditional media are also used online.

This paper investigates the discursive dimension of normalization in Romanian online political communication. Previous studies on normalization, personalization and negative campaigning have a quantitative approach and focus on candidate websites (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 2010; Hermans & Vergeer, 2012; Kaid, 2006; Kahn & Kenney, 1999; Kriesi, 2012; Sides, Lipsitz & Grossmann, 2009; Schweitzer, 2011). This paper offers qualitative data about communication strategies used by Romanian political actors for gaining legitimacy and positive image capital during an electoral campaign on their Facebook pages. We privilege this investigation path considering the dynamic and interactive character of communication on this social network site. While politicians' personal websites produce a rather static and unidirectional flow of communication, SNS are built on the idea of an "architecture of participation" (O'Reilly, 2005) and create a "day to day" communication effect (Beciu, 2011, p. 282). Within this context it is important to see how politicians manage their image on a communication outlet that encourages a continuous flow of communication.

In the same time, this paper offers a comparison between personalization and negative communication strategies used on Facebook and on televised talk shows. Such a comparison will help differentiate how politicians build their image and legitimacy when they directly communicate with voters rather than when they try to adjust to a specific journalistic view.

To our knowledge, there aren't any studies that focus on normalization of online political communication in Romania; therefore this paper will address this empirical gap. We will discuss normalization during the electoral campaign for the Romanian parliamentary elections. In order to study discursive normalization online, we will use the *dispositif* analysis (Beciu, 2011; Nell, 1999) on both politicians' Facebook pages and televised talk shows during November 8<sup>th</sup> – December 9<sup>th</sup> 2012. The *dispositif* analysis was chosen because it offers qualitative data of how political actors use different resources (communicational, technical, symbolic etc.) in order to create an interactional space and generate specific discursive effects.

Considering previous empirical results on the personalization of online political discourse in Romania, which indicate an extended focus of politicians on the professional dimension (Hermans & Vergeer, 2012), we expect that this trend has maintained. Also, having in mind that politics means confrontation and conflict, particularly on important issues; we anticipate that the same negativity seen on televised talk shows is present in online political debates. Consequently, our expectation is to see patterns of discursive normalization on online Romanian political communication. However, the different style of communication on Facebook and on televised talk shows may generate different discursive strategies of personalization and negativity. The aim of this paper is to investigate and reveal such strategies.

### **Innovation vs. normalization in online political communication**

The use of the internet as a means of political communication is a relatively new practice all over the world. The transition from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 contributed to the enhancement of the communication flow. Nowadays, politicians can disseminate their campaign messages without the mediation of journalists and citizens can offer feed-back, decreasing politicians' control over their messages. As Gurevitch, Coleman & Blumler (2009) notice, "political actors must consider the possibility that their messages will be modified once they are launched into media space. The digital media environment does not respect the integrity of information; once it has been published online, others are at liberty to remix content, in much

the same way as music fans are able to reorder and reconstruct beats, melodies, and lyrics” (p. 172).

These characteristics of online political communication, namely hypertextuality and interactivity, have encouraged some researchers to assert that the internet will improve the quality of political debate, shifting the attention towards more rational arguments (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995). These assumptions are the starting point for the *innovation* thesis of online political communication (Bimber & Davis, 2003; Gibson et al., 2003; Kaid, 2006; Klotz, 1997). According to this theory, political communication is faster and more comprehensive, is direct and has a higher responsiveness, gives more space to the discussion of important issues, is less focused on politicians as individuals, and involves less conflict (Schweitzer, 2008, p. 451).

Such an optimistic approach towards the rise of a new mass communication medium is not new. As Van Dijk (2005, p. 3) noted, the emergence of a new communication technology is always accompanied by utopian and dystopian views, and similar expectations were expressed in relation to the emergence of radio or television. Therefore, in opposition to the innovation theory, other researchers consider that online political communication follows the same patterns as on traditional media, leading to *normalization* (Foot & Schneider, 2006; Margolis & Resnick, 2000; Resnick, 1998; Schweitzer, 2011). As opposed to innovation theorists, advocates of normalization consider that online communication outlets are important additions to traditional mass-media, but their role on enhancing political debate and the consolidation of democracy is arguable. Online political communication is still focused on the individual rather than on institutions or important issues, and carries a pronounced degree of negativity. Moreover, differences between parties with great resources (human or financial) and parties with less capital are still visible in the quality and complexity of online campaigns.

On a *discursive level* (Schweitzer, 2011, p. 314), normalization means that online political communication is less focused on ideology or political issues, the attention being shifted towards politicians as individuals, leading to the personalization of online political communication (Hermans & Vergeer, 2012). Moreover, political actors continue negative attacks online, leading to the conclusion that

online political communication follows some of the trends observed on televised communication.

Personalization and negative discourse are not new trends in political communication. Previous research (e.g. Geer, 2008; Hermans & Vergeer, 2012) show that online political communication tends to replicate the same practices as on traditional mass-media. However, new media reshape communication introducing a new style of interaction (Beciu, 2011, p. 157) that could lead to some emergent communication practices. In this context, personalization might have different forms of manifestation on new media and on television. Therefore, our first research question is:

(1.) Which are the similarities and differences between political communication on Romanian politicians' Facebook pages and on televised talk shows in terms of personalization?

### **Shifting attention from parties to politicians as individuals**

According to some authors (Rahat & Sheaffer, 2007), the origin of personalization can be found in institutional and structural changes in society, that encourage the transfer of attention from parties towards politicians. Therefore, media and behavioural personalization (of both voters and politicians) are the result of institutional personalization. In Romania, the institutional change that enhanced personalization can be considered the introduction of the uninominal voting system in 2008, which favoured a tighter bond between political actors and the Romanian electorate (Teodorescu, Sultănescu & Sandu, 2009). Yet, some studies show that personalization in post-communist countries is also the result of the lack of confidence in political institutions, which explains the greater importance given by voters to political personalities (Rose & Mishler 1994). Continuing the former example, Romanian electorate tends to resonate to leaders with exceptional qualities and who have the power to make a positive change in their lives (Teodorescu, Enache & Guțu, 2005, pp. 197 – 210), which in turn may lead to media and behavioural personalization.

Media personalization, especially on television, can be explained by the fact that television operates with images (Glaser & Salmon, 1991). Therefore politicians should give more attention to the

way they manage their public image on the small screen. Personalization is also an effect of the weakening attachment of voters to political actors (Dalton, McAllister & Wattenberg, 2000, pp. 37–54). As a result, politicians' personality plays an important role on the voting decision (Caprara & Zimbardo, 2004), and leaders appeal to voters based on perceived similarities (Garzia, 2011). Moreover, voters want to hold governments accountable for their actions (McAllister, 2007, p. 7). Thus, they need to evaluate public actors on professional performance, rather than on abstract notions regarding their political views and programs. In some cases, the evaluation criteria go even further, being based on non-political personality traits rather than on professional competence and performance (Kriesi, 2012, p. 826).

Referring to online personalization, researchers (Hermans & Vergeer, 2012, p. 80) identify different dimensions of personalization, considering the kind of information that political actors privilege on their online platforms: *professional*, referring to their overall achievements as professionals; *home and family*, through which politicians focus on their personal life; and *personal preference*. One of the objectives of this paper is to investigate the kind of information privileged by Romanian politicians on their Facebook pages, in order to gain legitimacy and positive image capital. Therefore, the second research question is:

(2.) What dimension of personalization prevails on politicians' Facebook pages, compared to televised talk shows, and to what effect?

### **Negativity as a constitutive outcome of political confrontation**

In what concerns negativity in political communication, this trend is often viewed as being perilous to democracy, considering that it diverts attention from important political issues, to an artificially limited agenda. As a result of negative campaigns, the informative dimension of political communication decreases and voters become less interested in politics. This translates in a smaller voter turnout (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995; Wang, Gabay & Shah, 2012).

However, there are authors (Geer, 2008) who consider politics as being mostly based on conflict, bearing in mind the high stakes

involved. In this paper we privilege this approach, considering that politics means competition for resources. Consensus among different political forces can be reached only temporary, and negativity is a natural outcome of political confrontation. In this regard, there are studies showing that negativity doesn't have a great influence over turnout, and citizens make the difference between useful and irrelevant information disseminated through negative campaigns (Lau et al., 1999; Kahn & Kenney, 1999). What prevails is the usefulness of the information presented, rather than the tone of the political messages. This assumption is also confirmed by studies regarding negative media coverage. Candidates with more negative press have better chances to winning an election because voters are more familiarized with them (Burden, 2002). As a consequence, negative discourse is inherent to political communication, and the use of the internet may not contribute to its end.

For example, in Romania, during the electoral campaign, politicians must follow certain regulations regarding the broadcasting of positive or negative campaign ads. They cannot broadcast these kind of ads outside the duration of the political campaign. Hence, the internet becomes a place where politicians can disseminate negative ads and messages, without infringing audio-visual regulation. In the same time, considering the unmediated character of online communication platforms, in opposition with constraints related to talk shows (e.g. editorial view of the journalist, other politicians and guests discourse), the internet can be regarded as a way for politicians to freely contest and attack each other. As personalization, negativity might also have different forms of manifestation on television and on new media. In this context, the third research question is:

(3.) Which are the similarities and differences between political communication on Romanian politicians' Facebook pages and on televised talk shows in terms of negativity?

The aim of this paper is to offer a view on discursive normalization based on empirical facts that may help identify similarities and differences between political communication on Facebook and on TV talk shows. Based on these facts, we will be able to determine if communication on Facebook in Romania generates emergent communication practices in politics.

### Methodology

This paper studies the discursive dimension of normalization on Romanian online political communication during the parliamentary campaign in 2012. Our goal is to identify communication strategies used by politicians to gain legitimacy and positive image capital. For achieving this goal, two objectives are pursued:

1. To identify the specific mechanisms of online political communication personalization and negativity.
2. To investigate the kind of information privileged by politicians on their Facebook pages as opposed to televised debates. In terms of personalization, we studied the inclination of political actors to privilege information regarding their professional life, their family life or personal preferences (Hermans & Vergeer, 2012). Regarding negativity, we investigated the use of political attacks towards opponents correlated with positive self-references (projects, political initiatives).

In order to achieve these objectives, we used the dispositive analysis (Beciu, 2011; Nell, 1999), a qualitative method that analyses media discourse to determine the way various communicational resources (discursive, material, technological, logistical and symbolic) are used strategically to create an interactional space. These resources interact and generate a communicational identity for social actors involved.

The premise of our paper is that Facebook can be analysed as a dispositive because it creates a social space with its own communication rules and practices. In the same time, Facebook offers users the possibility to utilise different resources (text, image, video footage) to generate an interactional space and a communicational identity. By using the dispositive analysis on both Facebook and talk shows we will be able to investigate the discursive effects produced and different communicational practices used on both media.

This research will examine the Facebook pages of four mainstream Romanian politicians during November 8<sup>th</sup> – December 9<sup>th</sup> 2012: Victor Ponta (the leader of the governing coalition, The Social-Liberal Union - SLU, and prime minister of Romania); Crin Antonescu (leader of SLU, and president of the Romanian Senate); Vasile Blaga (the leader of the main opposition party, The

Democratic-Liberal Party – DLP, an leader of „Fair Romania” Alliance - FRA); Mihai-Răzvan Ungureanu (leader of the Civic Force Party – CFP, and leader of „Fair Romania” Alliance - FRA).

In addition we analysed six televised talk shows from the Romanian public television service, TVR, and a private television news channel, Romania TV, during the same interval, in which the aforementioned politicians were invited onset or participated through telephone intervention.

We investigated five research dimensions which help to reveal personalization or negativity of political discourse:

- the thematic orientation of messages, photos and videos posted, in order to establish the information privileged by the politicians;
- the practices of interaction with the visitors/with voters, to establish the degree of interactivity, and the introduction of special features that might reshape the image of the analysed political actors ;
- the social space promoted – the discursive identity that the *dispositif* generates for the politician, his opponents and his followers;
- the type of discourse promoted – elements that suggest the personalization or negativity of political discourse (references to the professional life, home and family, personal preferences, political attacks, positive self-reference) and the enunciation strategies used;
- the compliance of the communication contract – the politician adapts his discourse to the medium used and there are not consistent discrepancies between the image created on television and the one on Facebook. This dimension will help determine if political discourse on Facebook introduces new communication practices, and new image building strategies. Regarding Facebook communicational contract, this means that political communication is more interactive, constant, and reproduces face to face communication.

### **Data presentation and discussion**

The results of this paper show that political communication on Facebook and televised talk shows displays signs of personalization and negativity. On Facebook, personalization is noticed in the shift of attention from political parties to politicians as individuals and their

initiatives. This social network is a useful communication outlet where politicians share information about the electoral campaign and official positions regarding topics discussed in traditional mass-media. As other studies reveal (Hermans & Vergeer, 2012), the choice of political actors to create their own communication platforms online, alongside party platforms, is a sign of personalization itself. On television, this trend is the result of the way journalists focus more on political personalities rather than on institutions or parties. Political actors are asked for their personal opinion on certain topics and discussions are conducted around the actions of particular public figures. This trend can be explained by the fact that central to televised communication are visual images, making it easier for television to broadcast certain information with the help of familiar personalities (Glaser & Salmon, 1991). Facebook is also a vehicle for negative campaigning, where political actors launch attacks towards opponents and criticize their actions. As a result, negativity is incorporated in politicians' online communicational strategies. On television, this trend also emerges from the way journalists moderate discussions and frame certain topics. One possible explanation is that some of the Romanian television stations are often partisan and adopt a type of discourse based on conflict.

Another finding of this paper is that the web 2.0 potential of Facebook was partly exploited during the 2012 Romanian parliamentary campaign. As opposed to televised talk shows, where debates are conducted around the editorial policy of journalists, political actors have more space to promote their own agenda online. They also have more space to interact with voters and establish a close connection with them. As previous research regarding the use of websites in political campaigns (Jackson, Lilleker & Schweitzer, 2009) have shown, politicians' personal websites have six functions: *information provision* – the promotion of key messages and issues for the political actor; *campaigning* – disseminating persuasive messages to aid voter choices and sharing information regarding campaign events; *negative campaigning* – websites are used for political attacks; *resource generation* – fund raising or inviting supporters to download logos and badges to promote them on their online platforms; *networking* – the creation of a network to generate communication between its members, with the aim of endorsing the candidate; *promoting participation*. Applying the same functions to social media sites, the results of our study show that the analysed politicians used

Facebook mostly for information provision, campaigning and negative campaigning. Little attention was offered to building a network, promoting participation and resource generation. Politicians such as Victor Ponta or Crin Antonescu invited supporters to share messages to endorse their campaign. Mihai-Răzvan Ungureanu organised “question and answer” sessions on his Facebook page in order to create a network with his followers. However, politicians didn’t focus on these functions of online communication, and used them sporadically. A more comprehensive analysis of the specific communicational strategies identified online and on talk shows will be made in the following sections.

*Building legitimacy: politicians as professionals*

Regarding the thematic orientation of the messages, photos and videos posted on Facebook during the campaign, the focus is mostly on electoral events, or on information regarding their political platform. In line with previous research on politicians behavioural personalization online (Hermans & Vergeer, 2012), this paper shows that Romanian political actors tend to privilege information related to their professional dimension. Yet, some of the four analysed politicians (e.g. Victor Ponta and Mihai-Răzvan Ungureanu) also shared elements regarding their personal life or preferences, which helped create a multidimensional image, with the discursive effect of *humanization*.

For example, Victor Ponta also made reference to his personal life, besides sharing information regarding his governmental function, and his political achievements. He talked about his early days in politics, personal preferences or expressed gratitude for the help of supporters. As an effect, he created the image of a politician, who doesn’t forget his roots and respects voters. The same communicational strategy was adopted by Mihai-Răzvan Ungureanu, who shared personal information alongside messages regarding his professional dimension. He talked about his campaign events and stated official positions towards specific campaign issues. But he also shared personal experiences as going shopping, working at the computer during the campaign, supporting his PhD students, or recommending cultural events he was interested in. As a consequence, Victor Ponta and Mihai-Răzvan Ungureanu used Facebook both to communicate and to bond with supporters.

In comparison, Crin Antonescu and Vasile Blaga chose to discuss mostly campaign related issues (e.g. campaign events, their political platform, official positions), and personal references were minimal. Their pages were either a vehicle of voter and party mobilization like in the case of Crin Antonescu, or a place where negative comments towards opponents were made, in case of Vasile Blaga.

The professional dimension of politicians was also privileged in televised talk shows. However, the content was dictated by the editorial perspective of the journalist. As a result, debates surrounded politicians' position on certain campaign topics, or their attitude towards other political actors' statements. Despite these circumstances, one politician out of four, Victor Ponta, also talked about his family life as he did on Facebook. This shows that he had complementary strategies for Facebook and television and succeeded to switch the discussion to his own topics.

The focus on the professional dimension can be seen as a way politicians build *legitimacy* through discourse. One possible explanation for this finding is that voters want to hold governments accountable for their actions (McAllister, 2007, p. 7). Thus, they evaluate public actors on professional performance, rather than on abstract notions regarding their political views. Considering the context set by the 2012 electoral campaign, candidates created the image of strong and knowledgeable leaders, who understand the need of the Romanian electorate. Therefore, they focused more on their professional abilities. However, the need to build a network with their supporters, determined some politicians to also focus on personal information.

In terms of negativity, this research has shown that politicians who focused on personal information were less prone to launch political attacks than politicians who only emphasised the professional dimension. In case of Crin Antonescu this inclination was reflected by campaign messages that mobilized voters and fellow party members through anger:

Dear friends, with justice, with honesty, with honour,  
until the end, no mercy! (Crin Antonescu, Facebook)

In Vasile Blaga's case negativity was built through patronizing messages that offered him a powerful position in relation to his political opponents:

Each measure from our economic platform has a strong justification and is doubled by numbers, while SLU's platform is a collection of false promises.

(Vasile Blaga, Facebook)

Negativity was also present in talk shows, and was a result of the way politicians positioned themselves towards opponents.

The president has done that in other occasions too. This is the level he reached, this is the level he persist in. (Crin Antonescu, Romania TV)

Miss. EBA (president's daughter a.n.) said that the crowd booed me. Would it be possible not to make fool of ourselves on the National Day?

(Victor Ponta, Romania TV)

Mister Ponta has no credibility at all.

(Mihai-Răzvan Ungureanu, Romania TV)

Both on Facebook and on television, negative remarks of politicians were directed towards the professional qualities of the opponents. As a result, they resorted to *demarcation strategies* in order to present themselves as better representatives of voters' interest, and to gain legitimacy. Attacks were used to emphasize the lack of political knowledge of the opponents, and to underline the superiority of the challenger. However, a difference was noticed between negativity on Facebook and on talk shows. On television, this trend was also an effect of how journalists chose certain discussion topics, which encouraged the use of a negative discourse. Journalists used their personal opinions or interpellations in order to spice up the debate. As a result, they played both the role of animators and mediators of the discussion, igniting disputes and counterbalancing the dialogue with personal arguments, opinions or facts.

*Us versus them. Politicians in the same “team” with the electorate*

Looking at the practices of interaction with visitors on Facebook, results show that the web 2.0 potential of this communication outlet was partly exploited. Mihai-Răzvan Ungureanu was the only politician who organized „question and answer” sessions on his Facebook page, in order to communicate with voters. Vasile Blaga also offered to answer supporters’ questions. Yet, he wasn’t as active on Facebook, and redirected his followers to other online communicational platforms. Victor Ponta and Crin Antonescu invited supporters to indorse their campaign by sharing badges and logos on their Facebook profiles. But they offered little attention to online direct interaction with voters, preferring campaign events for this purpose.

Related to special features used to communicate with voters, all the four analysed politicians used videos and photographs among supporters to promote their campaign events. In this manner, they used Facebook as an unmediated communication outlet, where messages and campaign events can be disseminated without third party interference. As a result, their messages and events were framed according to the politician’s own vision, contributing to the personalization of campaign communication. Moreover, pictures taken among supporters helped them build legitimacy by creating awareness that they are sustained by voters. Photographs or videos weren’t used to disseminate negative messages towards opponents. Negativity was more the result of different discursive practices, rather than the effect of the distribution of specific visual content.

On television, the interaction with voters was limited as a result of the editorial policy of the journalists. Political actors had to answer broadcasters’ questions regarding different subjects on the public agenda, but had no opportunity to answer citizens’ questions. However, when controversial issues were addressed, politicians repositioned themselves towards the journalists’ questions and talked about their knowledge regarding voters’ needs. This way, they presented themselves as strong and rational leaders, who reject conflict and are more interested in solving voters’ problems.

I went all around the country (Timiș County, Dâmbovița County), and the situation is far from what we see on television. People live in difficult conditions, they have no jobs, these are the real problems of the citizens, and Romania is out of opportunities. And Ponta is responsible for this. (Vasile Blaga, Romania TV)

People in this country have problems, the society has problems, different ones than the words Mr Băsescu addresses to us, or the feelings we have towards each other. (Crin Antonescu, Romania TV)

The different strategies of interaction with voters had the goal to create a connection with the electorate, and promoted an “*us versus them*” type of discourse. However, on Facebook politicians have the opportunity to directly interact with voters, whereas on television the contact is limited. Even though not all politicians had a strategy of direct interaction with voters on Facebook, they tried to create a bond by sharing videos and pictures taken among supporters. This is another strategy of building legitimacy, by showing that politicians have gained citizens’ trust.

#### *Inclusion strategies. Creating a bond with supporters*

In terms of the type of discourse promoted, on Facebook results show that both personalization and negativity are present in politicians’ discourses, but in different degrees. Politicians like Victor Ponta and Mihai-Răzvan Ungureanu use *confession* in order to build the image of approachable leaders, and to establish an emotional bond with voters, which is a sign of personalization:

Today I’ll focus less on politics and more on school: two of my PhD candidates are presenting their thesis and I’m there to support them. (*confession*, Mihai-Răzvan Ungureanu, Facebook)

I have learned from these mistakes (from 2008 when SDP and NLP should govern together). (*confession*, Victor Ponta, Facebook).

Eight years ago I was just a young man who wanted to be involved in politics and who was helped by the people of Târgu-Jiu, Gorj County to become a deputy for the first time. (*confession*, Victor Ponta, Facebook)

Confession is also used on television, but sporadically, by politicians who also want to emphasize their personal dimension. Yet, the way the discussion is conducted by journalists doesn't encourage references to the politician's personal life.

I spent time with my family. It was the first time when Andrei (the politician's son a.n.) saw the ceremony of the National Day. (*confession*, Victor Ponta on Romania TV)

Another finding of this paper was that on Facebook politicians use *inclusion strategies* in order to mobilize and establish a bond with supporters. They achieve this through *injunction* and *appreciation*. In this manner, they make citizens their partners in the quest for a better society and express gratitude for their support. This is a sign of personalization, as it conducts to a more emotional and personal relation with voters. Yet, this isn't a practice used on talk shows.

Vote SLU for a powerful Romania! (*injunction*, Victor Ponta, Facebook)

I want to thank you for the eight years we spent together. (*appreciation*, Victor Ponta, Facebook)

Dear friends, with justice, with honesty, with honour, until the end, no mercy! (*injunction*, Crin Antonescu, Facebook)

I thank everyone who takes part at these meetings. (*appreciation*, Crin Antonescu, Facebook)

Vote for a fair Romania! (*injunction*, Mihai-Răzvan Ungureanu, Facebook)

Thank you for supporting me in this campaign offline and online. (*appreciation*, Mihai-Răzvan Ungureanu, Facebook)

*Demarcation strategies. Emphasizing the adversary's fault*

Both on Facebook and on talk shows, the personal dimension is doubled by the professional dimension, in which the analysed politicians promote their position regarding certain issues on the public agenda, their campaign events or political platform. Within this context, specific enunciation strategies are employed in order to emphasize their ability and knowledge to solve problems, to demobilize the opponents' electorate, and to shed a negative light over their adversaries. Therefore, results show also elements of negativity. The analysed politicians used *promise* and *obligation* in order to promote hope and to gain trust.

Our three priorities: repairing the injustice of the former government (you all know very well how many hospitals were closed, how many schools, how many pensions were diminished), launching economy through correct measures that create jobs and the punishment of those who broke the law. (*promise*, Victor Ponta, Facebook)

One has to invest in the education system in order to see later results. (*obligation*, Victor Ponta, Facebook)

I guarantee farmers that the SLU government will make agriculture a national priority. (*promise*, Crin Antonescu, Facebook)

Romanian political leaders have to work for Romania and its citizens. (*obligation*, Crin Antonescu, Facebook)

As a senator, I will promote an Ethics and integrity Code for congressmen. (*promise*, Mihai-Răzvan Ungureanu, Facebook)

Next year all the political forces will have to contribute to the modification of the Constitution. (*obligation*, Victor Ponta, Romania TV)

We have to make a priority to accomplish voters' will. (*obligation*, Crin Antonescu, Romania TV)

Through promise, politicians make a priority to solve citizens' problems and represent their interest. In the same time they assure the electorate of their ability and knowledge to do this despite certain difficulties. They assume a powerful position against their adversaries. This position is consolidated by obligation, which shows a fault in the actions of their opponents, who don't have the same knowledge to rule. Sometimes, politicians encourage a consensual relation with voters, by promoting an "*us versus them*" type of discourse, which generates a negative evaluation of the others:

We will do it. We will do it with all Romanians, for all Romanian citizens. (*promise*, Crin Antonescu, Facebook)

Lastly, other enunciation strategies that indicate negativity on Facebook are *value judgement*, *interpellation* and *warning*. Through these strategies, the four politicians evaluate their opponents from a powerful position and summon them to offer a response over a situation they are responsible for, or to follow a certain path to overcome a difficulty they generated. Against their adversaries, politicians who use value judgement, interpellation and warning have the legitimacy to appraise and the power and knowledge to represent Romanian citizens' interest.

Mister Ponta travels a lot between Antena 3, RTV, Realitatea TV (Romanian television channels) and his electoral encounters where he spreads only lies. It is the route of a demagogue. (*value judgement*, Vasile Blaga, Facebook)

We inherited a disaster from the former government and we managed to redress in the last six months. (*value judgement*, Victor Ponta, Facebook)

Traian Băsescu (...) made irresponsible declarations and of major gravity. (*value judgement*, Crin Antonescu, Facebook)

Romanian citizens will see how you really are: despicable. (*value judgement*, Mihai-Răzvan Ungureanu, Facebook)

I want to see reaction towards plagiarism cases of those politicians who signed in 2008 the Education Pact. (*interpellation*, Mihai-Răzvan Ungureanu, Facebook)

If the president doesn't respect this vote, we will suspend him. (*warning*, Crin Antonescu, Facebook)

If the president doesn't respect the voters' will, we have two possibilities: we explain our voters that their ballot doesn't matter, or we suspend the president. (*warning*, Crin Antonescu, Romania TV)

In my eyes, Mr Ponta doesn't have credibility. (*value judgement*, Mihai-Răzvan Ungureanu, Romania TV)

Enunciation strategies meant to shed a negative light over the political adversaries are accompanied by *declaration* and *statement*. The goal is to reinforce the challengers' powerful position and to assure followers by the truth of his engagements and by his political knowledge.

We kept our word! We gave back money to senior citizens. (*declaration*, Victor Ponta, Facebook)

The function of Prime minister of Romania and of any other country is neither assigned through a beauty contest, nor a selection of offers. (*statement*, Victor Ponta, Facebook)

After two years since the founding of SLU, we can say that we kept our word. (*declaration*, Crin Antonescu, Facebook)

SLU needs a clean victory so that the result of this election wouldn't be questioned. (*statement*, Crin Antonescu, Facebook)

I chose to run for senator, because the Right wing in Romania needs reconstruction and new force. (*declaration*, Mihai-Răzvan Ungureanu, Facebook)

Each time we set such an objective, we said clearly what need to be done to accomplish it, and what are the consequences. (*statement*, Victor Ponta, TVR)

Nobody wants this to happen (the suspension of the president a.n.). (*statement*, Crin Antonescu, Romania TV)

### *Building a discursive identity*

The mobilization of different communicational strategies on Facebook and on talk shows generates a specific social space and different identities for the analysed politicians, their followers and their voters. In the case of Victor Ponta, the image created on Facebook is of a balanced and powerful leader who not only makes promises, but also keeps his word. He doesn't refer as much to political opponents and prefers to emphasize his accomplishments and to promote campaign events. Voters are seen as partners with whom he establishes a close bond. This image is reinforced on television where he portrays himself as a trustful and democratic leader. He takes distance from political opponents and chooses to focus on his own actions.

A similar strategy is applied by Mihai-Răzvan Ungureanu. On Facebook, he sees voters as partners in his quest for a better society. However, enunciation strategies such as interpellation and value judgement, used in relation to his adversaries are meant to consolidate

his image of a strong and knowledgeable leader. On television, he doesn't refer as much to voters, and speaks as a technocrat and incorruptible leader. In opposition, his adversaries are corrupt and follow their own interest to the disadvantage of voters. This communicational strategy is influenced by the way the journalists conduct the discussion focusing on interpellation and conflict. As a result, Mihai-Răzvan Ungureanu repositions himself and emphasizes his ability to solve problems.

As opposed to these two politicians, who try to establish a close bond with their followers on Facebook, Crin Antonescu and Vasile Blaga have a more distant approach. For Crin Antonescu voters are temporary allies in the quest for defeating his adversaries. His discourse is one of a revolutionary leader, who has the legitimacy and power to represent the interest of Romanian citizens. This strategy is also used on television, where he depicts himself as a legitimate representative of voters. He knows their wishes and considers the need to accomplish them an obligation.

Finally, on Facebook Vasile Blaga speaks as a technocrat who has a better training to rule than his opponents. He establishes an unequal and patriarchal relationship with his voters, portraying himself as a knowledgeable and conservative leader. However, Vasile Blaga wasn't as active on Facebook, relying on other media to share his campaign messages. On television, he reinforced this discursive identity, in order to underline his superiority over his adversaries.

#### *The compliance of the communication contract*

Regarding the compliance of the communication contract, the four politicians adapted only in part to Facebook communication. Victor Ponta and Mihai-Răzvan Ungureanu were personal and interacted more with their followers. They had a transparent Facebook communicational strategy that involved bonding with the electorate and promoting campaign events. In opposition, Crin Antonescu and Vasile Blaga used Facebook as a one-directional communication tool that helped them mobilize voters, or criticize political adversaries. However, while Crin Antonescu had a constant communicational flow, Vasile Blaga was less active on Facebook during the electoral campaign.

However, the four politicians adapted more to the communication contract set by talk shows. As Charaudeau (2005, pp. 110-112) notices, talk shows focus on spectacle, conflict and the mix between the private and the public sphere. This trend was observed in the analysed talk shows. Discussions were conducted around politicians' personal opinion on certain issues. Conflict was promoted through journalists' interpellations and the way topics were selected. In this context, Victor Ponta combined statements regarding his official position with details concerning his personal life.

A key finding was that the four politicians tried to distance themselves from conflict and used different communicational strategies meant to build the *objectivity* of their discourse.

Our problem is to apply what the people indicate through their votes. (*ascertainment*, Crin Antonescu, Romania TV)

We speak about what we want to do, they criticize us. (*ascertainment*, Victor Ponta, TVR)

Three cities are in difficulty. (*ascertainment*, Vasile Blaga, Romania TV)

The same story from the '90s happens again. (*ascertainment*, Mihai-Răzvan Ungureanu)

However, objectivity was only a discursive effect, considering that political actors, repositioned their messages by delivering value judgements about their opponents' actions. Therefore, political attacks were rather indirect.

People live in difficult conditions, they have no jobs, these are the real problems of the citizens, and Romania is out of opportunities. And Ponta is responsible for this. (*ascertainment* and *value judgement*, Vasile Blaga, Romania TV)

Finally, there weren't discrepancies between the image promoted on Facebook and the one on television. Politicians maintained the same messages and the same tone of voice on both

media. Yet, on Facebook they had more space for discussing aspects related to the campaign and the political offer of each candidate. They had less control over their messages on television, where discussions revolved around controversial acts and statements of politicians.

### **Conclusion**

The results of this study revealed different ways of using Facebook in an electoral campaign in order to build legitimacy and an interactional space. Personalization and negativity are present, but they are revealed by the mobilization of different resources. Personalization is seen from enunciation strategies, the type of information privileged by politicians and from the way political actors frame their campaign events and share photographs surrounded by voters. Negativity is only a discursive effect resulting from different enunciation strategies (e.g. value judgement, interpellation and warning).

Looking at the patterns of political communication on Facebook and on televised talk shows, this study has revealed that personalization is present on both media. This trend is translated into a shift of attention from political institutions to politicians as individuals. However, the sole presence of politicians on Facebook can be interpreted as a sign of personalization. Political actors, have more space to promote their agenda, information about their personal life and preferences or campaign events. Whereas on talk shows, personalization is the effect of this specific type of media product, which mixes the public and the private sphere. As a result, the quantity of information transmitted by political actors on television is influenced by the way the discussion is conducted and the editorial policy of the journalist. From this perspective, online, politicians can share their own videos, photograph and messages, without third party interference. They also have the possibility to choose the type of information they want to privilege and the tone of voice.

Regarding the information privileged on Facebook and television, politicians chose to focus more on their professional dimension. The aim of this strategy was to build legitimacy and trust, considering the context set by the electoral campaign. In the quest for being perceived as knowledgeable and rational leaders, political actors declared they would make the best decisions for citizens, even if this

would mean denying their personal options. Legitimacy was also an effect of *us versus them discourses*, *inclusion strategies* or *demarkation discourses*. Through these types of discourse, politicians tried to present themselves as the best options for the electorate. They had the knowledge, abilities and power validated and supported by voters.

Finally, in terms of negativity, this research has shown that politicians who also focused on personal information on Facebook were less disposed to resort to political attacks than politicians who only emphasised the professional dimension. In this context, on their own communication platforms, some politicians tend to offer more space to discuss their accomplishments and positive initiatives. Yet, Facebook is also a virtual place where political actors can address certain issues that aren't discussed on television, therefore promoting their own agenda. In this context, politicians may also resort to political attacks meant to undermine the opponents' political offer or initiatives. In opposition, on television, negativity is both the result of the way politicians position themselves towards their adversaries, but it is likewise the consequence of the manner in which journalists frame the debates.

These findings are meant to indicate different patterns of Facebook use among politicians, and specific differences between political communication on this social network site and talk shows. However, the results cannot be generalised to all Romanian political communication. An extended corpus would offer further evidence regarding the way Romanian political actors use Facebook to build legitimacy and trust.

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Pag. 129-134

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## ***THE PEOPLE AND THEIR NETWORKS: SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC SPACE***

Thérèse Tierney, *The Public Space of Social Media.  
Connected Cultures of the Network Society*  
(New York, Oxon: Routledge, 2013)

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From the standpoint of researchers, social media is a very well integrated concept in the field of new media discourse, with a growing literature and critique. For users, social media is a field with many opportunities for communication, social interaction, sharing and distribution of information. The micro-celebrities have arisen in this environment that cultivates in the same time the individuals and the communities. The expression “user generated content” became a quintessence for this phenomenon. In the case of brands, for instance, social media opened new strategies and techniques for development and awareness. For the general public, social media is often associated with the term “revolution”, referring to the impact on political activism in North Africa or in the Middle East.

In this context, what novelty could a new publication bring in this domain? The significance of the changes brought by social media in the understanding of connectiveness, relationships or communication is, indeed, important and eloquent. But were all the relevant connections already made clear? Or is the contemporary social media well explained in the literature? For Thérèse F. Tierney, the answer to these questions is rather a “no” than a “yes”. Without minimizing the effort of the contributors to this area, Thérèse F. Tierney felt the need to update the discussions about social media and to reveal some missing points. A lot of previous analyses didn’t capture the context where the mobile technologies have been expanded or their methodological design was too limited for a wide interpretation of this phenomenon. In this respect, Tierney adds: “missing from this literature is a perspective that encompasses today’s dispersed place-based communities and a new understanding about bringing together physically separated individuals under the rubric of social media” (Tierney, 2013, p. 1). Thus, the social practices surrounding the public space became central. Between spatial dispersal and networked relations is established a dynamic that deserves to be investigated. But for this aim, Tierney refuses to fall in the endless study of this dynamic through the utopian and dystopian perspectives that were so used in the analyses of new media. Of course, the positive effects and traits coexist with the negative characteristics, but Tierney wants to exceed this hermeneutic philter, situating the study of social media into a deeper social and historical context. Thus, the authors that she assumes for the beginning are not only Bruno Latour or Manuel Castells, but also the urban planner Melvin Webber. In this respect, Tierney’s vision is one of a planner too, situation that introduces another degree of originality of her work. The cultural background of the author is very fruitful in this case; thus, Thérèse F. Tierney is an Assistant Professor of Architecture with a Designated Emphasis in New Media at the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign, US. Also, she is the Director of the *URL: Urban Research Lab*, a research group exploring networked technologies (University of Illinois Urbana Champaign). She made her pre-doctoral studies at the MIT Media Lab and she was a member of University of California Berkeley Center for New Media. Thérèse Tierney is co-editor with Anthony Burke of *Network Practice: New Strategies for Architecture + Design* (Princeton, 2007). She published papers in various journals, such as *Thresholds*, *Architectural Design*, *Trace SF*

*Urbanism and Leonardo: Journal of the International Society of Arts, Science and Technology.*

The cultural relations between new media and the architectural imaging were already studied in *Abstract Space. Beneath the Media Surface* (Routledge, 2007). The pressure of digital technologies on the image-object of architecture conducted to the dematerialization of the former. In this vein, the space still remains “abstract”. In *The Public Space of Social Media. Connected Cultures of the Network Society*, the space isn’t abstract anymore, and the focus is on the ways through which social media can produce interrelations between people and physical space. Thus, the locational context is inscribed in every analysis of social media, and the public – spatial or networked – do not constitute isolated spheres. Social media is seen in architectural terms, as having its own structure and, more than that, new media in general is characterized as having the huge potential to reset not only our communication styles and social practices, but also to reconfigure our cities by creating new public spaces and new respective meanings.

For this purpose, Tierney situates her investigation in the field of everyday social relations. In this respect, her research is integrated in the present current that makes congruent the offline and the online (for instance, Wellman, Haythornthwaite, 2002), and supposes the convergence of them in theory, as well in the common usages. Social media became a functional component of everyday life, and “the myth of cyberspace” detached from it seems now obsolete (Baym, 2010).

The originality of her book doesn’t affect the quality of assumptions and the depth of its architecture. Thus, the book is structured in 6 chapters, very well interconnected and documented. Chapter one, “Reappropriating Social Media” presents the essential connections between social media and the public space through Internet activism, a visible component that can be easier analyzed. The transformation of public sphere was constantly associated with the development of new media. Thus, Habermas’s view and its critics (Fraser, Hauser, etc.) were revisited, the main interrogation of this literature being: “New media creates a new public sphere or rather another public space?”. Of course, the polarization of the perspectives is found in this area, too. If Lévy backs up the possibility of new technologies to restructure the entire public sphere (Lévy, 2002, p. 64), Papacharissi considers that „our political experience online has shown that so far, the internet presents a public space, but does not yet constitute a public sphere” (Papacharissi, 2002, p. 23). Tierney’s

position asserts the existence of an “in progress” relation, that depends on many factors: “The Internet is a democratic public sphere only if the agents make it so, which is to say that they use open standards for messaging and create software that constructs the context of communication (visible to all), *and* if computers or other handheld transmission devices are freely and universally available and secure. At present, these conditions are improving, but universal access is far from being realized” (Papacharissi, 2002, p. 14). These affirmations are a reminder of Bentivegna’s approach on this subject: “So the Internet and democracy may coexist and nourish each other, but there is nothing automatic in their affirmation and mutual development. [...] The Internet will be a tool for democracy only when all those navigating it will allow it to be so” (Bentivegna, 2002, p. 59).

Second chapter, entitled “Assembling the Publics”, aims to respond to the main question: “What are the conditions that produce publicness?” This significant inquiry is treated on three levels: a spatial public (the importance of space materiality in the formulation of historical conceptions about it), a media public (shaped by technologies as print media and television) and a networked public (that are always connected with physical spaces). Chapter three, “Origins of Networked Publics”, advances a genealogy of social media, the most important moments and subjects being thus invoked. A fruitful taxonomy of networked publics is elaborated in “Networked Identity Making”, where Facebook is analyzed as a perfect example for a plethora of online interactions that are made possible through it, and also as a “visual grammar” (Tierney, 2013, p. 71). As Patrice Flichy emphasized the relevance of the “*imaginaire* surrounding a technique” (Flichy, 2007, p. 2), Thérèse F. Tierney accentuates the relevance of cultural imaginary in the construction and production of space. Kevin Lynch and Graham Dawson’s conceptions are echoed in the Tierney’s presentation of the role of cultural imaginary. The penultimate chapter – “Surveying Social Media” – presents the multiphase study completed between 2008 and 2012. The study uses various research methods and its findings are important not only in the case of confirmations of hypotheses, but also along the surface of some complexities that weren’t foreseeable from the beginning. In this respect, not without significance is the perspective on space and online social networks as “culturally relative phenomena” (Tierney, 2013, p. 112), a perspective contended in this book. Besides the conclusions (“Technological Innovation: Public Implication”), we

notice the presence of a consistent glossary, that can be very useful to students or other categories of beginners.

Thus, the clarity of writing, the deepness of arguments, the nuanced and original statements and perspectives recommend this book for all the people interested in new media, social networks, transformation of space with technological communication, and urban implications of social media. *The Public Space of Social Media. Connected Cultures of the Network Society* is a fresh and updated foray in some key areas and concepts of new media, and the empirical study presented in the book strengthens its theoretical assumptions.

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