

CAMPAIGN JOURNALISM ON ROMANIAN TELEVISIONS:
TOWARDS A NORMATIVE VIEW OF ADVOCACY IN THE MEDIA *

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ABSTRACT

Advocacy media campaigns, staged by Romanian television channels and focused on changing social policies, have gained increasing visibility in the Romanian public sphere. The article examines models of journalism and normative theories about the role of the press in a democracy in order to carve out a normative position from which this emerging media format can be analysed. It situates media advocacy within the frame of interpretive journalism, aimed both at facilitating democratic debate and citizen participation (civic journalism), and at social reform (radical journalism). The reassessment of media strategies based on emotions and interpretation as mediators of social reality may lead to a positive, 'optimistic' view of campaign journalism. However, the advanced commercialisation of the media and the struggles for political representation interfere with and make the task of socially responsible journalism an incredibly challenging one.

Keywords: media advocacy, normative theories of the press, interpretive journalism, radical journalism, commercialisation.

INTRODUCTION

The news departments of Romanian television channels, both public (TVR) and private (Antena 1, Antena 3, Pro TV, Prima TV, Realitatea TV etc.), have introduced, for a number of years now, special sections dedicated to public communication campaigns. Some have humanitarian objectives, others target personal behaviour, and yet others, a smaller but visible category, profess to participate in policy-making, mostly on social issues, and to transform Romanian society by making a problem salient and pressuring authorities into action. This is

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done against the somewhat indifferent or even hostile backdrop of Romanian mainstream politics, or so runs the claim, and in the service of Romanian citizens, who are the publics of the host TV channels. Generally, the words that stand out in the presentation of campaigns are: care, social responsibility, justice, change, and journalistic merit. A champion of the campaigns that have allegedly changed the face of Romanian society is Pro TV, which boasts a special position in the landscape of televisions in Romania, confirmed by the awards it has received, the involvement of star journalists, and, in particular, the politically noteworthy campaign outcomes:

*Only one year after its official launch in 1995, Pro TV started the campaign “Give and Win”. It was followed by “Cleaner Days”, “Pro NATO”, “We Care”, and the more disconcerting “Say No to Animal Torture”, and “Any Idea What Your Kid Is Doing Right Now?”. All this has demonstrated that Pro TV is more than a television because it does not remain indifferent to the problems of Romanian society. Even more, the idea of social campaigns initiated by televisions has become a model taken up by other Romanian TV channels [...]. As a result of this campaign [“Say No to Animal Torture”], in 2008, a new bill was passed into animal protection legislation – Law 9/2008 – a new Animal Protection Law, which stipulates fines of up to 10 000 lei and prison sentences for those who torture animals (Vasile, *VIP Superlatives* 2010, September 13; my translation).*

The list of Pro TV accomplishments in the *VIP Superlatives* quoted above continues with an Emmy Award for the campaign “Any Idea What Your Kid Is Doing Right Now?” and with several other policy proposals, some of which have resulted in concrete measures. Following suit, Antena 1, through Observator, mentions among its latest achievements a legal framework for free breast reconstruction for women who suffer from cancer and have to undergo a mastectomy (Observator.ro, February 13, 2014), while TVR1, the public broadcaster, takes credit for contribution to changing the Romanian legislation for volunteers:

The campaign staged by the TVR News Department in the autumn of 2013 supported the modification of the Law for volunteers, so that Romanians could benefit from the official recognition of the competences acquired during this experience. The jurist-deputies have said yes to the bill for the regulation of volunteering activities (TVR News online, May 5, 2014; my translation).

The examples are numerous and demonstrate a constant preoccupation of the broadcast medium with advocacy for social causes that have policy implications. Communication scholars have noted the emergence of this media format in relation to civic journalism and, especially, the “new television”¹ with its recently

¹ The concepts of “old” and “new” television, to mark a paradigm shift in television practices, were first introduced by Umberto Eco (cited in Beciu 2009: 109).

developed modalities of engaging publics, shaped by a logic of the spectacle and of the market (Beciu 2009, 2011; Lazăr 2008). Yet, in terms of its orientation towards policy-making, campaign journalism and the discursive mechanisms that underlie advocacy in Romania have not been the focus of major studies to date. The main question I tackle in this article is:

From what normative standpoints can the discursive modes of media engagement in press campaigns be assessed?

The angles this question opens up and the (always provisional) answers could serve as points of departure for the analysis and interpretation of television campaign journalism, my concern being specifically with Romanian television campaigns. I view the discourse of media advocacy as constituted by and constitutive of the institutional system and media organisations, in the broader context of media, politics and public culture in Romania (Beciu 2011; Richardson 2007; Fairclough 1995, 2003). The ways of raising an issue in such campaigns (often by means of denouncing some public authority and appeals to emotion), constructing a public problem, and mobilising support to change legislation make necessary an analytical framework attuned both to the different objectives of campaign journalism and to the novel circumstances in which the media function at present. In the context of this article, ‘normative standpoints’ refers to a conceptualisation of the role of the journalist from the perspective of normative theories about “good public communication” and “the media’s contributions to the working of democracy” (Christians et al. 2009: p. 18–19). They are normally correlated with the media system and the political system in a country, but the media and political systems are not the main focus here (Hallin & Mancini 2004). It is an approach that also permits a discussion of deliberation in the public sphere, due to its emphasis on media participation in informing and engaging the citizenry in decision-making on the best course of political action. ‘Novel circumstances’ refers to the transformations the media have gone through in late modernity, amply discussed in the specialised literature. Primarily, they are to do with the accentuated market orientation of journalism, under the impact of neoliberal policies, the rise of public relations, and the impetus of communications technology.

The aim of the article is to stress out the need to examine media advocacy as a form of interpretive, partisan journalism (not necessarily ideologically partisan, but engaged on behalf of a cause), which, inasmuch as it is carried out in the mainstream media, is also subject to the dominant logic of the market (consumerism, competition). The main stake would be to pave the way for an analytical framework that goes beyond the principles and distinctions specific to the liberal model of the journalistic profession, takes into account the advanced marketisation of media form and content, but does not embrace, from the outset, a “pessimistic”² view of the quality of journalism in a democracy. I begin by briefly

² I take the labels of “pessimistic” and “optimistic” from Brian McNair (2000).

introducing media advocacy as a strategic communication practice and campaign journalism as a specific development. I then refer to the roles of the journalist/media organisation, starting from the concept of social responsibility that Romanian televisions highlight in their self-presentations, and go on to propose a view of media communication strategies (the intensification of emotional coverage, adversarial discourse, interpretation and comment), which, if not downright optimistic, makes nuanced claims and dwells upon the analytical challenges inherent in press advocacy campaigns.

FROM MEDIA ADVOCACY TO THE MEDIA AS POLICY ADVOCATES

As hinted at in the Introduction, media advocacy is a type of public communication campaign geared at achieving some form of social change, in particular through the introduction and implementation of public policies. Advocacy campaigns are usually contrasted with the wider category of information and awareness-raising campaigns, designed to trigger change in behaviour on issues ranging from health to crime prevention, littering, drug consumption and various risks (Rice & Atkin 2001). The latter seem to be staged more often in the public sphere and to make more frequently the object of academic research, while the former remain fairly under-researched, in spite of the insights they offer into the construction of public problems, legitimacy, power relations or systemic transformation. If forms of advocacy in the Anglo-Saxon media go back to the seventeenth century, its more recent origins are traced by researchers to the late 1980s³ (Wallack & Dorfman 2001: p. 389). Media advocacy derives its principal characteristics, firstly, from an orientation of the campaign message towards “social change, institutional accountability, or collective action” (Wallack & Dorfman 2001: p. 390). In this sense, the scope of the action surpasses concerns with personal behaviour, through objectives such as facilitating the publics’ engagement and mobilisation, identifying the systemic causes of a problem (see also Cox 2006), or bringing to attention questions of social justice. Secondly, it is shaped by strategic, concrete objectives. “An advocacy campaign”, states Robert Cox, who looks at environmental campaigns, “can be defined broadly as a *strategic course of action* involving communication undertaken for a *specific purpose*” (2006: p. 244, my emphases). Producing change, in many cases with far-reaching effects in society, and effective either immediately or in the foreseeable future, is the chief goal of advocacy campaigns. It influences their planning, layout and evolution.

Media advocacy is, however, only one stage in what Wallack and Dorfman call “a broader strategy” (p. 395). This involves a careful consideration of the campaign issue in order to formulate alternate courses of action in policy-making, the identification of decision-makers who could bring about the desired outcome and of people or groups who could exert pressure on the authorities, and, finally,

³ Wallack and Dorfman (2001) analyse health advocacy campaigns, one of the main areas currently associated with the practice. According to other authors (Ward 2011), advocacy journalism made a comeback in the 1960s.

the tailoring of the message to all these different audiences. Cox (2006: 252ff.) points to similar components in the design of an advocacy campaign, with the media and the public acting as “secondary audiences” and policy-makers as “primary audiences”, even though the way to the latter is usually through the former. The media are needed to set the issue on the public agenda and to frame it, preferably, in the direction intended by the campaigners, demonstrating the advocates’ entitlement to raise it and providing the whole enterprise with legitimacy in the eyes of the public (Wallack & Dorfman 2001; Paisley 2001). With this in mind, Cox (2006) underscores the tremendous role played by the press in holding representatives and decision bodies accountable to public opinion. As part of the process, campaigners have to become acquainted with media institutional values and practices, so as to supply them with whatever is necessary to make the campaign cause visible in the public sphere, but in a manner that, at the same time, serves the campaign’s goals (Wallack & Dorfman 2001). One of the challenges is finding a balance between the usual media focus on individual victims and the policy advocates’ interest in the analysis of systemic, general causes and in the fate of communities or society at large (Wallack & Dorfman 2001). Another is the campaigners’ ability to express specific messages in ways that can reach the large and diverse audiences the media normally address (Cox 2006). Three audience strata, notes Cox (2006: 257), have to be integrated in the campaign strategy: supporters (or “the campaign’s base”), opponents, and “persuadables”, each group with distinct attitudes and expectations in terms of the information required, the values cherished and the level of engagement.

As can be seen from this brief presentation of the core features of media advocacy, the media, albeit crucial in mobilising public support and legitimising a set of policy goals, are first and foremost a target audience and a mediator for the campaigners’ cause. The format I am concerned with, Romanian television advocacy campaigns, obscures these underlying relations and processes to some extent, since the televisions publicly assume a position of policy advocates or civic actors in their own right. The participation of activists, NGOs and other organisations can be glimpsed in the coverage, but the degree of their involvement is not always clear. The practice is by no means specific only to the Romanian media, but can be encountered, for example, in the local British press, one of the few areas that have attracted scholarly interest and analysis (Aldridge 2003; Birks 2010, 2011; Richardson 2007; Temple 2005). Placing campaign journalism under the umbrella of “editorialised news reporting”, Birks (2010) notes that it has to be distinguished from other genres that journalists refer to as ‘press campaign’, primarily journalistic investigation and appeals for charity fundraising⁴. The

⁴ The blurring of lines between various ‘campaigns’ can also be observed on Romanian televisions, not least because a hybridisation of genres makes it possible to combine elements from each type. For example, advocacy campaigns may rely on investigative journalism to establish the existence of a problem and on an emotional, sensationalistic portrayal of victims that is similar to representations in humanitarian discourse. This does not mean, however, that it is not possible to distinguish a dominant communicative orientation of the campaign.

distinctions lie in the policy aims of advocacy campaigns, the radical changes envisioned (as different from investigation which works more within the system than with a view to reforming it), and the type of journalistic engagement with the topic and the intended audiences (Birks 2010: p. 209). Attempts to cast light on the functioning of the media format configured around campaign journalism bring up several related points. What entitles the media to take on such a task and within what frame? How does it square with the mission and norms of the profession? In what ways do the transformations in political communication and the present-day context influence the practice of advocacy journalism and the emerging discursive articulations? The next sections examine these aspects more closely.

MEDIA ADVOCACY AT THE INTERSECTION OF JOURNALISTIC TRADITIONS AND ROLES

Romanian TV channels define their mission through the lens of ‘social responsibility’, touting the concept as the guiding force behind their engagement in advocacy campaigns. Most textbooks on journalism link social responsibility to the Hutchins Commission on Freedom of the Press in the United States (1947), which formulated the guidelines for the profession in response to a perceived decline in standards in the American press. Apart from the importance attached to “truthful”, “comprehensive” information, access and wide representation, the Hutchins Commission assigned to the press the function of forum for critical discussion of “the goals and values of society” (McQuail 2010: p. 170). These guidelines indicate two principal orientations: one built around the norms of objectivity, impartiality, fairness and balance as “responsible journalism”, which continues the tradition of liberalism, while insisting upon more regulation of the media (Ward 2011, among others); one that attaches importance to the media interpretation of events and positive intervention in society. In this second meaning, the concept has become central to “care-communitarian” theories of journalism, where “‘responsibly’ refers to specific aims such as helping to develop caring human relations and communities and fairly representing minorities and other disadvantaged groups” (Ward 2011: p. 68; see also Nerone 2002). Thus, the concept has come to uphold “an affirmative role [for journalism] in advocating social justice for citizens who are powerless” (Bunton 1998: p. 253; see also Christians et al. 2009). It is precisely this meaning of socially responsible journalism that gains prominence in the claims made by Romanian televisions about their mission, so as to justify their engagement in advocacy (Lazăr 2008). If most codes of ethics employed for self-regulation in the Romanian media bring into relief the classical liberal approach (see, for example, the Code of the Romanian Press Club), televisions, and especially the private channels, stipulate in their codes or mission statements concern for and involvement in society:

The public television is concerned with the Romanians' lives and with re-establishing a hierarchy of values. This is the reason why it constantly gets engaged – through media campaigns, image and humanitarian campaigns – in social life (“What makes us different”, TVR site; my translation).

Correct information includes the obligation to cover the most significant aspects in the life of society, including those that are relevant for its positive development (The ARCA Code of Ethics, September 2011 – code to which most Romanian commercial televisions adhere; my translation).

Within the frame of social responsibility, the moral obligations of the profession are conceived in terms of safeguarding democracy and exposing the abuses of the power-holders, in accordance with the liberal approach, *as well as* advancing social justice. The press resorts to investigative journalism to uncover abuse, but also to “rhetorical resources to move the public to act on these problems” (Christians et al. 2009: p. 57), which makes it amenable to “cater[ing] to populist political interests” (p. 56). The “interpretive and advocational” approach to the media (Ward 2011: p. 65–66) that fits in with this understanding of social responsibility does not entail, however, that principles having to do with the accurate presentation of facts go entirely by the board, only that greater store is set by opinion and the interpretation of facts, the pursuit of social causes, and the empowerment of the marginalised. Anticipated by a “revolutionary” form of journalism in the eighteenth century and subsequent developments, such as muckraking journalism in the United States, the tradition of activist media underwent in the 1990s a “more moderate reform” (Ward 2011: p. 65), evolving into “civic journalism” and an ideal of participatory democracy. In a similar vein, Christians et al. (2009) interpret advocacy as cutting across what they call the “facilitative role” and the “radical role” of journalism, from the viewpoint of normative theories of the media. Even though each role requires specific modes of communication, they can both be linked to “civic democracy”:

...elements of advocacy appear in relation to a facilitative role, since advocacy could not be fulfilled without a flow of articulated positions on controversial issues affecting community and society. Adequate information also implies the availability of diverse relevant standpoints and alternative choices and solutions for problems. Even more strongly, advocacy is central to the radical role of the media, since effective criticism is typically based not on evidence and expert analysis but rather on alternative visions of what is right and good (Christians et al. 2009: p. 127).

In their capacity as facilitators of “public life”, the media are expected to provide the conditions for the participation of an array of civil society representatives and for the expression of a diversity of worldviews, i.e. an arena where solutions can be found for issues on which there is substantial disagreement. Engagement in the democratic process presupposes, thus, a public space for

“interactive dialogue... on both practical matters and social vision” (Christians et al. 2009: p. 159), with journalists acting as “active community participants” and upholders of “citizen-based values” (p. 161). This type of journalism is considered paramount to supplying “the cultural conditions of democratic life” (Christians et al. 2009: p. 163), on the basis of moral values rooted in visions of the good, negotiated and shaped during the dialogue facilitated by the media. In her analysis of local press campaigns run in Scotland, Birks takes the same position, situating the role of journalists in the democratic corporatist model of media and politics (Hallin & Mancini 2004); participatory democracy and democratic pluralism are central to this model. The press campaigns she examines raise issues such as the journalists’ redefined mission, the access granted by newspapers to representatives of the civil society, the representation of marginalised groups, and the formation of active publics (Birks 2010: p. 211). Within this frame, Birks emphasises “[t]he distinction between press protest as a legitimate part of pluralist liberal society [...] and as manipulative populism” (Birks 2011: p. 131). It is a distinction that discloses the tension between the principles of participatory democracy in civic journalism and the wide popular base necessary for mobilisation in radical journalism (Christians et al. 2009). Both play a part in media advocacy.

The radical⁵ role of the press seems to have taken a step back at present, being mostly related to the identity projects of various groups that struggle for full access to rights, rather than to major revolutionary movements. While alternative and community media are the principal sites for radical journalism, forms of radical expression have been integrated into the mainstream media (with their bite reduced), especially those concerned with “fundamental issues, including social justice and human rights” (Christians et al. 2009: p. 190). Although such instances are rather exceptional in the mainstream press, their contribution is assessed by Christians et al. as essential to “the overall climate of opinion”, an aspect that also needs to be considered in the case of advocacy television campaigns in Romania. As the aims of radical journalism are persuasion and mobilisation for purposes of social justice, redistribution of power and, ultimately, profound societal transformation, the media involved in this mode of communication should be “*more participatory and dialogical* than the conventional media – even beyond the level reached by the facilitative role” (Christians et al. 2009: p. 181, my emphasis). The “adversary model” (Blumler & Gurevitch 1995) in political communication is, nonetheless, poorly regulated in general, no fast and hard rules being specified, except for a clearly oppositional relationship between journalists and politicians.

These traditions and models of journalism translate into particular discursive styles and forms. Speaking from a historical perspective, Marcel Broersma (2007) identifies two main journalistic styles: a “news style” and a “reflective style”. The

⁵ A distinction needs to be made here between “repressive” and “democratic” radicalism, depending on the orientation and the claims of the groups (Christians et al. 2009). I refer only to democratic radicalism.

“news style”, further subdivided into an “information” model and a “story” model, is associated by Broersma with the Anglo-American tradition of journalism. The “information model” is premised upon the objective, fair and balanced presentation of information, coupled with detached, rational argumentation, and is characteristic of quality newspapers. The “story model” favours the sensationalised, emotive narrative for commercial purposes and has largely negative connotations, derived from a negative view of tabloidization. The “reflective style”, on the other hand, “has its roots in partisan journalism, which wanted to *educate, instruct* and *persuade* its readers of certain political or sociocultural views” (Broersma 2007: xv, my emphases). Broersma locates it in the tradition of French journalism and underscores the role of journalistic interpretation as a mediator “between readers and reality”. According to him, this journalistic style has a “performative power” that serves to construct social reality. In a different context of analysis, the performative capacity of media formats, subject at present to a logic of the spectacle and the commercial, is similarly noted by Beciu (2009, 2011) and Lazăr (2008), who discuss the new communication conventions and interactions between journalists and their publics. Such developments cast a different light on the functions of subjective interpretation and emotions in advocacy journalism, aspects which I briefly address below.

Commenting on British local press campaigns, Temple (2005) feels positively inclined towards the journalists’ reliance on emotions and sensational overtones “to successfully attract and mobilise local sentiment” (p. 428), using for illustration the case of a campaign that failed because it was “too serious”. The example confirms the importance of emotions for mobilising publics in campaign journalism. Arousing the indignation of those who have been wronged is the first step in raising a type of awareness (“perception”) that is conducive to action (legal or political claim for reparation) and, in the case of groups, to solidarity. Kathryn Abrams (2011) explains how this mechanism works in legal claims for rights. The “moral shock” that results from the sudden realisation that one has been wronged is crucial in “ascribing responsibility” for the wrong-doing and “is often strongly mediated by emotion” (Abrams 2011: p. 557–558). In order for indignation to be aroused, notes Abrams, a common frame is needed, as well as shared moral values for assessing what “right” or “wrong” is. This is why some form of pre-existing popular consent on these matters is not problematic in itself. Social movement leaders understand the mechanism very well:

Movements may also seek to evoke emotions in their target audiences by the use of metaphor (or other figurative language), ritual, or drama (Abrams 2011: p. 565).

“The emotions of injustice and indignation” are necessary, alongside opinion and interpretation, in the formulation of an adversary position and the mobilisation of activists (see also Perpelea 2008). Luc Boltanski (2004[1999]) describes the

same process in what he calls “denunciation” by means of “enlightened” moral indignation. The denunciation of a wrong-doer as “a necessary mediation of the orientation to action” (p. 63) requires emotion to begin with, since “indignation cannot be impersonal” (p. 64), but this emotion has to be followed by detachment that allows a debate to be started around the matter of concern. For a member of the public, this means an intense shift from a position of sympathy or even identification with the victim, to one of debate, where evidence for the accusations has to be provided and a weighing of arguments has to be carried out: “The discourse of denunciation thus appears as at the same time indignant and meticulous, emotional and factual” (Boltanski 2004: p. 66).

Even when not linked directly to mobilisation strategies, genres such as emotionally intense media narratives, due to their emphasis on the plight of marginalised or suffering individuals, may contribute to a public culture that is more open, for example, to cosmopolitan understandings of the good life, as Martha Nussbaum (2013) has argued. A similar function is attributed to “thick journalism” by Simon Cottle (2005), who comments on the contribution of emotional coverage, if properly done, to a “mediatised social space that constitutes, to some imperfect degree, a ‘public sphere’ of common intercourse and shared public understanding” (2005: p. 110). In this context, hybrid media genres, configured around a mix of opinions and feelings, “act as a public interlocutor” and “help to produce rhetoric and explanation that are essential for ‘deliberative democracy’” (Cottle 2005: p. 112, drawing upon Dryzek and Benhabib).

One of the questions that take contour from a normative perspective is the extent to which the advocacy campaigns on Romanian televisions manage to include, in formulating an adversarial position towards the authorities, both stages that scholars point to: denunciation and detached debate on or problematisation of a public issue. Another question is whether the campaigns could be viewed, in broader terms, as part of a “deliberative system” (Krause 2008), inasmuch as the debate is picked up in other public arenas or invites critical reflection. Thus, placing television shows, advertising and movies in the same category as activist testimonials, Krause notes:

The symbolic expressions and testimonials of activists do more than merely lead to deliberation, then. They are themselves deliberative if they press (however implicitly) justice claims, or claims about the common good, and thereby contribute to individual and public reflection on matters of law and policy (Krause 2008: p. 1210).

Admittedly, many advocacy campaigns organised by the media may be “little more than flag-waving exercises”, lacking the necessary force to “engage with the formal system of politics” (Temple 2007: p. 423). Nevertheless, we may think of them, beyond the fulfilment or non-fulfilment of their specific objectives, as components of the “deliberative system” mentioned by Krause or as vehicles of a

“critical rhetoric” (Cox 2006: 247ff.) that proposes alternative social imaginaries, starting from the denunciation of existing states of affairs.

Such views, traditions and journalistic roles *co-exist* at present in media communication, resulting in the emergence of mixed models of journalism and discursive hybridity. The normative approaches to journalism outlined here legitimise a different interpretive frame for media advocacy, a frame that moves away from the dominant Anglo-American, liberal paradigm, and makes room for subjectivity, interpretation and emotion in the process of mediation (see also Lazăr 2008). Once we factor into the equation the transformations of media practices in late modernity, however, the lines become blurred again. Among them, the unprecedented market orientation of journalism is, perhaps, the most significant, as the drive towards commercialisation, supported by technological advancement, has come to dominate mediation, including of the public issues that are the focus of advocacy campaigns in Romania (Beciu 2009, 2011; Lazăr 2008). Equally importantly, the competition among media organisations is, beyond the expected economic benefits of ratings and audiences, a competition for political power, not only with other media organisations, but with elected officials (Aldridge 2003; Birks 2010, 2011; Richardson 2007; for the Romanian media see Beciu 2009, 2011). Neither influence on journalistic practices – of the market or of politics – is novel (quite to the contrary, one might say), but the commercialisation of the media at present has reached new levels of intensity.

MEDIA ADVOCACY CAMPAIGNS IN A COMMERCIAL REGIME

The conclusions drawn by the British scholars who have looked at local press campaigns in the UK tilt towards a “pessimistic” interpretation of such transformations. Birks (2010, 2011) demonstrates that Scottish press campaigns come short of achieving their objectives within the normative frame of civic democracy. Local Scottish newspapers claim to represent the categories for whom the campaigns seek redress, but, in fact, regard them as market segments rather than constituencies, which is at odds with the newspapers’ self-declared role of “civic organization or single issue pressure group” (Birks 2010: p. 216). It is a position that encourages the “reification of the audience” and “political passivity”, trust being used, according to Birks, “as a brand characteristic”, not as something earned by journalists (2010: p. 216). In other words, newspapers do not represent, but “speak for” their readers, and encourage only a minimum of participation (this may vary depending on the campaign and the newspaper). This triggers, says Birks, an “instrumentalisation” of readers, whose trust or agreement on the course of action is simply invoked, not obtained. In the same line, journalists rely on access to politicians for their choice of campaign topics (they choose topics they know from politicians that are likely to be passed into legislation), in spite of

claims of acting from outside the mainstream political system. The involvement of civil society organisations is limited to certain groups who do not engage in extensive opposition to the political system, such as “experts” or “charities” (Birks 2010). In contrast with the requirements of successful policy advocacy, Scottish newspapers fail to expose and analyse the systemic causes and conditions of the problems in question and prefer to focus on individual victims (see also Richardson 2007).

The tendency towards the reification and the instrumentalisation of readers, as well as towards exacerbated individualisation and sentiment – what Birks calls “the emotional ‘authenticity’ of ordinary people” (2011: p. 132) – is likely to foster populism. The lack of deliberation and public consultation, combined with a “redemptive rhetoric” levelled at the politicians in office and with “manufactured dissent” reinforces, to Birks (2011), the strategic treatment of audiences who are not enabled to become active citizens and publics. The literature on moral panics (Cohen 2002; Critcher 2003) similarly refers to strategies of sparking moral outrage by ‘othering’ particular categories that become easy targets of vilification. The issue of power is prominent here, given that newspapers employ forms of constructed consensus to reposition themselves as the true representatives of the publics’ interests against elected politicians. If not supported by the introduction of multiple viewpoints and situations, the use of emotions and sensationalism to legitimise the journalists’ advocacy goals may take newspapers away from what is understood to be the mission of civic, participatory journalism. In this sense, the democratic potential that can be attributed to press campaigns is wasted on newspaper branding projects and attempts to assert their power in the political game:

If political advocacy is to have a positive democratic role, then there needs to be a professional framework that can accommodate it. Key to a professional practice of campaign journalism would be a coherent and consistent notion of objectivity and truth, an understanding of ‘publics’ as politically active, a commitment to discussing what should be done (not just finding fault), and to empowering publics (not speaking for them) (Birks 2010: p. 221).

Even more negative conclusions are reached by Aldridge (2003) and Richardson (2007), who draws upon Aldridge’s work in this area. Aldridge (2003) is highly critical of the British local newspapers’ claims to take part “in change-making, as a strategy to attract readers” (2003: p. 499, my emphasis) because of the inevitable outcome: community identity is constructed “as a market imperative” (p. 492) and “the personal” is glorified to the detriment of the political (p. 501). What results is a homogenous, sentimentalised view of social groups that lends itself well to “an appeal to universals”. According to Aldridge, this approach puts readers in a position to identify with the categories targeted by the campaign on the grounds of sentiment, without rational debate and proper contextualisation (a view tributary to the strict separation between rational debate and emotions in the liberal

Anglo-American approach). At the same time, it invests newspapers with the power and authority that can be reclaimed on the basis of the “loyalty” of large numbers of readers. The newspapers may and occasionally do take a different path in carrying out advocacy, but the commercial orientation steers the course of campaigning and the ways in which public issues are construed:

When the systemic aetiology and the complexity of social problems and divisions are obscured, space is opened up for the banal definition of issues and grotesquely over-simplified solutions (Aldridge 2003: p. 506).

Richardson (2007) emphasises the power statements that a media organisation can make through press campaigns, the elements (aspects of the problem, participants etc.) that are left out of a campaign for the sake of reproducing certain configurations of social relations, the profits made, and the opportunities to reaffirm the newspaper’s participation in public life or to boast loyal readerships. The sensationalisation of topics, the suffusion in sentimentality and the preference for “symptoms, not cause” are viewed as serious drawbacks of present-day campaigning.

What all these studies reveal, even though some of them retain distinctions and norms characteristic of the classical liberal approach to journalism, is the negative impact of marketisation on media practices to the point of dramatically altering the functions of representation, legitimation and debate that advocacy should fulfil in view of policy-making. How can we distinguish between the legitimate use of emotions to mobilise publics and “manufactured dissent” (Birks 2011) or misguided “hyperadversarialism” (McNair 2000), under conditions of market pressure and power struggles in the journalistic field? An answer lies in whether or not denunciation is followed by a stage of detachment and generalisation from a case (Boltanski 2004[1999]; see also Beciu 2009, 2011). If this transition does not take place, will it still be possible to identify a positive contribution of media advocacy to formulating a public issue, achieved primarily in a mode of alert and interpellation (Beciu 2009, 2011; Lazăr 2008)? Since commercialisation is here to stay, the task of changing society assumed by campaign journalism becomes particularly challenging, even after investing interpretation and emotion with a different mission than the one they are typically assigned in the traditional Anglo-American model of journalism.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Starting from the visibility in the Romanian public sphere of media advocacy campaigns and the positive intervention in society that they claim, the present article has looked into existing models of journalism for the purpose of carving out a normative position on this emergent media format. By situating campaign

journalism at the intersection of the facilitative and the radical role of the press, several characteristics of media advocacy have been pinned down: the centrality of citizen representation and participation in debate (as well as of civil society overall); the popular base of radical-adversarial journalism and its role in the denunciation of wrong-doing; the crucial function of interpretation and subjectivity in the mediation of social reality, integrated into a performative dimension of journalism; the reassessment of emotions in public life, not only for mobilisation or for grounding goals and claims in particular sets of values, but also for the public culture in general; the different degrees of advocacy that may be encountered, reform being more likely than fully-fledged revolution, especially in the mainstream media; the presence of advocacy in different modes of public communication and normative views thereof, easy to correlate with the hybridisation of journalistic genres and styles, also manifest in the case of Romanian television campaigns.

Interpretive journalism from positions of partisan advocacy is more at home in continental Europe than in Anglo-American journalism with its liberal model (Christians et al. 2009, among others). Countries where a Mediterranean external pluralist model of media and politics is in place, but even countries such as France, have been traditionally more open to opinion journalism and partisanship. The Romanian media system in postcommunism is difficult to locate within the frame developed by Hallin and Mancini, even in their 2012 extended version. Most easily associated with the external pluralist system and partisan journalism, it presents characteristics of the other main systems, as well, especially in the lip service paid to the liberal model (“a mimetic orientation”, Jakubowicz 2012), without much foundation in practice. The neoliberal policies that favour commercialisation and the political control of the media (a “captive” public broadcaster, among other things), both forms of “instrumentalisation” of the media, are rampant in Romania, and find support and legitimation in the public culture (Coman & Gross 2012; Jakubowicz 2012; Mihelj & Downey 2012). Thus, media advocacy in view of policy-making is thoroughly integrated with a market-oriented, competitive journalism, where the strategies of mobilisation and raising public issues find themselves intertwined with the branding attempts of media organisations or personalities, profit-making imperatives, and a drive towards the spectacle (Beciu 2009, 2011; Lazăr 2008).

Under these circumstances, it is indeed likely that an analysis of Romanian television campaigns will reveal the negative transformations that the British scholars complain about in the case of British local press campaigns. On the other hand, a broader and, at the same time, more nuanced view of television advocacy campaigns may identify in them elements that have a positive contribution to the Romanian public culture and, in avowedly rare cases, even counteract some of these trends, inasmuch as they are directly shaped by them. One of the advantages of analysing campaign journalism within the frame of interpretive journalism lies

in the fact that it does not discard, from the outset, the possibility that advocacy in the media can be carried out in conformity with acceptable journalistic standards and can achieve at least some of its proposed goals, if not wholesale societal transformation: engaged, ‘connected’ publics, a space for positive moral sentiments in the public sphere and alternative social imaginaries.

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