

Chapter 50

The Crisis of Public Health as a Media Event: Between Media Frames and Public Assessments

Valentina Marinescu
University of Bucharest, Romania

ABSTRACT

The focus of the present article is on the analysis of the influence exercised by media narratives on the Romanian audience's reconstructions of social movements from January-February 2012. The analysis was interested to show what are the aspects involved in the publicizing of this media event in Romania, by focusing on the event narrative built in such a way to transmit a particular significance related to the protest movements related to the crisis of the health public system in Romania. Two research methods were used in collecting the data: a survey on two hundreds Romanian respondents and quantitative content analysis of five national Romanian newspapers. As the results show, the high consumption of mass media messages does not determine whether the public adopts the media narratives concerning the events from the beginning of year 2012. At the same time, the analysis shows that in the case of the media events that took place in Romania in January-February 2012 the impact of the media narrative on the way in which the audience from Romania rebuilt those protests was a minor one and other factors had played a major role in triggering massive mass protests in Romania.

INTRODUCTION

In the analysis of the relationship between media and society a widespread thesis is the one according to which mass media can influence people's perception of certain issues and, at the same time, it has the role to reconstruct these issues in the public space (Bernays, 2011, p. 79). If the newspapers publish fewer articles on a certain topic, it can mean that the respective topic is not as important as the other topics published by this media (Frangi & Fletcher, 2002, p. 27).

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Far from being the identical reflection of reality, the news represent a reconstruction of social events and processes, also including, together with real facts, a collection of new elements among which are facts or people, images as well as the experts' comments. The finite product of the work of journalists, the news, is, in fact, only that which the journalist wants their audience to see (Monhan, 2010, p. 4). As Murray Edelman (Monhan, 2010, p. 21) said, news constructs the social world, history, evoking the worries, hope and assuming of the events that are observed or ignored (Monhan, 2010, p. 21).

The specific of the Academic approaches regarding the relation between communication and health consists of using the interdisciplinarity on the theoretical and methodological levels. The problems encountered in different medical systems and finding the solutions to these problems are the foundation of constructing certain research combining medicine and public policies (in general those in the administrative sphere, but also from an economic perspective) and sociology (Mechanic, 1996, p. 238).

A study on the issue of health in Romania (MedLife, IMAS, April 2012) shows that 70% of the Romanians do not intend to make a private health insurance (MedLife, IMAS, April 2012). According to this study (MedLife, IMAS, April 2012), in the last years, Romanians have changed their attitude regarding going to the doctor. If in 2011 a share of 58% of the Romanian respondents did not go to routine medical checkups, one year later, 75% of the respondents declared that they went to these checkups on a regular basis. Young people (30-44 years old) were the ones who declared that they went to medical checkups the least often, the most concerned with health being the women, old people and those living in urban areas (MedLife, IMAS, April 2012).

The present article aims to identify the impact of the media narrations regarding the events that took place in Romania in January-February 2012 on the way in which the Romanian public reconstructed these protests.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Social and Media Construction of a "Media Event"

The focus of the present article will be on the analysis of the influence exercised by media narratives on the Romanian audience's reconstructions of social movements from January-February 2012. To be more precise, we are interested in the analysis of the aspects involved in the publicizing of this media event, by focusing on the event narrative built in such a way to transmit a particular significance related to the protest movements related to the crisis of the health public system in Romania.

As Couldry stated (2003, p. 59–69), we considered that in the case of the events of January-February 2012, the relation between the media and the community had as main characteristic the presentation and the manipulation of certain fundamental schemes and categories through images and written texts.

In the context of the mass media image all the three aspects of the sign according to Pierce (iconic, indexical, symbolical) function simultaneously in order to support the interpreting and framing of particular news. In the case of the image a number of factors functions in order to limit the polysemy. According to Goldman and Beeker's analysis (1985, p. 351–361; Hall, 1973, p. 176–190), we perceive images on a daily basis and that is why we see them as "naturally produced artifacts", whose significance is neither built nor contested. At the same time, visual symbolism is often based on metaphorical relations that are fundamental for our cognitive system, becoming thus invisible (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 115–123.).

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