

COMMUNICATION IN MEDIATION IN TELEVISION JOURNALISM

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Abstract

The research of journalistic mediation as a model of public communication, which also includes the televised activity of mediation, represents a challenge in itself, determined by the low interest of researchers in this subject and, respectively, by the very small number of studies which approach it. The works currently existing in the international scientific circuit treat journalistic publishing as a mission deriving from the social function of the media, and the TV shows oriented towards mediation – as ordinary talk shows. This approach, tangential and unilateral, did not allow the multidimensional investigation of the subject, which imposed the identification of a new research perspective, in order for the journalistic remedy, including the televised one, to be examined first of all media-communication functions, as an autonomous journalistic activity. Thus, the purpose of the research carried out within this study lies in the conceptualization of mediation communication in television journalism and in the projection of its identity profile in the contemporary media context. In order to achieve this desideratum, the investigative effort was oriented towards exploiting the essence of the journalistic mediation activity in general and of the communication in mediation in television journalism in particular, as well as their specificity by describing the main insignia, characteristics, missions, etc. The case study was conducted on the basis of the shows *Vorbeste Moldova* and *Vremea pravdă*, from Prime TV channel.

Keywords: *journalistic mediation, mediation in communication, television journalism, TV channel, show, talk show, conflict situations, function, mission, social dialogue.*

In contemporary times, the links of social individuals with the communities to which they belong or with the societies in which they live are formed on the basis of knowledge derived from generalist and / or utilitarian information, which comes from very varied sources of information. One of the most effective such sources is the media, which, through the journalistic content from and about society, acts both at the macrosocial and at the microsocial level. This kind of journalistic content falls into the category of social journalism.

At the macrosocial level, they mainly put forward information of a generalist nature, which fortifies or, on the contrary, resizes the relationship of the individual with the surrounding world, determining the evolution of his relational and actional framework in relation to the surrounding environment, but especially to the distant one. In this aspect, social journalism contributes to the formation of general knowledge about the world, as it disseminates values, attitudes and behavioural models that influence the life philosophy of social individuals: their opinions, attitudes and actions. From this perspective, the media manifests itself as one of the most important sources of formation regarding the social profile of the contemporary individual in the context of universal phenomena, processes and trends.

The most important mission of social journalism, at the macrosocial level, is to ensure the connection between different groups, categories and social strata: to regularly promote the reality from different social environments, the cultural values and traditions existing in these environments, to debate the problems faced by different communities and to ensure social dialogue. In this respect, priority is given to journalistic activities that can catalyse the exchange of information between different groups and social categories in order to reduce tensions and resolve existing conflicts, as well as those that can facilitate the accumulation of social capital. Their importance lies in the fact that they contribute to the creation and / or modification of public opinion and to the orientation of social action in accordance with the public interest, and thereby ensure social order and general well-being.

At the microsocial level, social journalism deals, as a priority, with information of a utilitarian nature, meant to satisfy the informational needs of each individual, to harmonize his relations with the members of the social group to which he belongs, in order to overcome certain conflict situations, to help them develop strategies and tactics of interaction and, if necessary, change his near environment. From this perspective, the most important mission of the media is to bring to the public agenda and to debate the real problems of common people, in order to identify their scale, to determine their development prospects and to propose options and ways of solving them.

Such media activities can be regarded as social advocacy activities, as they reflect cases of general public interest in relation to representatives of socially disadvantaged or potentially vulnerable groups (pensioners, orphans, large families, migrants, homeless people, unemployed, people with special needs, etc.) and protect the interests of marginalized, discriminated individuals and those who find themselves in difficult situations. In social journalism, "social advocacy represents the organized actions of the mass-media in order to take over and promote the "invisible" problems, neglected, in order to warn the decision-makers and to influence public attitude as well as the attitude of political actors. Social advocacy manifests itself when, in order to analyse and evaluate a certain social problem, journalists introduce in the information circuit situations, cases, concrete examples from the life of real people or social groups. The purpose of such materials is to help people solve their personal problems. The journalist who writes in this manner performs an activity very close to that of the lawyer, as, both of them, in essence, pursue the same goal: to help their heroes / clients and to protect them from abuses." (Stepanov, 2015).

The category of journalistic social advocacy activities also includes journalistic publishing, which represents a form of structured approach to a conflict by reflecting in the press and in audiovisual broadcasts the actions and opinions of all actors involved in this conflict, decision-makers and the society in general. Mediation represents "an informal process in which a

neutral third party, without the power to impose its solution, helps the parties involved in the conflict to reach a mutually acceptable agreement" (Baruch Bush & Folger, 2005). The fundamental purpose of journalistic mediation lies in creating links and contexts that would ensure the resolution of conflicts.

Journalistic mediation, as a model of public communication, represents a voluntary process that ensures the formation of flexible frameworks for the exposure and debate of the conflict. Mediation is a certain, fair and responsible, kind of treatment which helps the parties involved in the conflict to clarify themselves on key issues and to build an agreement in accordance with them. Although it does not have the prerogatives of judicial instruments for conflict mediation, the potential of the media is sufficient to initiate their social mediation, giving the actors, but also to third parties, the opportunity to engage constructively in their analysis and to identify viable solutions for each case.

The involvement of the press in the mediation of conflict situations is justified by its information function, because, as a rule, the press is the one which brings conflicts on the public agenda, makes them visible and turns them into up-to-date topics, placing them in the attention of society and of decision-makers. The press keeps in its sight any public conflict and, depending on how things evolve, returns to it whenever appropriate: whether the relational framework of the performers has changed, or new performers have appeared, or new statements have been made, or new actions have been foreshadowed, etc. By periodically returning to the previously reflected conflicts and by providing new details, the media projects their evolution in the dynamics of their development and constantly maintains the public's interest in such events.

The role of the press in conflict management also emerges from its analytical function, as it analyses, explains, interprets and forecasts the evolution of conflict situations. Debating certain conflict situations within different media formats gives performers the opportunity to present their own points of view, to exchange ideas, to confront their opinions and to get acquainted with the visions of third forces: experts, analysts, civic activists, etc. During the public debates, it

outlines the nature and objectives of the conflicts, their true dimensions, the real interests of the actors involved, etc., the information in question being decisive for the projection of the social profile of the conflicts and for the formation of the currents of public opinion in relation to them. The multilateral and consecutive media coverage of conflicts ensures their social construction and creates appropriate conditions for identifying consensus and initiating social dialogue. Thus, journalistic mediation is neither negotiation nor conciliation, it is a means of initiating and managing social dialogue in order to solve conflicts.

The television coverage of such events is also carried out with the help of the entertainment function, given the format of talk-show that, as a rule, such shows adopt, but also with the help of the culturalization function, when addressing topics related to culture and heritage or when promoting life models.

Mass-media projects the evolution of conflicts in a diachronic manner; it monitors the relational framework of the performers and promotes their actions in different periods, thus helping them to see their facts from different angles of view, to evaluate them and, why not, to review their priorities in relation to the publicized problem. Stimulating social correlation by facilitating the exchange of opinions and information determines the conflicting parties to identify the obstacles which hinder understanding, to develop strategies of overcoming them in order to bring about change. However, mediation can be justified and validated "only by the change it causes to each of the conflicting parties, who thus manage to give a different dimension to the source of the conflict and to regain their balance" (Brăescu, 2015).

The journalistic communication of mediation is carried out in two ways: 1) through publishing materials – part of generalist legal products, such as: periodical publications, journals and radio or television bulletins, and 2) through specialized journalistic products, such as broadcasts and thematic rubrics. In the first case, the specificity of the mediation activity lies in the media accompaniment of conflicts: reflecting their origin and evolution, analysing the essence and interests of the actors, confronting the opinions

of experts, etc. It manifests itself throughout and at all stages of conflict development, their reflection being periodic, consistent and consecutive. In its mediation work, the generalist press uses basically all journalistic genres. From the informative genres, news, interviews and reportages are most often used, and from the analytical ones – the analysis and the commentary. The usage frequency of a particular kind of press depends on the extent of the conflict, the degree of its recognition by the masses and the changes that are recorded in its development.

The specialised journalistic products, designed to address conflicts, are usually concentrated in audiovisual and online broadcasts. Each edition of such shows takes into debate only one real and outdated topic, which it represents from several perspectives and approaches it multi-dimensionally. Most of the programs specialized in mediation are structured on three dimensions: the beginning, the culmination and the end. At the beginning of the edition the interventions of the parties involved in the conflict are presented, as well as their witnesses; in the climax the expertise, the opinions of analysts, the interpretations and arguments of experts are presented; and at the end of the show the unravelling occurs, thanks to the summary interventions of experts and analysts, meant to completely clarify, to offer practical advice and solutions, to project perspectives, etc. The concept of mediation shows, for the most part, meets the insignia of a talk show; it is constant and does not vary from one edition to another.

The following identity elements are specific to the shows specialized in conflict mediation:

- they are designed to address different conflict situations in order to identify solutions to resolve or, at least, mitigate them;
- they are filmed on set, but for revealing situations or arguing behaviours / actions, they use materials made outside the set, on the ground;
- they are centred around the interaction of conflicting opinions belonging to performers, analysts and / or experts at different levels;
- they are made up of several editions – evolving beams – each edition having the mission of debating only one issue. The reflection of one and the same topic over the course of two and

more editions is not characteristic to this kind of show;

- they are managed by a moderator who, depending on the situation, fixes, instigates or directs the discussions and who is responsible for carrying out the agenda of the show. The neutrality and equidistance of the moderator is a *sine qua non* condition for the quality and success of mediation;
- they are broadcasted live.

The broadcasts carried out in order to mediate conflicts are designed in such a way as to generate exchanges of ideas and opinions from which solutions emerge. In most cases, the solutions appear live, which leads the moderators to create a constructive atmosphere, to maintain it and not to allow the situation on the set to degenerate into scandals with verbal or physical abuses. Journalist Veronica Gore argues that "in order not to reach unpleasant moments, I think it is necessary to take into account the behaviour of the guests. An analysis can be done prior to inviting them. (...) As a moderator, it seems fair to me to impose one's rules, to intervene when the guest is off topic. The media is meant to educate the population, and the talk show the same, we must not forget about it." (Gore, 2017). Fortunately, in mediation programs in the journalism from the Republic of Moldova, physical violence is a rare phenomenon, but not verbal violence, which, most often, is used by the parties involved in the conflict. But there are also situations when experts themselves exchange harsh lines. This happens when the invited experts have very different opinions, even diametrically opposed in relation to the topic being debated, and the moderator fails to manage the processes on the set well enough or to intervene on time in order to reorient the discussions.

Talk shows can be presented in the form of a geometric figure with three extremes, since they necessarily correlate three basic performers: the moderator, the protagonists and the experts. The moderator is the leader who must very thoroughly manage the time of the show, the course of the discussions, as well as the behaviour of the participants. On the set, the participants often behave extremely emotionally, the atmosphere heating up to the maximum, especially if the

problem approached is sensitive or if it concerns the interests of special social categories, perceived very differently in society. In such cases, the moderator must react promptly, in order to maintain order in the studio and to avoid both verbal aggressions, and especially the physical ones. The moderators of the mediation TV shows represent the leaders who must direct their efforts to maintain an optimal balance between the invited experts/analysts, in order not to allow the monopolization of the discussions by some of them. They have the obligation to:

- "restrict assertions in disagreement at the local level;
- renew (expressions) in the case of words, the meaning of which was understood differently by the interlocutors;
- induce the execution of a remedy on the part of one of the participants, in respect of the exchange, assuming responsibility by a clear explanation or by appealing to sincerity;
- avoid affiliation or not to the assertions of the interlocutor, resorting to ignoring the message, according to the principle of politeness" (Teodorescu, 2014).

The moderators of mediation TV shows "need to know when to be incisive and when they have to take over the reins of the discussions in case of slippages" (Necșutu, 2017). In some situations, they aim to catalyse the discussions and motivate the actors to be actively involved in the debates, and in others, on the contrary, – to temper them and give them a different direction." It is the duty of each moderator to invite people with different visions, from different camps. If we are talking about MPs, then let them also be from the camp of the Power and the Opposition, if we are talking about experts, then let them be with different views on the same theme. Inevitably, polemics occur. And in these cases, the role of the moderator is essential". Also, the moderators must be well documented, so as to analyse the topic from all points of view, to design an overview of it, to clarify the details, to identify the discrepancies between the facts and statements of the protagonists, to evaluate the opinions of experts, etc. Poorly documented moderators can be easily manipulated by those present on the set, which, in the end, has a negative impact on the show itself.

Currently, in the television journalism of the Republic of Moldova, there are two shows that meet all the insignia of a show specialized in mediation, namely: *Vorbeste Moldova* and *Vremea parvdâ* (*Time of Truth*).

The talk show *Vorbeste Moldova* began to be broadcasted on October 13, 2017, on Prime TV channel, four times a week, from Monday to Thursday, starting at 20:00, being moderated by presenter Natalia Cheptene. The producers define the concept of the show in the following way: "Our heroes come to the set of the show to share their personal histories, which do not leave anyone indifferent. Anyone can have their say: relatives and eyewitnesses, supporters and opponents, officials and experts, celebrities and journalists, even the spectators present on the set. Talking about particular cases, we're talking about things that affect everyone" (Prime.md, 2021).

The show has a Facebook page and a YouTube channel, where all editions of the show can be found. The number of views varies from edition to edition, ranging from a few tens of thousands to a million. Most of the top editions, which recorded over one million views, were broadcasted in 2019, immediately after the beginning of the emergency state in public health, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. That's when restrictions were imposed on all public activities, which prompted social individuals to self-isolate and spend more time in front of the television sets.

The show *Vorbeste Moldova* and its Facebook page (Facebook, 2017) keep the same style, chromatics and conceptual design. On its interface one can find information, such as: 1) a brief description of the show; 2) the e-mail address of the show: <https://www.vorbeste.md/>; 3) the telephone number of the editorial office: 0607 57 573; 4) the e-mail address used to send messages: vorbestemoldova@prime.md; 5) the YouTube channel: Vorbeste Moldova; 6) the Instagram page: [vorbeste.moldova](https://www.instagram.com/vorbeste.moldova); 7) the domain identification: TV shows or series. The feed on the Facebook page of the show *Vorbeste Moldova* includes: promotional materials, photos of the protagonists, screenshots from different editions and active links that connect with the YouTube account. On 06.12.2022, this Facebook page was

followed by 154,452 people and estimates 81,522 people.

The Time of Truth is another show designed to mediate conflict situations, which appears four times a week, from Monday to Thursday, at 19:00, on Prime TV channel. The first edition was broadcasted on September 6, 2021, with the title: "Investigations, exclusive interviews, expertise, DNA tests and Lie Detector. All this will bring us closer to the truth!" (Prime.md, 2021). The show is moderated by journalist Ludmila Muntean. The producers define the show in the following way: "The first Russian talk show in the Republic of Moldova which presents really important issues for our citizens. We don't just talk about people or events. For us, the result matters! Journalistic investigations, exclusive details of important cases, examinations, DNA tests and tests at the lie detector – all these help us get closer and discover the truth. In the studio *Vremea parvdâ*, we analyse in detail the problems faced by our heroes. Then, together with the reporters of the show and the invited experts, we try to find possibilities of helping the troubled, desperate people who have come to a standstill or are at a crossroads. It is also very important for us to put the officials and the people of the law to work!" (Prime.md, 2017). The show has a Facebook page and a YouTube channel, where all editions are stored. The number of views differs from one edition to another, the smallest being several hundreds, and the largest – several tens of thousands. Both the TV format and the Facebook page (Facebook, 2021) of the show keep the same stylistic, chromatic and design look. On its interface one can find information, such as: the brief description of the show, the telephone number of the editorial office 0607 57 573 and the identification of the domain: shows or TV series.

As in the case of the talk show *Moldova*, the feed on the Facebook page of the show *Vremea parvdâ* includes: promotional materials, photos of the protagonists, screenshots from different editions and active links that connect with the YouTube account. On 06.12.2022, this Facebook page was followed by 2,561 people and appreciated by 1,092 people.

The comparative analysis of the shows *Vorbeste Moldova* and *Vremea parvdâ* proves that between

these two shows there are both similarities and differences. The most significant differences, which emphasize the identity profile of each issue and condition their very different positioning on the local media market, were identified in the process of quantitative analysis, being primarily related to:

- the language in which the shows are made: *Vorbeste Moldova* is made in Romanian, and *Vremea parvdâ* – in Russian;
- the audience: the average audience of the show *Vorbeste Moldova*, which varies between several tens of thousands and 1.2 million, is about 60 times larger than the audience of the show *Vremea parvdâ*, which swings between a few hundred and several tens of thousands;
- the projection of the TV format in the virtual environment: the show *Vorbeste Moldova* has both a Facebook and an Instagram page, while *Vremea parvdâ* – only a Facebook page.
- the informational complexity of the Facebook page: on the interface of the Facebook page of the show *Vorbeste Moldova* (Facebook, 2017) there are seven elements, while on that of the show *Vremea parvdâ* (Facebook, 2021) – there are only three elements.

The research also highlighted a string of similarities between these two shows. The similarities are determined by the fact that both broadcasts:

1. appear on the same TV station – *Prime TV*;
2. are broadcasted in prime-time;
3. have the same thematic diapason – social issues;
4. have the same reflection objective – conflicts, dramas and human traditions;
5. have the same purpose – mediation of conflict mechanisms;
6. have the same formative-reality in the Republic of Moldova;
7. have the same TV format – talk show;
8. have the same stylistics concept, rhetorical and design;
9. have Facebook pages;
10. have the same YouTube account.

The qualitative analysis of these two shows presented similarities also at the level of chromatics, style and communication strategies adopted by the moderators.

For rendering the atmosphere on the set the following elements are used: first of all, the colours that symbolize fire, insistence, aggression, malice, violence, pain, etc., that is, the colours that stimulate people to quickly make decisions, based on emotions. For example, the colour red, intensely present on the set of the show *Vorbeste Moldova*, “gives birth to extreme feelings and can increase the both blood pressure and the rhythm of breathing” (Platinumoptic, 2017), whereas the blue-grey colour with shades of black, which prevails on the plateau of *Parvdâ weather* is associated with anxiety, despair, evil and inspires grief and tragedy.

The rhetoric of both shows is based on two terms of reference: tragedy and fatality, which emotionally amplify the feelings experienced by both the protagonists and the viewers. The serious voice of the reporter and the “hard” musical background create alert contexts for confronting the ideas and opinions of those present on the set, meant to keep the viewers in suspense until the end of the show. “All that matters is that the guests discuss information, ideas, opinions, contradictory attitudes, according to the argumentative approach through the roles and relations established between the participants, but also through the creation of the communicative event.” (Teodorescu, 2014).

From a communicational point of view, the main objective of both shows lies in creating a space for a correct, balanced and efficient dialogue. In order to achieve this desideratum, a series of communication strategies are used, the priority being the communication subordinated to the ethical canons, which is based on the impartiality and neutrality of the presenters. The qualitative analysis of the speeches and interventions of the moderators Natalia Cheptene from *Vorbeste Moldova* and Ludmila Muntean from *Vremea parvdâ* proved that both journalists respect professional ethics and deontological principles. The interventions of both moderators do not contain indications of agreement or disagreement, their attitudes and behavioural actions being balanced, equidistant and impartial both in relation to the parties involved in the conflict and to the experts on the plateau.

Therefore, communication in mediation represents the kind of journalistic activity that

manifests itself in the form of integrated journalistic products from the category of journalistic species of opinion and commentators. The most commonly used form of expression of mediation in communication, in television journalism, is that of talk shows. The own identity of the communication in mediation emerges from its bivalent character – social and, at the same time, emotional – which corresponds both to the needs and to the expectations of the public. Due to this attribute, journalistic products, designed to mediate conflicts, turn into tools for debating problems, identifying solutions and creating consensus on the topics addressed. At the same time, due to this appropriation, journalistic mediation products also turn into means of public awareness, which offer viewers the opportunity to experience new sensations and / or to relive feelings with an increased emotional charge. The journalists' ability to correlate utility and spectacle attracts the attention and arouses the interest of tens and hundreds of thousands of media consumers and, as a result, the products made for the purpose of conflict mediation become points of maximum attraction, which ensure the audiences and ratings of audiovisual broadcasts.

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