

THE PHENOMENON OF MEDIA CONVERGENCE IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA: CONDITIONS OF AFFIRMATION AND FORMS OF MANIFESTATION

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Abstract

The media convergence is a phenomenon that has recently occurred in the local media. The first step toward convergence – the development of online environment – was made in '2000, when the information technologies entered the circuit and the Internet extended on the media market. The first forms of convergence have occurred only in 2010, when the press holdings *Jurnal Trust Media* and *General Media Grup SRL* were launched. Although we may already speak about a certain level of media convergence in the local massmedia, *the various collaborations between press institutions aim mainly at the personal interests of their owners of financiers, who, usually, come from the political or business field and have the purpose to manipulate or to get certain benefits. From this prospect, the phenomenon of convergence identifies itself with another nationally and internationally well-known phenomenon – the concentration of media property, limiting the pluralism of opinions and weakening the quality of the journalistic content.*

Keywords: mass media, digital technology, Internet, media convergence, convergent journalism.

1. INTRODUCTION

The technological development which occurred in previous years entailed and allowed at the same time the revolution of all fields of activity, including the media communication one. The local mass media had to face essential transformations in order to survive and to generate profit. Under these conditions, the media convergence occurred and affirmed itself as a dominating current in the field, being defined as an innovative process supposing a new approach of selection, production and broadcast of news by the use of all accessible media types. The convergent journalism has significantly influenced the traditional journalism and the functioning methods of the other elements of the mass media system, generating concept modifications of the processes and the modern journalist products. In this respect, the study of

convergent journalism from a historical prospect, which is the purpose of this paper, has doubtless topicality and importance, as it scientifically highlights the processes that take place in this field and its trends of development.

2. EVOLUTION OF CONVERGENT JOURNALISM IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Unlike the Western countries, where the phenomenon of media convergence occurred in the '90s, in the Republic of Moldova this phenomenon happened later, in '2000, when the information technologies entered the circuit and the Internet extended on the national media market. The development of this phenomenon has been divided into two main stages:

The implementation period of the new technologies by the Moldavian media institutions and the appearance of the first media trusts, which started at the end of the '90s and lasted until 2009, when the first new media partnerships appeared;

The period of centering the different types of media in new press holdings, a period which started in 2010 and exists even nowadays.

The first stage is the *pre-convergence* period, the online journalism regards it as "an activity specialized in the multimedia production of newspaper message for the Word Wide Web platform (www or web) in order to receive the information immediately, non-linearly and interactively" (MARIN, 2016). "The interest for this type of journalism increased as the technological premises for accessing the information e-space formed and the number of Internet users multiplied" (MARIN, 2016).

According to the National Agency for the Regulation of Electronic Communications and Information Technologies, in 2002, the estimated number of Internet users was 179 000 (ANRTI, 2003), and in 2002 it increased to 406 000 (ANRTI, 2004) (it was more than doubled). In 2015, the number of subscribers of the access services to broadband fixed Internet was of 534,3 thousand, and in 2017 - 584,3 thousand, with 4,8% more than in 2016 (557,4 thousand) (ANRTI, 2017). In 2017, the number of broadband mobile Internet access services users (based on 3G, 4G and modems/cards/USB - dedicated access) was over 2 million 430 thousand, more than double in comparison with 2013 (1 million 023 thousand). Therefore, the connection rate to broadband fixed Internet, calculated per 100 inhabitants, increased from 2% in 2004 and 6,6% in 2005 to 14,3% in 2014 and 15,5 in 2017. The surfing rate of broadband mobile Internet increased from 28,7% in 2013 to 53,3% in 2016 and 68,4% in 2017 (ANRTI, 2017). Including in rural environment, where the progresses registered in the digitalization process are very low, the rate of accessing the internet services continues to increase (for example, it increased from 2% in 2005 to 7% in 2010) (GOTIȘAN et al., 2012).

During this period, the majority of traditional media institutions adopted the new technologies and created online versions. A series of news portals appeared, portals which do not have traditional media equivalent, online platforms specialized in live broadcasts from public events or sites dedicated to certain categories of population (for example, sites for women, sites with information related to the medial field, sites related to agriculture etc.), and thanks to the competition increasing over the years, the quality of provided products improves significantly. The first media trusts appeared during this period and, implicitly, the first forms of cooperation between the press institutions. But, the preoccupations of the owner-politicians of that period was not the development of convergent partnerships or different models for a better functioning of the mass media, rather the realization of political benefits resulting from the massive implication in the editorial policies of press institutions. Consequently, a great majority of the mass media broadcasted biased, incomplete and manipulating information.

The second stage starts with the launch on the local media market of *Journal Trust Media* and *General Media Group* press holdings. The cooperation forms between the press institutions belonging to the same organization are being emphasized during this period, in order to streamline the journalist resources and activity. The media products developed in the new activity environment do not differ much, in terms of form and content, from the traditional mass media. The new elements are related to the information production and broadcast method based, mainly, on the new digital technologies. In a convergent environment, the journalists learn to quickly transmit the information, in different formats and on various platforms, urging them to possess advanced technical knowledge.

3. THE AFFIRMATION AND IMPLEMENTATION CONDITION OF THE MEDIA CONVERGENCE IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

As throughout the world, the occurrence of convergence phenomenon in the Republic of Moldova is due to various political, economic, social, cultural factors. The implementation of the digital technology presented the biggest influence, which led to significant transformations in the structure of news writing and the methods by which the journalists collect, process and broadcast the information. The first changes in this sense appeared at the end of '90s, once the media institutions implemented the new technologies.

Initially, the traditional publications created electronic pages where they published the content of the printed version, without emphasizing the interactivity or the diversification of the journalist content. With little exceptions, as the weekly investigation newspaper *Ziarul de Garda* and several other publications, the written press continued to focus, mainly, on the printed version.

Gradually, things changed and online journalism has extended more and more. The web pages of the publications, radio frequencies and local televisions were completed by a series of

multimedia elements, links to archive materials, interactive tools as comments and readers' suggestions, who, often, help journalists to subsequently develop the analysed subjects. Hence, the journalist materials read by the public in the printed versions of the newspapers are completed by videos or audios on their electronic page, and the TV or radio materials are decrypted in text format on the site. Concurrently, the field of telecommunications has developed vertiginously. Electronic devices for storage, broadcast and receipt of information such as the smartphones or tablets appeared, being accessible to everyone. Namely under these conditions, the first forms of convergence appeared, referring to the method of submitting the information and the method of its reception. It is, on the one hand, about the meeting, on a single platform of the text, audio and video information, and, on the other hand, the receipt from a single device (for example the mobile phone) of the media content of any type.

Concurrently, a series of platforms that do not have a traditional media equivalent appeared. However, they are very popular amongst public. They provide a different and quickly updated content, using the most recent technologies and tools. Examples in this sense are the general news portals *Unimedia.info*, *Agora.md*, *Noi.md*, *Deschide.md* etc., specialized sites such as *Mediacritica.md*, *EA.md*, *Perfecte.md*, *Moldovenii.md* etc. We will continue to describe only several of them, which are considered stable and popular amongst the public, indicator in this regard being the length on media market of over four years and the daily number of unique viewers.

UNIMEDIA is the general news portal, launched on the media market in 2005 with the slogan "Number one news portal of Moldova". It is one of the most popular news, analyses and comments sites from the Republic of Moldova, registering a traffic of about 40 000-50 000 daily viewers and over 300 thousand per month (GEMIUS AUDIENCE, n.d.). About 30-35 new materials in text, video, audio, photo, infographic format are being broadcasted daily, structured into 13 categories: *Political, Social, Economic, Tech/Media, EU/External, Diaspora, Wine of Moldova, Culture/Tourism, Sport, Auto, Fashion/Otherwise, YouTube&FB, all news*. In 2012, the site changed the field from *.mdto.info*.

AGORA is also a generalist news portal, founded in February 2014. It offers daily information to the public about the current events and subjects from the country and from abroad. It's a multimedia site providing news in text, video, audio, photo and infographic format. Daily, 30-35 new materials are being published, especially news, which are structured into ten categories: *Actuality, Political, Social, Economic, Health, Banks and Insurances, External, Technologies, Media and Lifestyle*. Additionally, *Agora* published analyses, interviews and currency exchange. "The portal initiates and implements other own media projects/campaigns aimed at developing the society from the Republic of Moldova and facilitating communication between the citizen and the state". According to the data submitted on the site *www.trafic.md* by the Audit Office of Circulation and Internet, the portal *Agora.md* is viewed daily by almost 22 000 unique viewers (GEMIUS AUDIENCE, n.d.).

Noi.md is a general news information portal, founded in September 2010 by the "MLD-Media" Company. The portal' journalists mention that the articles are published in two languages, Moldavian and Russian and that the editorial office emphasizes the analytical materials. The information is published within 16 columns, the site being accessed daily by almost 28 000 viewers (GEMIUS AUDIENCE, n.d.)

Mediacritica.md is a specialized information portal, administered by the Centre for Independent Journalism, which has the purpose "to fight against the propaganda phenomenon and press manipulation and to develop the critical spirit of the media consumers from the Republic of Moldova. The portal was developed within the media campaign against false and tendentious information - STOP FALS!, developed by the Independent Press Association (IPA), Centre of Independent Journalism (CIJ) and VIP Association of Independent Television Reporters from Moldova (VAITRM). *Mediacritica.md* publishes news, analyses, comments, case studies, structured on five categories/columns: *Filter the information!, Actions, Media in the sight, Observer*, and the *ABC of the press*. The column *Filter the information!* presents a selection of three news treating the same subject. But only one news meets the journalist standards. The column

Actions presents events organized by CIJ and its partners, IPA and VAITRM, within the project of media campaign against false and tendentious information. *Media in the sight* presents examples of news, developed with disrespects to the ethical regulations and other journalist norms. *Observer* is the column hosting case studies and comments developed by different media experts about the way in which the press manipulates and makes propaganda. The *ABC of press* is a "specialized dictionary" containing videos and articles that explain the principles of press structure and media functioning.

The portal *EA.md* is a site, launched in 2015, dedicated to subjects for women, offering the slogan "women's number one site". According to the administrators of the site, its mission is "to provide women with the most interesting and important news, useful information and to inspire them to become successful exemplars". The information in text, video, audio and/or photo format are structured on 10 columns: *Actuality, Career, Fashion, Health&Beauty, Relations&Sex, My Family, Bride, Receipts, Culture&Leisure* and *Moldavian Genuine*. According to the Audit Office of Circulation and Internet, the site *ea.md* is accessed daily by almost 18 000 viewers.

Moldovenii.md is a specialized site, launched in 2011, with the purpose to promote the values and the culture of Moldovans and to study and understand the history of this region. The authors of the site are experts in the field of culture, religion, history, politology, business, economy and finances. The information is published in text, audio and video format and is classified into ten columns: *We, Moldovans; The Creed, Dictionary, History, Culture, Strategy of Development, Kitchen, Nature and Tourism, Children and Library*. According to the estimations of Audit Office of Circulation and Internet, the site is accessed daily by almost 1 500 unique viewers (GEMIUS AUDIENCE, n.d.).

In the same context, it has to be remarked the appearance of online platforms specialized in live broadcast from public events. The biggest live broadcast project in the Republic of Moldova and Romania is *privesc.eu* (2009) (MARIN, 2016). All video events broadcasted lively are archived and stored in the online library of the site. They

are available at any time and may be viewed or taken. The viewers may leave comments on the chat *privesc.eu*, expressing their opinions about what is broadcasted. According to the estimations of the site, almost 2 million unique viewers access the portal *www.privesc.eu* every month.

In case of radio broadcasting, the digitalization process, which is the base of the media convergence, was slower and irregular. However, it took place in temporary coordinates, almost similar to the digitalization process from the world. For comparison, on the American continent, the first shows in digital and FM format were broadcasted in 1994 by the radio station of California University, called WSXY. In Europe, the first online radio station - *Virgin Radio* (currently *Absolute Radio*) was launched on March 7, 1996 in the Great Britain. In the Republic of Moldova, the first online radio station was *Radio Moldova International* (RMI), which started its activity on July 24, 1992. Initially, its shows were transmitted by "Maiac" Technical Centre from Grigoriopol, which shortly afterwards was seized by secessionists from Tiraspol. Subsequently, RMI was transmitted by the Technical Centre from Galbeni-Bacau, Romania, and later on in an online format. In 1993, RMI broadcasted programs with a weekly duration of 20 hours, in Romanian, English, Spanish and French. In the last two years, the broadcasting time increased up to 30 hours/week. Its broadcasting was suspended in 2013 (MARIN, 2016).

After that, the majority of radio stations diversified their activity through the creation of web pages, on which the decipher of interviews, news and shows in text format, *live* audio broadcasting and *blogging* services were published. The comments and the articles of the analysts, experts and opinion maker from the Republic of Moldova were also published here. The best examples in this sense are the online platforms of radio the stations *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty in Moldova* (RFE/RL), together with the site *Europalibera.org* and *Radio Vocea Basarabiei* together with *Voceabasarabiei.md*.

The local television made its first steps towards the online environment in 2008, when the newspaper *Jurnal de Chisinau* launched the first online television channel - *Jurnalto.md*. It

proposed news and reportages from different fields, talk-shows (“Cabinetul din umbra”) and entertainment materials etc. In 2008, a live broadcast of a football game on mobile phones and on the site of French Company “Orange-Moldova” was made (MARIN, 2016).

It followed changes related to the digital television, a telecommunication system that broadcasts and receives moving images and sounds through digital signals. The Republic of Moldova did not totally move towards digital television, although it signed the Agreement of the Regional Radiocommunications Conference (RRC) from Geneva, in 2006. Since November 1, 2016, 8 TV channels of the 34 terrestrial frequency users, broadcast through digital signal. It is about *TV Moldova, Prime TV, TVR Moldova, Canal 2, Canal 3, Publica TV, N4* and *Accent TV*. The deadline for the transition from analogue terrestrial television to digital television was prolonged several times by the authorities from Chisinau, the last term being on March 1, 2020. The invoked reason is that the local radio stations did not install regional multiplexes of digital television yet.

An important aspect of the digital media is the speed at which news and information are being produced and published. It became known and used the latest news method (*breaking news*), allowing to the population to be updated with the latest news that take place in the country and abroad. Through Internet, the television channels and the radio stations diversify their content. People have access, for example, to the integral video recording of a certain event, without the comments or the opinion of the reporter, allowing them to form their own and objective opinion about these events. The online platforms, the majority of television channels and radio stations provide the possibility to watch/listen to *live* journalistic content, and the subsequent watching/listening of TV/radiophonic programs, the most important sequences of entertainment broadcasts, talk-shows or debates emissions.

Generally, the online newspapers, radio and television do not differ from the traditional ones when it comes to their functions. For example, similarly to the printed versions, the newspapers contain international, national and local news.

The traditional and online newspapers are structured depending on the content: articles that include different subjects (politics, social life, culture, sport etc.), elaborated according to the same standards (title, lead, basic text, images and others). However, in comparison to the traditional press, the electronic format has certain advantages as it offers a bigger space for information, links to other sites, space reserved for readers’ comments, the possibility to continuously update the information etc.

As we have already mentioned above, the second aspect of this stage refers to the reunion of press institutions in media trusts owned by different politicians and/or businessmen, aiming at promoting their political agenda and manipulating the public opinion. The concentration of the mass media property from Moldova started in 2001, once the Communists Party took the power and it has become more obvious starting with 2005, when the same party won the second mandate, but with fewer members in the Parliament. Then, the opposition emphasized the existence of state media institutions financed with public money that were playing the government’s game. The state radio and television became public only on paper, the governmental newspapers were taken out for privatization, but they continued to have the same pro-governmental policy. Vladimir Voronin, president of the Communists’ Party, announced at the Communists’ Party Congress of March 15, 2008, that the party he was running possessed four newspapers and one television. Nevertheless, experts from the field contested this information. Raisa Lozinschi, ex-editor of newspaper *Jurnal de Chisinau* and member of Observers Council of *National Public Institution of Audio-visual, Teleradio-Moldova Company*, who investigated the concentration of media property in the Republic of Moldova, considers that the communist media trust was much bigger. Taking into account the editing policy, the media publications that provided consistent editorial support to the Communists’ Party were the television channels *NIT, N4, Prime, 2 Plus* and *Ren TV*, the radio stations *Antena C* and *Serebreanii Dojdi*, the newspapers *Moldova Suverana, Nezavisimaia Moldova, Comunistul* and *Puls*, the news agencies *Novosti Moldova* and *Basa-press*

and the site *www.omg.md* (INDEPENDENT JOURNALISM CENTER, 2009). The journalists who were working for these institutions collaborated and exchanged journalistic information and materials, so that the approach angle in the broadcasted media products was the same. We may conclude that, although different from the models of media convergence implemented in Western countries, the local mass media had a model of content convergence, but of different nature, the owners of the media institutions mainly having political purposes.

Another tremendous press trust was the one of the People's Christian Democrat Party's leader (PPCD), Iurie Rosca. Initially, it covered the newspapers *Flux*, *Țara*, the press agency *Flux* and the printing house *Prag 3*. After the privatization in 2007, the municipal radio station *Antena Cand Euro TV*, the television channel was controlled by Iurie Rosca, and *Antena C* – by the Communists' Party. Or, according to the monitoring reports made by CIJ and APEL, "the radio station *Antena C* sustained openly the Communists' Party in broadcast and news programs, and *Euro TV* – subsequently, called *EuTV* – was loyal to PPCD" (GOTIȘAN et al., 2012).

In 2008, the PPCD trust launched a radio station – *Radio 10* – which had the logo the heart and the jingle: "Listen to your heart!", exactly as the electoral attributes of PPCD (INDEPENDENT JOURNALISM CENTER, 2009). The functioning model of these institutions supposed a degree of cooperation and collaboration. The employees of the newspaper *Flux* (editor-in-chief Sergiu Praporsic and the deputy editor-in-chief Igor Burciu) presented broadcasts at the television channel *EU TV* and the director of the radio station *Radio 10*, Vasile Nastase, who presented the TV broadcast "Media express", by which the opposition was criticized.

The other trusts of that period were smaller than the two described above. We therefore mention the institutions owned by the president of Journalists' Union from the Republic of Moldova, Valeriu Saharneau (the radio station *Vocea Basarabiei* and the television channel *Euronova* from Nisporeni); the trust that reunited the press agency *Infotag* and the television channel *TV7*, owned by the society *AnaliticMedia-Grup*, belonging to the ex-parliament's member

PLDM, Chiril Lucinschi; the trust is run by the director of the *Jurnal de Chisinau* publication, Val Butnaru, who owns beside this the economic newspaper *Eco* and the online television channel *Jurnal TV* (INDEPENDENT JOURNALISM CENTER, 2009).

In this context, it has to be mentioned also the National Public Institution of the Audio-visual (NPIA), "Teleradio-Moldova" Company (TRM), which despite having a different functioning principle from the private institutions, it is, in this sense, a type of concern. NPIA "Teleradio-Moldova" is a heritage of the Soviet Radiotelevision, which had are markable development during the '80s, '90s, following the renovation of technical-material base. Until the '90s, the national television service was the single local operator in this field. During this period, it subordinated to the State Committee of the Socialist Soviet Republic of Moldova for Television and Radiobroadcast (1958-1990). Subsequently, it was restructured in the National Radiotelevision (1990-1994), since 1994 – in State Company "Teleradio-Moldova", and in 2004 – in National Public Institution of Audio-visual "Teleradio-Moldova". The institution includes departments, radio editions (*Radio Moldova*, *Radio Moldova Muzical*, *Radio Moldova Tineret*) and TV (*Moldova 1*, *Moldova 2*), a series of subdivisions, including the Studio "Telefilm-Chisinau", "Teatrul TV", Theater of Dolls "Prichindel", Symphonic Orchestra and Coral Chapel "Moldova". Although they collaborate and exchange information, the journalists work in different editorial offices and produce their own media product, which is broadcasted to the radio stations and television channels, but also published on the common platform of the company.

These facts have to be mentioned in respect to article 51 from the Audiovisual Code, the interferences of the public authorities or the influences of a party, commercial, economic, social-political or other type organization are completely forbidden. NPIA "Teleradio-Moldova" has to elaborate, produce and broadcast radiophonic and television shows about the internal and international economic, social and political realities, and about the realities from the field of culture, entertainment,

education, sport, pluralist, impartial, innovative, high quality and integral emissions, aimed at providing the correct, impartial, equidistant information and respecting the political equilibrium, freedom of expression, creation and conviction. The company has to honestly, loyally, and equidistantly transmit the information within the news programs; to respect the right to information of all the categories of citizens of the Republic of Moldova, including the national minorities; to favour democratic debates, the exchanges of opinion between different categories of population and the integration of the citizens into the society; to achieve cognitive and entertaining shows for children of different ages, teenagers and young people etc. (REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA PARLIAMENT, 2006a).

However, according to the monitoring reports of CIJ in electoral campaigns, for several years, the editing policy of NPIA "Teleradio-Moldova" was influenced by the political changes from the country. Although this institution has been public starting with 2004, in practical terms, the process of public recuperation of the company started in 2010. "The launched reforms, despite a set of impediments and deficiencies and, at times, due to their intermittent character, led obviously to the editorial reform of the public audio-visual - it transformed from a tool of proponent information into a tool of equidistant and impartial information, for which the editorial independence, the equilibrium and the political pluralism, the freedom of expression, creation and conviction became rules of current behaviour" (MARIN, 2016).

The second stage of the media convergence in the Republic of Moldova - *the concentration period of different types of media in the newly formed press holdings* - starts in 2010 and lasts till the present day. The start of this period was marked by the launch on the local information market of two media holdings:

Jurnal Trust Media, composed of television channel *Jurnal TV* with the site *jurnaltv.md*, the newspaper *Jurnal de Chisinau* - with *jc.md*, the radio station *Jurnal FM* - with *jurnal_fm.md*, the news portal *jurnal.md*, the weekly newspaper *ECONOMIST*, the tabloid *Apropo Magazin* - with *apropomagazin.md* (which is not updated since

2018) and the advertising agency *Reforma Advertising*;

General Media Grup SRL, composed of television channels *Prime*, *Canal 2*, *Canal 3* and *Publika TV*, the related sites: *prime.md*, *canal2.md*, *canal3.md* and *publika.md*, and the radio station *Publika FM*, which retransmits the journalist content of the television channel *Publika TV*.

Although, as we already mentioned, until 2010 there were some press trusts, these two holdings have catalysed the affirmation of the convergence phenomenon in the Republic of Moldova. It is about a new format of collaboration between the media institutions, a new editing structure and new methods of information production and broadcast.

Hence, although separated from structural point of view, the editing offices of the media institutions *Jurnal Trust Media* and *General Media Group* are located in the same building, and the journalists work, more or less, in a convergent environment. They exchange information, use the same technical tools and promote reciprocally. The managers of the institution meet regularly in order to exchange opinions and to develop special projects. The information is presented in different ways: in text format on the site of the institution of newspaper, video - at the television channels and sites, and audio - at the radio stations.

The model that describes the best the level of convergence between the two press holdings is *the continuous convergence*, elaborated by the American researchers L. Dailay, L. Demo and M. Spillman, who refer to the five levels of the activity in media organizations: *Cross promotion*, *Cloning*, *Coopetition*, *Content Sharing*, *Convergence* (DAILY et al., 2005).

It is important to note that, as before 2010, once the first convergent editing offices appeared, the different collaborations between media institutions continued to aim at the personal interests of the owners or the holdings' financiers.

Therefore, the previous suspicions that the important televisions are controlled by politicians and businessmen, some of them with connections in the Russian Federation, confirmed in 2015, after the adoption of the law committing the radiobroadcasters to publish the information of the beneficiaries of the mass media institutions

(REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA PARLIAMENT, 2006b). For example, Vladimir Plahotniuc, ex-leader of the Democrat Party (PDM), declared at the end of 2015 that he owned four television channels (*Publika TV*, *Prime TV*, *Canal 2* and *Canal 3*) and three radio stations (*Publika FM*, *MuzFM* and *MaestroFM*). PDM and Vladimir Plahotniuc are also affiliated with the portals *publika.md*, *voxpublika.md*, *epresa.md*, *autostrada.md*, *zumi.md*, *vesti.md* and *24h.md*. V. Plahotniuc is also the owner of the advertising agency *Casa Media* and *Casa Media Plus*, which control most of the advertising market from the Republic of Moldova (GOGU, 2018; MACOVEI et al., 2017).

Another example is the mass media affiliated to the Socialists' Party of Moldova (PSRM). It is about *Accent TV*, *NTV Moldova*, *Exclusiv TV* and *Aif.md*. Two of the three mentioned channels broadcast the same content, produced in the same studio and presented by the same moderator. The third television channel affiliated to PSRM produces its own news, but the subjects and the messages are similar to those broadcasted by the first two channels (GOGU, 2018).

On the same note, we mention the holding *Jurnal Trust Media*, financed by the businessman Victor Topa, who fled to Germany after the Moldavian instances convicted him for fraud. The businessman controls the holding through the German company *Rheinstein Media Management Germany GmbH*, founder of the foreign capital enterprise *Jurnal de Chisinau Plus SRL* (MACOVEI et al., 2017). The media institutions, part of this press trust, always had rough critics against the ex-government (the Democratic Party of Moldova) and the businessman Vlad Plahotniuc. This fact was also remarked during the electoral campaigns, their editing policy being oriented toward the disadvantage of the government's candidates of that period, amongst them being enlisted Igor Dodon. In contrast, Andrei Nastase and Maia Sandu were intensively promoted and favoured from an editorial point of view by the frequency and the number of news in positive context (INDEPENDENT PRESS ASSOCIATION, 2016; 2018; 2019).

In 2018, a new trust affiliated to the Political Party Șor appeared on the local media market. It is composed of the television channels *Orhei TV*,

TV Centrala (ex-television channel *Euro TV*) and the radio station *Radio Orhei FM*. It has to be noted that all monitoring reports of the Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ) on the propaganda elements, information manipulation and infringement of journalist deontology rules show that the politically affiliated institutions favour directly and indirectly the politicians and the parties supporting them. Consequently, the public has access to almost identical editorial content, without any diversity and pluralism of opinions, and in some cases manipulating and propagandistic (INVESTIGATII, 2019).

Although the legislation was modified in the way a single media owner could not own more than two licenses in the audio-visual field (REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA PARLIAMENT, 2016), this fact did not produce significant changes in terms of mass media concentration. Or, in the last years, more broadcasters changed *de jure* the owner, but *de facto* no change appeared in their editorial policies, they continued to promote the agenda of the parties to which they are affiliated. For example, Vladimir Plahotniuc, transferred in May 2017 to one of his counsellors the licenses for the two television channels with national coverage (*Canal 2* and *Canal 3*). However, the four television channels mentioned above continue to broadcast identical journalist materials, having approaching angles by which is promoted the image of the Democratic Party of Moldova. The broadcasted information programs are identical, the difference residing in the studio presenters and, sometimes, the order in which the materials are broadcasted.

4. THE NATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK ON ONLINE MASS MEDIA FUNCTIONING

Currently, the media convergence and the online mass media are not yet the separated subject of a legislative document in the Republic of Moldova. Nevertheless, the Criminal Code, the Civil Code, the Law on the freedom of expression, the Law on personal data protection and other special laws refer to all types of mass media, including the online ones.

Hence, the *Law on the freedom of expression* contains provisions applied to all means of communication, either written press, audio-visual, analogue or digital media (REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA PARLIAMENT, 2010a). It is linked to the European Union legislation and proposes to facilitate the application of the highest standards of the freedom of expressions in the Republic of Moldova. In particular, it refers to the defamation and to the protection of personal life.

Article 20, paragraph 3 of the *Law on electronic communications* commits the owners of the web sites to provide upon request to the authorities the IP addresses of the viewers (the law does not specify a specific institution) (REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA PARLIAMENT, 2007). This provision of the law allows the authorities to find and, consequently, put under custody any person that wrote a comment, which is considered "outside" the law by the Moldavian legislation (for example: aggressive language, instigation to violence etc.).

In the same context, we mention two legal directives referring including to the Internet, being explicitly concerned. It is about: (1) *Regulation on the administration of domain names of superior level.md* and (2) *Law on copyright and related rights. Regulation on the administration of domain names of superior level .md* (REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS, 2001) allows to the administrator of domains .md (MoldData) to eliminate a domain without the right to recover it, in case it is suspected of publishing an illegal content, and the *Law on copyright and related rights* (REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA PARLIAMENT, 2010b) allows to the authorities to block a web site if it suspected of infringing the law. The critics and the experts mentioned that both laws are disproportionate and open toward politically motivated abuses (GOTIȘAN et al., 2012). There were precedents in this sense. For example, the news site *Unimedia.md* almost lost, in 2009, its domain because of comments posted by the viewers of the platform, comments that were seen by the General Prosecutor's Office as way of undermining the sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova. The protests and the actions of the civil society did not permit the closure of this domain.

The Criminal Code (REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA PARLIAMENT, 2002a) supposes that the majority of the criminal offences are applicable for mass-media, generally, and for digital communications means, without namely mentioning the Internet. *The Civil Code* (REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA PARLIAMENT, 2002b) provided the right to respect the honour, dignity and the professional reputation, but it does not refer directly to the online environment.

We therefore conclude that the legislation related to this information segment is insufficient. It may lead to the appearance of a series of doubtful portals, which work without needing a license, and the authorities are powerless to undertake certain actions against them. The journalist materials from these news sites often have nothing in common with mass media ethics and deontology. But they may sometimes serve as the primary source for spreading out the manipulating content and media fakes, which, subsequently, are taken by televisions and circulated as credible information.

In the new conjuncture, the need to adapt the normative framework consists of the following considerations:

The different platforms of information broadcast, which until recently were transmitting a single type of messages, currently, allow the transmission of all types of messages;

The limits of demarcation between different domains are not seen very clearly;

The technological tools used for the registration, transmission and reception of messages do not allow the distinction between telecommunications services and audio-visual services, as this equipment is more and more polyvalent.

It has to be mentioned the fact that the Parliament adopted in 2018, after eight years of discussions, a new Code of Audio-visual, creating the legal framework necessary for the transposition of EU Directive on Audio-visual Media Services, which is a very important step in this field.

The new Deontological Code of the Journalist from the Republic of Moldova, completed in 2019 with the purpose of linking it to the new changes due to the evolution of information technologies with direct and significant impact

on the mass-media activity, principle 2.45, stipulates that “the journalist and the mass media institutions adopt an identical behaviour in the real and virtual space” (MEDIA-AZI, n.d.). Or, it is primordial the respect by those who have connections or are part of this field, of fundamental values as the freedom and the diversity in the media environment, the protection of minors, the protection of consumers etc. The information transmitted by mass media has to be complete, varied, critical, reliable and unbiased.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The study regarding the development framework of the mass media from the Republic of Moldova allows us to ascertain the fact that the first forms of media convergence appeared by themselves, as reply to new global trends. The first forms of convergence were preceded by the implementation of the digital technology and, implicitly, the development of online journalism. Starting with 2000, the traditional publications create their own online versions where, on the same platform, the information is submitted in text, audio and video format, which means the convergence of the information. Equally, the vertiginous development of the telecommunications and the interaction with the industry of computers – the technological convergence – led to the appearance of the new form of information’s broadcast and reception, by which a single device accomplishes multiple functions. Concurrently, a series of portals with no traditional equivalent appear and the new media partnerships outline. But the subsequent concentration of media institutions in press holdings belonging to different politicians, indicate the fact that this phenomenon acquired political connotations. In these institutions one can easily notice the influence of politics on the journalistic content, and from this prospect we may affirm that, although there is a certain level of media convergence in local media companies, the demarcation line between the phenomenon of convergence and the phenomenon of media property concentration is extremely delicate, even inexistent. Moreover, there is no development strategy for the local media field,

but if such a strategy were to be implemented, it may lead to a better functioning of the mass media system in the new conjuncture.

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