

MEDIA AND ITS RESPONSIBILITIES. THE ROMANIAN SYSTEM OF EDUCATION AND ITS PUBLIC PERCEPTION WITHIN ROMANIAN CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

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Abstract: We draw a conceptual frame for the actual media evolutions from Romania regarding the topic of national education. This frame has two dimensions. The first one is disclosing a pattern in which news and debates about education are being delivered by the media to the public. A relatively wide range of elements are scrutinized: the issue of plagiarism, the issue of the very poor quality educational system and so on. The debate is focused upon the way in which media treats nowadays these topics. The second one uncovers is asking if the Romanian media is ready to take part to a collective effort in order to improve the status of national education. A perspective upon the *cultural background* of the subject is developed in the end. We indicate some cultural elements which could be responsible for the media style of delivering the theme of education to public.

Keywords: Romanian educational system, public perception, media, media responsibilities

1. Introduction

We must underline the fact that the topic of our study, in our view, is was not, and still it is not, properly developed within the recent studies of PR and public communication in general from the Romanian actual academic space. This is the reason why the references about this topic not only that are scarce but even those which are already published, very few anyway, only indirectly are linked with the topic of our paper and we think that they are far from being enough for the process of obtaining a relatively solid conceptual construction. Of course, it is undeniable the fact that some of these papers had developed indeed some reliable analysis, in an acceptable manner, about the way in which contemporary Romanian press are dealing in its materials with the issue of national education, but these studies are, yet, unable nor to draw a systematic picture upon the frames through which media speaks about the subject nor to develop a further frame in order to indicate some possible ways of improving, within the media frame of possibilities, the national educational system. For these reasons we had to develop for this study a minimum and *preliminary* conceptual frame in order to obtain some classifications on the elements which we consider that are crucial if we want to understand the main ways in which Romanian media speaks today about the national educational system. Thus, the study begins with a summary of what we consider to be the major forms through which the Romanian press presents today to its public the situation of the national educational system.

2. Images and Symbols. A Brief Anatomy of a Negative Picture.

For the average contemporary citizen from Romania the negative image of his country has, beyond a general symbolism which is relatively easy to recognize, some distinct symbol-topics for almost every domain, social, political, economic or cultural. These are various elements which offers, in different forms and contents, the essence

of the negative dimension of a given particular field of life from contemporary but also from the historical Romania. These elements are present even in the way in which is treated the educational domain, a one which lately was profoundly affected, in the most negative possible manner, by the so called "transition". Beyond the lack of efficiency, the absence of finality in the social field and the chronic shortage of financial support the contemporary Romanian system of education, and especially the domain of higher education, has for the contemporary citizens from Romania few distinct elements of symbolism within the public sphere of the media, elements which are easy to disclose and which were created in time by the Romanian media. In what will follow we will try to disclose these elements in a brief and systematic manner. But before this we must, however, underline the fact that we do not claim to offer here a complete set of the modes in which contemporary Romanian media speaks about the national educational system. We have selected for the purpose of this brief and, we can say this, preliminary analysis, only few of these media ways of approaching the topic of education from contemporary Romania which in our view are the most representative nowadays.

2.1. The Issue of Poor Quality – From Plagiarism to Low Level of Quality in Romanian Contemporary System of Education

The first element, one which is very easy to notice in the nowadays Romanian media, is reflected through press releases which are underlying the very poor quality of contemporary national educational system from the country. In different forms, this element is present in almost every media material which is released to the Romanian public in the last few years. Briefly, this element could be summarized and it is ultimately reduced to some general topics which today are very familiar to the public. Here we can mention among these topics the poor results obtained by the Romanian pupils at different forms of national exams, the low rate of promotion at the end of high school period, the great rate of school abandonment, and so on. Of course, the element of low quality implies more than these topics but, yet, these are forming in general what the Romanian media presents to the public. Moreover, the press materials are almost always accompanied with very negative comments.

Another distinct topic of the media releases to the public about the poor level of the contemporary national education, within a general frame, is represented by the issue of plagiarism. Maybe this is because this phenomenon is very present within the Romanian contemporary political class but, at least in our perspective, its abundant presence in the media could not be explained only through the phenomenon of plagiarism which is, unfortunately, so wide spread within actual Romanian political class. As it is known many of the actual Romanian politicians not only that they have a PhD in one academic field or in another but many of them are also teaching in universities and among this wide segment for many of them the press disclosed in the last period different forms of plagiarism which are present in their so called "academic papers". In addition to this, as it was disclosed by the Romanian media, the phenomenon of plagiarism within the political class is also present in other countries from EU. It seems that this phenomenon is tolerated and accepted in different forms by the society. Some consistent analysis had been developed in the space of the international media among this phenomenon in contemporary Romanian academic and public space in general (Iancu 2012). However, we underline this again, the interest of the press about the topic of plagiarism could not be reduced only to the presence of

this phenomenon among papers published by individuals who are in the same time politicians and academics in the formal sense of this word.

Speaking now strictly in terms regarding the way in which the media talks about the plagiarism we can very easy notice that the whole phenomenon is reduced by the media to its core element which is represented by the idea of academic theft. Of course, when we talk about plagiarism this is the most important aspect of the whole issue but, at least to our knowledge, there are no yet substantial studies about its roots and about its historical development throughout the history of the Romanian educational system. However, for the purpose of this short analysis we retain here the way in which appears the nucleus of the idea of plagiarism within the actual Romanian press releases about this topic. In addition to this relatively rudimentary approach, we must also consider the fact that the general public is not properly trained or used to distinguish between an authentic case of plagiarism and other forms of academic fraud.

In addition, closely linked with the topic of plagiarism is the phenomenon of low and very low quality of the actual Romanian system of education regardless of the level. Plagiarism does not represent by itself the single clue of low quality but it is definitely a type of a very special negative effect produced by a very disastrous system. In a healthy academic environment, the phenomenon of plagiarism is rapidly and efficiently sanctioned because the system has its own healthy antibodies capable to react and to maintain the sanity of the entire structure. But within a system how is the contemporary system of education from Romania, and especially at its superior levels, it seems that there are no such effective antibodies and this is the main reason because of which the numerous cases of plagiarism from the recent period have not been properly sanctioned by the system. However, we retain here the basic frame through which the actual Romanian media is disclosing a very negative phenomenon to the public. Together with the simple presentations of cases of plagiarism, the media directly shows to the Romanian contemporary public a very negative aspect, among, of course, many others, from within the actual national educational system. In addition, we must be aware of the fact that even if this general frame is, we must admit this, a very rudimentary one, it has, anyway, the necessary power to correctly indicate a deep negative phenomenon in its entire real dimension by discreetly indicating or suggesting the implications and the complications of it.

2.2. The Issue of Financial Support for National Education – Another Media Pattern of Approaching a Negative Phenomenon

Secondly, another key element widely presented by the media is the issue of financial support for the national educational system. This fact must also be seen, in our perspective, as a media pattern through which the same negative situation is presented to the public. This pattern, in our view, is also a rudimentary one, but it seems to be very effective, and it is underlying the issue of salaries of the personal from the educational system but also from the scientific research. Examples here are abundant and what is interesting to notice is the fact that this topic is also directly linked with the issue of the poor quality of the entire system (Frangopol 2011). In some press materials it has been suggested that the actual Romanian educational system is a sort of refuge for those who were not able to find for themselves a much better paid job. This could be true, from our point of view, for significant parts from the high school

level teachers but it is a very debatable topic for the higher education level where the things are much more complicated.

2.3. The Romanian Contemporary Educational System and the Issue of its Finality at the Level of Work Market

Finally, another element widely used by the Romanian contemporary media to show the issue of quality from within the national educational system is the absence of any substantial finality, at the level of work market, of the whole educational process. A technical debate it would be much more complicated here but in terms of the purposes of our study it is enough to disclose this topic as a distinct element through which Romanian contemporary media is disclosing to the public one of the forms in which the poor quality from education takes shape. Interesting to notice in this context is also the fact that this topic is presented on two distinct lines of approach. One is underlying the absence of a realistic correlation between what the educational system has to offer to the work market of the country and the other points out that even in those cases which this correlation could be identified the graduates are very bad prepared, in terms of their professional training, and because of this they are not ready to be properly integrated within a performant work market. There were many public positions upon this topic in which was strongly underlined the poor level of professional acquisitions of the vast majority of graduates regardless the formal level of their diploma. This poor level has been clearly demonstrated in various modes. The PISA tests has also shown and testified the poor level of Romanian pupils in general. A clear analysis about the topic of poor quality from Romanian contemporary education but also about what it could be done in the future in order to improve this status had been developed recently by Petre Frangopol, a leading author in this field (Frangopol 2011) It is easy to see that this frame in which the poor quality of the entire system is disclosed to the general public is another model through which Romanian media is approaching today the issue of the low quality from the actual national educational system.

As intermediary conclusions it is obvious that the contemporary Romanian public perception about the status of the actual national educational system it is formed and shaped through the set of media patterns described by us until this point. It seems that, regardless of their relatively rudimentary levels these patterns, due to their content, have the capacity to transmit the real scale of the issue. In addition to this observation we may also notice that the topic of poor quality from the national Romanian contemporary educational system is for the Romanian media one from which manipulation, deliberate or not, is almost completely absent. This can be true because of the simple fact that is nothing to manipulate when you disclose, in such direct manners, the reality from within a domain which is so badly affected and with a very negative dimension so obvious for everyone.

The set of media patterns described until this point is forming in the same time the way in which contemporary Romanian public is perceiving the situation from within national educational system. Basically these patterns, regardless of their some rudimentary features in terms of public communication and media tools, have, as we seen, the power to deliver a true content, a one which speaks without doubts about the real status of the educational system from the country. We ask ourselves if the media should have something to add in order to send a more realistic message to the public. We do not talk here about the possibility of a sort of media intervention in order to help improving the status from within contemporary Romanian system of education. We just

might ask if the media should add something to its actual type of message regarding the national education in such manner that will preserve the professional standard in terms of public communication and journalism.

3. Media and its Responsibilities – Should be the Media more Responsible?

We do not intend here to open a debate, more or less general, upon the possible role of the media in society or about its crucial role in social and economic development and so on. However, we consider that in vulnerable societies such is today the Romanian society media must play a more significant role not only in informing the people in a professional and correct manner but also in forming them for a society built with responsible citizens.

Even if the debate is more complicated than is possible within a limited theoretical analysis such is this study we can, however, indicate some elements which, in our perspective, could be improved by the Romanian media in its daily work on informing and forming the public perception on current status from the national education. And maybe the most important of these elements could be will for a more professional and deeper analysis about the topic of national education. This should be done because in the vast majority of the cases the media releases about the issue of education depict an approach which is, as we already seen, a relatively rudimentary. The cases selected by the media to be presented to the public are treated in a simplistic manner. This state of facts does not help the general public and does not offer a set of proper tools which finally would help the public to better understand the whole subject. On the other hand, there are indeed some media platforms, within the online environment, which offers, for a superior category of public, elaborated and very well developed analysis about the topic but we have to be aware that these sites are not designed for the general public. Thus, these platforms could not help at all and could not determine a proper and correct perception about the real status from contemporary Romanian national educational system. Even if those rudimentary patterns have indeed the power to depict, as we seen, the whole amplitude of the issue, they are fail to described it in deeper and reasonable manner for the general public.

Another element which could indeed help and could determine better performances from the media about the way in which speaks about the national education is to have specialized journalists about this topic. They are in some cases available but yet, in our perspective, the effects of their work are not too palpable until now at the level of general Romanian contemporary public opinion.

And, finally, it would help if some leading and prominent figures from the field of reforming the educational system will be more present in media releases with consistent perspectives about the topic. We have here in mind especially specialists from the West, from countries with performant educational systems and with a more developed media not only in this field but in general. Of course, these specialists will not be necessarily available for the entire segment of the general public but at least they will be able to significantly improve the level of debate from some already available media spaces from contemporary Romania. Anyway, in some cases they could be able to expand the general audience and to make it more receptive to the subject.

These possibilities could, of course, only indirectly be able to determine any improvement in the national educational system, *at least by creating a better*

awareness at the level of those which have the power to decide the faith of the national education. This may be seen as a small step but on a long time this type of evolution bring the contemporary Romanian media to a point from which it will be able to have a significant role to play in improving the status of the national education.

4. Is there any Cultural Background Responsible for the Entire Situation? Plagiarism as a Tradition

This topic could have only an indirect linked to the main element of our theme but, however, we consider that it has its relevance within the entire discussion. The main issue here is if it is possible to identify some general features within a collectivity which can explain some social patterns of behavior on long periods of time?

Even if we do not consider that some general characteristics of any society could be *anytime* directly determined by some *unhistorical* and *universal* more general features and conditions yet a discussion about this subject could be realistically developed. This is true, as we can see, at least from a historical point of view. Within the contemporary Romanian cultural space a discussion like this was made recently even it was not extensively disseminated and analyzed. Its main task was to identify some historical facts regarding the topic of plagiarism in Romanian culture. Even if this issue of plagiarism, which is, unfortunately, so widely spread within the educational system, could not explain the entire set of causes which put the actual Romanian system of education in such negative status and in such negative public perception, it has, definitely, a major role in explaining a significant part of these causes. And, as it was disclosed, it seems that indeed Romanian culture has a sort of an unwanted tradition regarding plagiarism (Dobrescu 2007). We do not claim that this feature could be seen as an unavoidable one and, at least to our knowledge, there are no significant studies in this direction. But, however, this negative tradition, so to speak, could partially explain the deplorable situation from today. And, as it was shown by some recent authors, the phenomenon of plagiarism is a *historical reality*, a one which it cannot be denied, in Romanian culture.

Also, we consider that the absence from the media of any approach regarding the national education based upon a cultural perspective, as it is the one just described by us above about the historical conditions of plagiarism, could be seen as another distinct sign of its rudimentary patterns involved in the ways in which presents to the public the general set of problems from within the contemporary national education.

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