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25 years of PR in Romanian book sector: A short history of institutionalization and professionalization

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This paper is the first to review the 25 years of PR in the Romanian book sector and establish a typology of most used technics and instruments of book promotion, while revealing the evolution in terms of understanding and practicing PR on a market that is constantly growing and is key to the development of a society. Correlating this with the general development of public relations as new profession and field of study in Romania, this paper allows a deeper discussion on the institutionalization and professionalization of public relations in the Romanian book sector.

Key words: PR for book sector, institutionalization, professionalization, history of PR in Romania

Introduction

During the last decades, there is a growing preoccupation of public relations scholars to go beyond defining public relations and delimitating from related domains, to analyzing in-depth the various practices and specializations that appeared with the development of the profession and of the domain. This lead to a multi-level approach on the study of public relations: on the one hand there is a line of research on analyzing the specializations of public relations, that generated the emergence of other areas such as internal communication and public relations, corporate communication, crisis communication, health public relations or government public relations, etc; on the other hand, there is a line of research on how public relations are understood and practiced in other parts of the world (national/domestic vs. international/global), that generated the country focused case studies.

Initially, both lines of research were dominated by the functional approach aiming to answer to the “Effectiveness Question” (why and to what extent public relations increases organizational effectiveness) and to the “Excellence Question” (how public relations must be organized and managed to be able to make the contribution to organizational effectiveness), fundamental in developing the Excellence theory of Grunig and Grunig, which was the dominant theory in public relations in the 1990s.

Later on, scholars started to focus on developing common conceptual frameworks to engage in cross-national comparisons and international studies. It is the case of Krishnamurthy and Verčič, for example, who edited the first Global Public Relations Handbook and pointed out “there is also a dire need to extend our analyses of public relations in different regions by going beyond a couple of conceptual or theoretical underpinnings and also exploring how contextual variables external to the organization (such as culture, political system, economic system, and media system) influence public relations activities in various parts of the world” (2003, p. XXVII).

Such studies that take into account the context of public relations are, in fact, part of the wider socio-cultural turn emerging recently in public relations scholarship (Bentele, 2008, Bentele & Wehmeier 2007, 2008; Edwards 2011, 2012; Ihlen & van Ruler, 2007, 2009; Ihlen

& Verhoeven, 2009; L'Etang, 1996, 2004, 2005, 2009; McKie & Munshi, 2009; Moloney, 2006). Scholars embracing approaches inspired by Critical Theory discuss also about *public space* and *public sphere* and not only about *market*, about *effects* and *impact* of public relations practices and not only about improving the process itself, more about *power issues* in society and various actors and less about *the power of a single, privileged actor*. In order words, they bring forward alternative discourses to complement the dominant managerial discourse in the greater conversation about public relations' current role in society.

It is in this context that this study discusses the gradual institutionalization of public relations within the Romanian book sector after 1990: besides providing a Romanian case study that contributes to the mapping of practicing public relations in various parts of the words, this study can illustrate the social role of public relations in a post-communist society that is undergoing a process of reconstruction on so many levels (institutional, social, identity). Our study focuses on the Romanian book sector, mainly on publishing houses, because their activity and mission imply also a substantial public mandate and have social and cultural impact in society. In addition, this is an interesting case study all the more as the Romanian book sector is particularly different than the other European book sectors – this is a very fragmented market (around 1,400 publishing houses), with only 45 publishing houses issuing more than 100 titles per year. According to the Romanian Editors' Federation, the Romanian book market is estimated at around 90-100 million EURO (including manuals and the kiosk editions sold with newspapers) and, in terms of book consumption, this is equivalent to each Romanian buying 1 book (Romania's population is of over 22 million people), which is 7 times lower than in Western countries (RP, 2014, November 12). Among the causes for the underdevelopment of Romanian book market, the Federation lists the low purchasing power of the population, the existing problems in the distribution system (major decrease of bookstores), lack of governmental strategies and programs in the book sectors, as well as the failure of the educational system to encourage reading. In fact, Romania is constantly placed in the second half of the international hierarchy resulted from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) scoring low points in reading: in 2012 it ranked 45 out of 65.

These particularities of the Romanian book sector are thus an additional reason for exploring the role of public relations in society, as there is also a need, at social level, for publishing houses to play also a social role.

Theoretical construction of the paper

While discussing the development of the public relations in the Romanian book sector, this paper aims to underline the complementarity of the dominant managerial and of the recent critical approaches in the study of public relations. Romanian publishing houses may have, indeed, a more powerful social mandate and serve public interest due to the existing context of the Romanian society, but after 1990 they are mainly private businesses and therefore the functionalist understanding of public relations as business practice cannot be ignored: “public relations always served as an instrument of the liberal economy and private business, being meant to assess the business performance in society or in particular public spheres (by means of different types of profitability: financial, social, relational etc.)” (Rogojinaru, 2013).

In turn, scholars who assume a critical approach to public relations privilege the social and economic context of public relations, rather than the practice: “the systems theories like those proposed by Grunig and his colleagues are incomplete since they ignore the context of public relations in terms of its origin in, and impact on, existing power relations in society. Generally, critical theorists argue that public relations practitioners perpetuate the ability of both corporations and government to maintain a privileged position in society, usually by dominating the news agenda and excluding minority voices from public debate” (Edwards,

2006). Therefore, the critical approach to public relations not only changes the focus from organizations' point of view to society at large, but also introduces other elements of analysis, such as the variety of actors acting in society and the status they have. The relationship to be established, the negotiation and agreement to shared meanings is no longer a process only between an organization and its publics: it is a process taking place in society where various actors (organizations, governments, media) with various agendas are active and participate in a dialogue that has become not only a public dialogue, but a public debate, which means of public interest. It is in this broad context that the research questions in critical public relations change from "how public relations help organizations be efficient" to reflexive questions concerned about "what is the role of public relations in society".

Critical approaches represent clearly a paradigm shift from understanding and analyzing public relations in terms of management theory that was indeed taken-for-granted in public relations research with Excellent/Symmetry theory becoming a "dominant paradigm" (Botan and Taylor, 2004), to understanding public relations as a social force or social activity in society. Thus, public relations research has broaden both in terms of methodologies and approaches, as illustrated by the in-depth inventory made by L' Etang (2005): "there has been a major discursive turn within the field (Mickey, 2003; Surma, 2005; Weaver, Motion, & Ro per, 2005); a re-orientation away from the U.S. towards other cultures and histories (L'Etang, 2004; Sriramesh and Verčič, 2003; Tilson & Alozie, 2004); and a merging with media sociology (Moloney, 2000). There has also been some published research from media sociologists of various critical (in both senses) persuasions (Davis, 2002; McNair, 1996; Miller & Dinan, 2000). Careful work on theoretical frameworks—Pieczka's (1996) forensic essay critiquing systems theory remains a classic—and key concepts, such as Leitch and Neilson's (1997) deconstruction of "public," and some polemical pieces, such as McKie (1997, 2001)—have begun to provide a richer field. Berger's (2005) recent insights into public relations at the managerial level explode the concept of "dominant coalition," to reveal the chaotic, partial and political world of management practice." (p. 522).

This shows a trend towards a consistent European body of research in public relations that challenges the US approach to public relations focused on management theory: "Contrary to most public relations approaches, a socially oriented view is not oriented toward management problems, but rather toward the relationship that public relations has with the societies in which it is produced and with the social systems it coproduces. However, we argue that sociological approaches to public relations can also give meaning to practices at the mesolevel of organizations and the microlevel of individual practitioners" (Ihlen & van Ruler, 2009, p. 3).

This paper draws particularly on the seminal work of Berger & Luckmann (1966) focusing on the concept of *institutionalization* that emerges from the *habitualization* of practices: "institutionalization occurs whenever there is a reciprocal typification of habitualized actions by types of actors. Put differently, any such typification is an institution. What must be stressed is the reciprocity of institutional typifications and the typicality of not only the actions but also the actors in institutions. The typifications of habitualized actions that constitute institutions are always shared ones. They are available to all the members of the particular social group in question, and the institution itself typifies individual actors as well as individual actions. The institution posits that actions of type X will be performed by actors of type X." (p. 81). Therefore, social activities that repeat and tend to follow a certain pattern lead to the emergence and further development of practices associated with these activities and, through typification, reciprocity and habitualization, they will follow in time a gradual process of institutionalization. And this happens also because a symbolic meaning, of

what that practices entail, has been socially constructed and shared by the ones who practice them.

The concept of institutionalization is useful in understanding how public relations practices have developed in time and lead to the emergence of institutions and not only. Institutionalization stands for the emergence of a profession, of a professional body of practitioners, of education and schools to form the future professional body and, of course, institutions. At the same time, since public relations itself is a dynamic process in which social actors interact and construct new definitions, meanings and interpretations, these can eventually generate new structures and institutions which, in turn, bring new significations and interpretations about public relations.

Historicity is another key concept used in this paper, especially since the analysis traces the development of public relations in Romanian book sector for a period of 25 years. As Berger and Luckmann underline, once the institutions established, they “imply historicity and control. Reciprocal typifications of actions are built up in the course of a shared history. They cannot be created instantaneously. Institutions always have a history, of which they are the products. It is impossible to understand an institution adequately without an understanding of the historical process in which it was produced.” (p. 82). At the same time, they emphasize that “institutions also, by the very fact of their existence, control human conduct by setting up predefined patterns of conduct, which channel it in one direction as against the many other directions that would theoretically be possible. It is important to stress that this controlling character is inherent in institutionalization as such, prior to or apart from any mechanisms of sanctions specifically set up to support an institution” (ibid.). In other words, the institutionalized practices impose the norms that guide human behavior and this is how control is exerted. It is a control by social norm, not by coercion and sanction that appear once laws are in force.

Summing up, this paper looks at the development of public relations in the Romanian book sector from both a functionalist and critical perspective, needed in order to describe the way it is practiced but also placed within a larger social context, so that it ultimately serves not only the purpose of the publishing houses, but also that of the society at large.

Methodology

This longitudinal study aims to trace the main stages in the evolution of public relations in the Romanian book during a period of 25 years, as well as to identify the current practices and understanding of the very role of public relations within a sample of publishing houses. It builds on the key statements of constructivism, therefore it looks at the *early post-communist activities* of promoting books, to identify a certain *pattern* that leads to the emergence and development of certain *practices* of public relations associated with these activities. It is argued that, in time, through *reciprocal typification* and *habitualization*, these result in *institutionalization*.

We used the three phases identified by Rogojinaru (2009) in the development of public relations in Romania to identify practices, actors and structures of public relations specific to each of these stages during the last 25 years in the Romanian book sector. Thus, Rogojinaru (2009) distinguished between the pioneer phase of the early 1990s (1991–1995) based on an amalgam practices of media, publicity and promotional events, the exploratory phase in the second half of 1990s (1995–2000/2001) Introductory for public relations studies and transient in practice, the consolidation phase from 2001 and ongoing (p. 553).

We continued with an analysis of three publishing houses (Humanitas, Nemira and Vellant) considered representative for the Romanian book sector against three criteria: dimension, financial capacity and consumer perception of reputation. Humanitas Publishing House is part of a greater holding including, among others, a bookstores network, a

multimedia and a digital branch. Founded in 1990, immediately after the 1990 Revolution, through the privatization of a state-owned publishing house (Political Publishing House), Humanitas is currently the leader of the Romanian book market (in 2013 it reported a turnover of 7.35 million euros and an increase by 8.4% in profits as compared to the previous fiscal year). Nemira Publishing House was founded in 1991 by a Romanian writer and is currently owned and managed by his family. Nemira also integrates a national distribution chain, with seven Nemira bookstores in the biggest towns of Romania. For 2013 it reported a turnover of almost 1.5 million euros. Vellant Publishing House is a very young publishing house, founded in 2008, with a turnover of almost 93.950 euros in 2013.

The research was carried out between June and October 2014, on a corpus made up of the public communication of the publishing houses (websites, blogs, social media pages and accounts on Facebook and Twitter, press releases and statements of their representatives), the internal documents and the organizational charts, the websites and press releases of the Romanian Editors' Federation and of the main book fair in Romania (Gaudeamus). In terms of methodology, this study uses a mix method design combining (1) participatory observation (one of the authors established the PR department of another top 10 publishing house and ran it for during 2007-2009, gather data about the entire book sector and its development), (2) content analysis of social documents and (3) in-depth interviews with the representatives in charge of communication within the three selected publishing houses.

The interviews investigated: 1) the type of activities carried out by the PR department, the categories of assignments performed (as identified by Cutlip *et al.*, 2006, pp. 34–35) and the identification of practitioners' two major dominant roles that occur in practice: public relations technician and public relations manager (p. 42); 2) the perceived value of PR by the specialist towards internal audiences, the management or the dominant coalition (Grunig & Dozier, 2002); 3) the evaluation of organizational visibility and reputation (and measures taken in order to improve them). This first stage uses the model of excellence in PR (Grunig & Dozier, 2002) as a reference point, evaluating internal communication departments according to several success factors structured on four levels: program level (the object of their evaluation), departmental level, organizational level and evaluation level (named „effects of Excellent PR”). We adapted this schema as follows: we replaced the program with an overall illustration of the communication dimensions and activities that are carried out by the department or by the responsible in charge of PR. At departmental level, we considered relevant to our study the institutional capacity of integrating public relations, which includes the development of PR programs, the institutional relationship between PR and marketing, the levels of subordination, the strategic value of research and the quality of the human resources. At organizational level, we looked at the proactive dimension of PR, the strategic integration of PR in the decision making process, the strategic use of evaluation and the capacity to incorporate specific issues of book sector.

To complement these, we also analyzed the online communication of the three publishing houses looking particularly at interactivity defined as number of positive reactions to a post, the number of replies and the number of comments. In order to operationalize it, we applied a *functional benchmarking* to obtain an overview of the corporate *conversational* competence of the publishing houses in dealing with critical issues for the Romanian book sector. We used an assessment grid (first developed and used by Rogojinaru, Zaharia, Moise, 2013) including *quantitative* indicators that increase and enhance organizational *visibility* (the number of positive reactions to a post, the number of replies and the number of comments), as well as *qualitative* indicators to measure the degree of *innovation* in PR processes (strategic vision, complexity of tactics, the influence of involved entities, the appropriateness of channels), and also the *reputational* strengths of the company (brand equities, level of public trust and publics' closeness to organization, etc.).

Findings and discussions

Gradual institutionalization of PR within the book sector during 25 years

In the first phase of public relations development in Romania (**1990-1995**), the pioneer phase, there were few publishing houses and only one had an activity also before 1990 (Cartea Românească was founded in 1919). Their main collaborators in spreading the news about the new titles were the journalists working for state owned media. In terms of practices, publishing houses used to promote their books by buying advertorials, sending the new titles to key journalists so that they could write a review and the arrangement of few isolated interviews. There were few events: some book launches and, as of 1994, a national book fair where readers could come, meet their authors and buy discounted books. This is another specificity of the Romanian book sector as in other countries the book fair are places where editors and authors meet to discuss potential collaborations. In turn, in Romania, due to the gradual closing of bookstores, the book fairs are the main points of contact between readers and publishing houses which ultimately results in opportunities for the first to buy many discounted books and the later to score high sales (an important percentage of the annual turnover is obtained during the fair).

In the second period (**1995-2001**), considered the exploratory phase of public relations in Romania, the actors in the field multiply: new publishing houses are established, private owned newspapers and TV stations are founded and the first professional associations emerge in the industry. As a result, the practices become more diverse ranging from ads, interviews with authors, events and book launches, while the book fairs become more numerous. Since an industry is slowly developing, some incipient structure appear within the publishing houses: the people responsible, simultaneously, for communication, marketing and sales. This illustrates a limited understanding of the public relations role within the publishing houses that usually have one single person handling all these different tasks.

It is only **after 2001**, when the consolidation phase of public relations beings, that the role and functions of public relations start to be practiced to a wider extent. Publishing houses start developing strategic campaign of integrated communication that include interviews, media campaigns, launches and public lectures & readings, meeting with authors in big public spaces outside the traditional book fairs or bookstores. This is the time when the publishing houses start creating websites and blogs and also have their first contact with social media. However, that's the period with the most rapid transformations, also due to the technological and internet advent in Romania and this resulted in viral campaigns in social media and even corporate social responsibility programs. The book fairs also multiply and are organized twice a year (one in late spring - Bookfest, one in late autumn – Gaudeamus) and even regional book fairs are organized in major cities of Romania.

A real competitive book market starts also consolidating in this period, with lots of publishing houses (some thousands) that have now more and more audiences: besides journalists, bloggers grow in importance and influence in online media. The professional associations are also more diverse and three entities are competing with “winning” publishing houses as members: the Editors’ Associations, the Society of Romanian Editors’, the Association of Distributors and Editors).

As a consequence, the publishing houses start to establish communication and public relations departments (e.g. Humanitas, Curtea Veche, Polirom) to manage their communication with external audiences and to organize the increasing number of events. A major change towards the previous period is that people in charge of communication have a degree in communication and/or public relations and/or media and they start the process of gaining internal legitimacy for public relations so that it is considered as separate function from marketing and sales. In this quest, the communication representatives of the publishing

houses join the professional organization in communication – the Romanian Public Relations Association, where peers were carrying out the same battle within their organizations. However, in other sectors and domains, the institutionalization and professionalization of public relations was far more quicker also due to the dynamics of the markets (e.g. Fast Moving Consumer Goods market - many multinational companies have established branches and “exported” also communication know-how).

Even so, after 2007, the year when Romania joined the European Union, the book sector had a development book and this was translated into numerous communication campaigns as books had become interesting products that could be turned into “cool” brands. Consequently, for the first time, communication campaigns for books are acknowledged and win prizes in the national competition Romanian PR Award (in 2008, Curtea Veche Publishing received a Silver Award for Excellence in corporate communication section for “Everybody comes to PAMUK” campaign aimed to engage the audiences to attend the events organized to celebrate the visit of the Nobel prize winner, Orhan Pamuk, in Romania; in 2009, Polirom also received a Silver Award for Excellence for the campaign “Ask me about Firmin”). This is the period when private companies begin to find attractive and beneficial for their image the association with particular books (because the message reinforced their corporate messages or the author had a close managerial perspective to theirs or promoted a particular management vision) and become sponsors of publishing houses or of their events.

Although the economic crisis from 2009 impacted also the Romanian book sector, heavily affected by the dropping of sales, the market remained a very competitive one as several media companies started to develop kiosk editions to be distributed with newspapers in a strategy to increase newspaper consumption. This had as direct effect the financing of publishing houses that found an alternative way of selling books.

In 2012, the first public relations agency dedicated entirely to the book sector (Headsome Communication) was established by the former PR Director of Polirom Publishing House. The agency continues up to date to contribute to the professionalization of the book sector and of public relations within the book sector, initiating dedicated events that became annual: “Approved for Printing. The Gala of the Romanian Book sector” and “The International Literature Festival from Bucharest”.

Last but not least, publishing houses have started to develop long term corporate social responsibility programs to increase the reading habits of young Romanians. Such a campaign is the one of Curtea Veche Publishing, „Childhood books”, carried out in partnership with the Romanian Royal House, that aims to provide books to children all over the country: they organize several events to raise funds such as cyclist tours or meetings with the Royal Family.

Current practices - Mixture of instrumental and strategic public relations

Our analysis of the communication management of the three selected publishing houses shows Humanitas incorporated the strategic value and role of PR, Nemira assumed a tactical and integrated marketing communication, while Vellant has a strictly tactical, yet creative understanding of public relations.

In the case of Humanitas Holding, the dominant coalition is formed by the general director, the directors of each independent entity (Publishing house, Humanitas fiction, Humanitas Media, Humanitas Digital and Humanitas Bookstores) and the director responsible with the organization’s publicity and promotion. The later coordinates a team of four Public Relations officers in charge of each entity and the flow of transmitting decisions respects a particular hierarchy and verticality: the dominant coalition establishes the marketing objectives and the titles that should be promoted, the director of publicity and

promotion conceives a program to sustain the objectives and then transmits it to each PR officer, for implementation. The communication activities developed by the Humanitas PR network of specialists are tactical (writing and editing, media relations and placement, organizing special events, production of materials, website administration, internal communication) and strategic (CSR campaigns, online communication, institutional representation at the national and international books awards competitions).

Nemira Publishing House has a Department of Communication and Marketing with two employees: one employee is the PR specialist and one is responsible for digital and online media. The PR specialist has both a technical role: media relations, special event management (book launches, targeted workshops, reading sessions, autograph sessions, book fairs; talent management) and a strategic one: conceiving and implementing campaigns, sustaining the relational capital of the publishing house and is part of the decision making in the dominant coalition. She also added to her portfolio crisis communication, counseling, research, speaking. Her formal responsibilities are PR, but she also has to sustain marketing activities. The level of institutionalization of public relations in these small and medium organizations like Nemira is not profound, even if the pressures from external audiences are high. In the case of Nemira, the dominant coalition is not aware of the disciplinary differences between PR and Marketing: for management head, the PR specialist does „everything it has to do with promotion and organizational image” (Al. Florescu, PR Specialist Nemira).

Vellant has a PR specialist in charge of mainly technical and methodological tasks, focused on implementation, but without a broader strategy: writing and editing, media relations and placement, organizing special events, production of materials, website administration, internal communication, online communication.

A common key finding for all three organizations is that research is used mainly with the purpose to evaluate the efficiency of communication programs already implemented and less used to support the dominant coalition in their business decision. As a large company with multiple sub-entities, Humanitas has an internal structure highly vertical and bureaucratic which limits initiative, while Nemira has a more horizontal internal structure and flow of decision and Vellant lacks a strategic approach of communication.

Another finding reveals the degree of institutionalizing PR within the organization: Humanitas has developed a formal flow of communication between its PR specialists, has introduced norms and regulations and, also the daily activities are highly standardized. In turn, Nemira and Vellant are currently developing a formal and organizational *savoir-faire*, legitimizing the value of public relations. These differences have a direct influence on the way publishing houses conduct issues management and address them, aspects that will be described in the following sections.

Current practices - Branding as strategic and integrated dimension of communication

Humanitas combines various branding strategies: sometimes it emphasizes the organization as corporate brand (authors rejoice success once they become Humanitas authors), other times it builds upon its well-known translators. Bogdan Baci, PR Specialist Humanitas Bookstores told us that „we address our audiences (existent and potential) through our consolidated image, because Humanitas is, for everyone who comes to our bookstores, a brand.” (personal interview).

Nemira Publishing House prefers a positioning through a process of creating niched collections (fantasy, adult, science-fiction etc) and branding them as such, while publishing translations of famous novels and bestsellers. The branding strategy is an organizational learning function, as Alexandra Florescu told us: „for Nemira, the long term strategy is

clearly defined by branding. We try to maintain our identity for our existent clients, to emphasize the already consecrated collections, but also to try to address new audiences for those collections less visible (universal literature, young adults and Jungian psychology).” (extract of interview). On middle term, the objective is the process of branding the Jungian psychology collection, starting from building a visual identity to a positioning strategy on the market and complementary coherent online publicity.

Vellant, as a very young publishing house declares itself as being different from the others; it develops currently an organizational branding, by strengthening the image of marginal publishing house, as its representatives declared („encouraging excentricities” – extract of interview with Elena Marcu, PR & events coordinator).

The PR specialists interviewed mentioned as a priority for the dominant coalition the strategic dimension of branding and that their key-role is to counsel the members of the dominant coalition, based on their constant evaluation. If consecrated brands, such as Humanitas use a very complex and nuanced branding strategy, middle-sized businesses, such as Nemira, integrate only some components and instruments to address their audiences. Small-sized enterprises can only sustain technical level functions.

Current practices - Online communication: reputation and visibility

During the interviews, the PR specialists revealed the importance of online for the practice of PR, both in terms of audiences and organizational objectives. When giving examples of strategic communication programs, all three mentioned online communication as being extremely relevant for their audiences. “Almost all promotion programs we conceive and implement use the online and, mostly, the digital. We could identify during our annual research and during the implementation of certain engagement techniques that it was so much more relevant for our audiences to interact with us online and not directly. That doesn’t mean we don’t organize anymore special book events, like book launches or autographs sessions, but we always add to these traditional techniques special programs in online that could help us interact with our audiences” (Al. Florescu, Nemira PR Specialist).

Consolidating the reputation. Humanitas owns and manages an impressive online network: three websites and 14 Facebook pages: the online newsroom of Humanitas Holding, each sub-entity of Humanitas Holding addresses digital audiences in a segmented way (Humanitas Publishing House, Humanitas Fiction, Humanitas Multimedia, Humanitas Bookstores), almost every Humanitas bookstore has a Facebook page. This impressive number of Facebook pages owned and managed by PR specialists would generate the impression of a focus on conversation in their digital communication. However, the organization develops a monologue communication, lacking conversation and engagement of e-publics.

Humanitas builds its organizational reputation upon the image of its director, Gabriel Liiceanu, a reputed and consecrated philosopher, writer and intellectual. In 1990, he founded together with other Romanian intellectuals, the first independent NGO (the Group for Social Dialogue) to sustain the function of critical societal thinking and action. This capital transferred to the organizational reputation of Humanitas, all the more as Liiceanu has consolidated the image of an intellectual publicly involved and engaged, believing in his social role as a model for others. Humanitas is based on humanities and philosophical translations and publications and currently gathers a school of thinking in the Romanian cultural field. Gabriel Liiceanu’s continuous presence in the public sphere raised the organization’s credibility, visibility and positioned it as a model of business in the book sector.

The Facebook pages sustain this vision and type of organizational culture: the posts are not mainly informative, but formative and educational (either quotes from books or well-known authors or fragments of media interviews that authors or translators had in cultural mass-media). The digital communication uses the symbolic dimension of individual prestige in order to generate and enhance organizational reputation.

Building a reputation. Nemira was also founded by a known writer of theater plays who also was the general director of the national television, Valentin Nicolau. The organization did not use the reputational capital of his owner in a public manner, but with the purpose of attracting valuable Romanian writers, already consecrated or promising debutants. At Nemira, since its foundation, well reputed Romanian writers and intellectuals have started their career. Currently, it developed a business strategy that is based on specialized collections, aiming niched audiences, therefore it has an impressive portfolio of websites and blogs: the main websites are designed as marketing tools, as virtual or electronic bookstores. Instead, Nemira owns and manages a media website, an online newsroom separate from the main websites, which creates a certain confusion at the level of interested audiences. The network of blogs comes to develop a constant interaction with the readers, creating therefore virtual spaces where the readers and the fans of a certain literary genre already form communities. This strategy is extremely efficient; the organization realized that it can facilitate, through a specific online space, the interaction and socialization between the fans of a certain literary genre (like science-fiction) or of a certain title (like the translated bestseller *Game of Thrones*). The positive effects are to be seen, as PR specialist of Nemira pointed out, in the presence of consumers at their book launches or at the book club that the publishing house organizes for its readers.

Facebook pages sustain the same high level of interaction and engagement with their digital publics. Just as Humanitas, Nemira also owns and manages an impressive number of Facebook pages: the organizational one, the online newsroom, the Facebook accounts of some of the Nemira bookstores and the Facebook account of Nemira community of readers (the book club). The main format of the digital communication is very different in terms of interaction and engagement of audiences: the content is adapted to audiences' needs of information or socialization. The informative function is present, as in the case of Humanitas, many posts bringing information about collections, promotions or book launches. This informative communication is always completed and improved by a highly interactive and community driven accent: many posts are focusing on finding consumers' opinions about certain titles or authors, or even involving audiences in the process of decision-making regarding the cover for a title.

Even if Nemira does not manage a Twitter account, the communities of fans of certain titles and literary genres who interact on Nemira blogs or Facebook pages represent, as Rogojinaru considers, probably one of the most effective form of digital endorsement and can be subcategorized in «top fans», «promoters» or «evangelists» (Comm & Burge, 2003: 125). In the campaigns of branding a collection or a title, the publishing house also addresses to bloggers and the blog «visitors». Another type of audiences, maybe the most relevant for the relational marketing approach, is «I» public who define and promote their own profile, write for massive audiences, solitary people sharing the illusion of being heard by vast populations in the virtual space.

The PR specialist confirmed during the in depth interview that consumers do perceive as being dominant in their case the marketing focus (promotions and discounts), so the organization was conceiving a communication strategy that would include social and educational dimensions, through campaigns of encouraging young people to read.

Positioning on the market. Vellant positions itself as marginal and encouraging marginal culture and reading interests; its dominant communication is basic marketing,

lacking relational or interaction options. The publishing house translates books that encounter a diversity of reading interests and it didn't develop a focused strategy of branding titles or collections. It is more relevant because it also publishes young Romanian writers and, therefore, it addresses young consumers. Its online communication is based on the organizational website, which functions exclusively as a virtual bookstore, a Facebook page where the news about promotions and discounts are dominant and a Twitter account where the communication is not adapted, the content being almost identical to Facebook content.

Concluding thoughts

This paper has reflected on the gradual institutionalization and professionalization of public relations within the Romanian book sector after 1990 and up to 2015, correlating it with the general evolution of public relations as a new profession and field of study in Romania in the same period. It showed its evolution from the promotion of books through promotional practices (sending new titles to journalists so that they could write reviews) and events (the traditional book fairs and launches) to the use of the entire toolbox of public relations (e.g. building media relations, using new media, adopting corporate social responsibility programs) and strategic planning of communication and integrated campaigns.

At the same time, this study illustrated the emergence of structures within the publishing houses: from a person in charge of promoting the new titles to a graduate of communication and public relations in charge of communication and up to the establishment of a communication department. This is linked also to the constant effort of public relations practitioners to legitimize public relations within the publishing houses and distinguish its practice from mere marketing or sales. It is in this context that they adhere to professional association in public relations.

The final section discusses in-depth the current practices of public relations that have been standardized and regulated within publishing houses, a normal outcome of the institutionalization process. However, with few exceptions related to some exceptional events, there is a predominant technical and instrumental understanding of public relations: in other words, the publishing houses are still focused on a rather uni-directional, top-down approach in their relationship building with various audiences, as reflected particularly in the analysis on their online presence.

As the book sector is still underdeveloped in Romania, they miss the opportunity to engage with the younger audiences and to elaborate on the key role of books in re-building a society. Understanding public relations as a social activity would have facilitated this endeavor. In turn, in Critical Theory terms, they preferred to use public relations in order to preserve their power position and to serve their commercial interests, ultimately excluding alternative voices from the conversation, including their audiences.

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