





The Emotional Impact of Traditional and New Media in Social Events

El impacto emocional de los medios tradicionales y los nuevos medios en acontecimientos sociales

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ABSTRACT

In past times, media were the sole vector to reflect in their entire complexity the events surrounding major world tragedies. Nowadays, social media are an essential component of the media process and classical press channels are connected to the social networking flow, where they can find information and, at the same time, tap into the emotional pulse of society. On 30 October 2015, a Bucharest nightclub was destroyed in a blaze tragedy in which 64 people were killed, most of them young. The present study focuses on how Romanian mainstream media and social media came together and made use of each other, generating post-tragedy side effects. Monitoring was conducted over a period of one month, starting from 30 October 2015, the date of the tragedy, until 30 November. Our investigation method combines content analysis and the interpretation of quantitative data, with reference to parameters such as context, themes, style, genre, and information/opinion rapport. The conclusions of this case study show that the interweaving between media and social media has generated a change of paradigm in mass communication, as a result of which professional journalists continue to play a role as responsible filters.

RESUMEN

En el pasado, al referirse a tragedias, los medios de comunicación representaban el único vector que reflejaba el acontecimiento en toda su complejidad. Hoy en día, los medios sociales constituyen un componente esencial del proceso mediático, y son los medios clásicos de prensa los que están conectados al flujo de las redes sociales, de las que no solo recopilan información, sino también el pulso emocional de la sociedad. El 30 de octubre de 2015, en un club de Bucarest, se produjo un incendio que ocasionó 64 muertes, la mayoría jóvenes. Este estudio se centra en cómo el flujo mediático y las redes sociales en Rumanía se fusionaron y se apoyaron mutuamente, generando efectos secundarios tras la tragedia. El período de seguimiento fue de un mes, desde el 30 de octubre, cuando se produjo la tragedia, hasta el 30 de noviembre. El método de investigación combina el análisis de contenido y la interpretación cualitativa de los datos, con referencia a parámetros como el contexto, el tema del artículo, el estilo, el género periodístico o la relación información/opinión. Las conclusiones de este estudio nos muestran que la conexión entre los medios tradicionales y los medios sociales ha ocasionado un cambio en el paradigma de los medios de comunicación, cuyo resultado es que el papel de los periodistas profesionales como filtro de garantía sigue siendo prioritario.

KEYWORDS | PALABRAS CLAVE

Media, social media, blogs, tragedy, emotional impact, opinion leader, online.
Medios, medios sociales, blogs, tragedia, impacto emocional, líder de opinión, on-line.



1. Introduction

With events featuring strong emotional impact that extends nationwide and worldwide, the public and media communication are under the direct influence of first-moment reactions which arise and then spread spontaneously at incredible speed and uncontrollably across the online medium. Gortner & Pennebaker (2003: 581) note that, when a tragic event strikes a community, it “produces a collective experience of shock and grief” and one of the first reactions “is that people immediately band together and talk about the experience”.

This study focuses mainly on the manner in which the media and social media came together and influenced each other during and after the tragedy that occurred in Colectiv, a Bucharest nightclub, causing the deaths of 64 young people.

We use the term “media” to refer to traditional and news media. The concept, as employed in the present paper, includes all classical mass communication media such as newspapers, magazines, radio and television, and also the online versions of traditional newspapers. The latter belong to mainstream news media, even if they use an electronic format.

“Social media” is a generic term used for various forms of consumer-generated content (CGC) such as blogs, social networks sites, forums, virtual communities, online newspaper reader comments, media files shared on sites such as YouTube, etc. Accordingly, it is not synonymous with “social network sites”, as it is a more comprehensive concept.

Being permanently connected to blogs and streaming social networks, mainstream media journalists tend to take shortcuts from direct investigation and delve into the emotion-drenched spirit of social media. This is self-evident in the case of television and professional online mass media. As Nayar (2009: 153) shows, “in the age of tele-trauma, suffering is spectacle”. According to Allan & Einar (2006; 2009), Atton & Hamilton (2008), Carlson (2011), Deuze (2012) and Gillmore (2010), there are two main reasons for such behavior: firstly, it is much more convenient and less costly for them to select and pick up ready-made user-authored content. In this regard, social media have become an inexhaustible source of topics. The second reason is closely connected to the increase in rating or traffic, which ultimately translates to money. On the other hand, present-day media consumers, who are at the same time active producers in the virtual realm, are considerably more sensitive and more receptive to emotional enthrallment than to naked information and factual reasoning. In this context, Mythen (2010) considers citizen journalism to be a powerful and ambivalent phenomenon which entails advantages but also risks.

1.1. Context

On the night of 30 October 2015, fire broke out leading to a horrific tragedy during a rock concert by the underground band “Goodbye to Gravity” in Colectiv, a Bucharest club. Over 400 people were in the club at the time. On the night in question, 27 people died and almost 200 were injured although in the hours, days and weeks that followed the number of deceased rose to 64. Dozens of other young people were hospitalized in the country and abroad due to their severe burns.

The emotional impact of the tragedy was so great that it initially generated a massive wave of sympathy and, in tandem, an even greater wave of indignation, both very visible online. Organizing themselves quickly through Facebook, hundreds and thousands of people took to the streets of the main cities in Romania to demonstrate against the system and the corrupt political class. On the fifth day of civil pressure from the streets, Prime Minister Victor Ponta resigned. A few days after the Government fell, a proposal emerged for a new Prime Minister and a technocrat Government.

In the tense context of manifestations, and using a poorly inspired declaration of the Orthodox Patriarch Daniel as a pretext, an additional revolt arose against the Orthodox Church, an institution that is a symbol of Romanian spiritual identity. Social networks hosted a bitter anti-church campaign, enhanced and reinforced by clamors from the street, which accompanied day after day of protests across the country.

Naturally, the press in Romania accorded generous, consistent and diverse media coverage to the tragedy. In the hours and days immediately following the fire, the mass media initiated a flow of breaking news. According to Spiridon and Delcea (2015), the first information on the fire was broadcast simultaneously on the Mediafax news agency and the Digi24 television channel at 23:15, approximately 45 minutes after the first telephone call to the emergency services. After midnight, Facebook began to show the first lists with the names of victims, written in long-hand, along with photographs of the dead and other lists of injured people admitted to different hospitals. “There are moments when Facebook functions like a press agency of this particular tragedy” (Spiridon & Delcea, 2015).

1.2. The influence of social media on traditional media

When unpredictable events such as tragedies occur, it is very unlikely journalists will be present on site at the very instant of occurrence. Since 9/11, the trend has been for laypersons to replace the mainstream media by recording relevant spectacular, first-hand frames, which they subsequently post on their personal accounts on the various social networks they use (Palen & Liu, 2007; Mythen, 2010). Some of this footage then goes viral.

As Oliver (2015) notes, "Social media is the best in the minutes after because there's an almost instantaneous spread of reports from the ground. When big news strike, traditional news outlets seem to be always a step behind, often relying on the same reports that crowd your feed".

Up to a point, this is a natural occurrence. Technology and mobile Internet, but also the civic instincts of people, have generated alternative forms of journalism based on the spontaneity and involvement of citizens who witness events.

As an event unfolds or its consequences generate another chain of events, the mass media and social media continue to interrelate, sometimes to the point of becoming confused with each other, which means capturing, producing and transmitting content they consider to be of general interest or relevant for a certain target public only. For professional journalists, the documentation and verification of sources are often stages that may hinder and delay the process of information reaching the

public, whereas many common users, unhampered by these principal filters, can instantaneously post and distribute the most diverse content relating to the tragedy.

Gillmore (2010: 27) considers that "big breaking stories are literally exciting. They're often about death or the threat of death, or they otherwise create anxiety. Neurological research shows that the more of your personal bandwidth anxiety takes up, the less clearly you think".

Therefore, along with prompt, factual and equidistant journalistic feed, one finds authentic and useful content, as well as false information, and faked or biased opinions. Moreover, social media represent a space of emotions, of subjectivism and of extreme reactions (Serrano-Puche, 2016: 21). However, as Yates & Paquette (2011: 7) have argued, "bringing together various players with different expertise and contexts, and providing some level of common ground between them" are social media's strengths.

Atton and Hamilton (2008: 86) offer their perspective on the above by noting that "Alternative media are characterized by their explicitly partisan character. In the language of ethics, they exhibit clear biases, yet they proclaim their selectivity and their bias, and generally have little interest in balanced reporting". Clearly, any event with a strong emotional impact will ripple down onto social networks, where there is no censorship and people feel entitled to express themselves freely. Last year's tragic events in Europe, such as the terrorist attacks, received their own generous share of prompt and extremely diverse reactions in themes and intensity across the social media.

This reality is summarized by journalist and blogger Nick Denton (2014), head of Gawker Media, in a self-critical article pleading for truth, honesty and professionalism in the online medium. In his own team, too, the race for quantity has affected the quality of published content: "Editorial traffic was lifted but often by viral stories that we would rather mock. We - the freest journalists on the planet - were slaves to the Facebook algorithm".

As a professional media entity, adevarul.ro played a filtering role, taking authentic information and attributed opinions from social media, indicating the sources in nearly all cases. This aspect is important in terms of the interweaving of media and social media, given that rumors, false information, highly aggressive personal attacks, and moves towards the political appropriation and exploitation of events were insidious traps for professional journalists.

1.3. Influencers on social media and in real public space

Web 2.0 applications have fundamentally modified the paradigm of mass communication. Social media have become the main arena for debates, providing space for the public voice of citizens. The de-monopolization of mass

communication is a phenomenon that has spawned adjacent phenomena, such as the creation of professional or interest communities and the rise of informal opinion leaders with the power to focus, concentrate and influence various categories of users (Meraz, 2009).

In the delineation of the mainstreams of opinion (a pro and con debated topic), formal and informal leaders play an essential role on social media.

Through likes, comments or distributions received for their content on blogs and social networks, fans, followers or supporters enhance the symbolic image capital of influencers. In highly tense contexts, although not only there, users confess their adherence to a dominant opinion stream by sharing the perspective of an influencer. In other words, in online debates, texts written by opinion leaders often work as authoritative arguments, good enough to underwrite reactions and attitudes.

Barratt (2014) states that categories which are well-known as providers of opinion leaders include journalists, university professors and experts, artists, and celebrities.

2. Material and methods

The methods considered for the present study were an analysis of the content (themes, perspectives, style) of the media and social media during a period of one month following the tragedy, and the interpretation of quantitative data provided by Zelist.ro (the most important platform for social media monitoring in Romania) and by the *adevarul.ro* site.

We chose to combine and corroborate data from two relevant quantitative sources, namely, Zelist.ro – as mentioned, the most important Romanian platform for social media monitoring; used by important state organizations (such as the Romanian Ministry of Communications and Information Society) as well as private organizations (Forbes, for example) – and the website of the *Adevarul* newspaper, *adevarul.ro*, one of the most widely-read and popular press sites in Romania, with national coverage and a very clear code of conduct. The *adevarul.ro* site is constantly ranked in 3rd place in both the “General news” and “Mass-media” categories, according to *traffic.ro* site, and is surpassed only by two highly sensationalist/tabloid sites.

A vulnerability of the data provided by the Zelist.ro platform is that it only monitors public Facebook pages, not personal profile ones. In the absence of the latter data we can only approximate the impact of the tragedy on this online segment, which we have not been able to investigate directly for objective reasons, but rather only by corroborating other information, such as media analysis or highlighting the popularity of content that went viral. In order to analyze the online medium after the *Colectiv Club* tragedy, we focused on monitoring the most relevant segments of social media: blogs and Facebook. The latter remains by far the top preference for Romanians, with 8,300,000 users at present, according to <http://facebrands.ro/>, the Facebook pages monitor in Romania.

According to Oprea (2015), the manager of the Face brands analytic service and of the Standout marketing and communication agency in social media, “social networks and blogs remain the most dynamic and interactive media nationwide, and we expect them to continue to consolidate their position in 2016 also”.

Our monitoring was performed over a one-month time period, from 30 October 2015, when the tragic event occurred, until 30 November. The site’s search engine allows results for a given interval to be listed following two criteria: timeline and popularity.

Regarding the popularity criterion, we noticed that the search engine uses an algorithm based on the number of distributions, number of likes and number of comments.

Although we used the term *#Colectiv* and the timeline criterion, the search engine displayed all results for the given month (7,495 articles) and we therefore performed the rest of the selection manually, by titles and key words. We viewed approximately 860 journalistic contents relating to the *Colectiv* tragedy which were published on the *adevarul.ro* site between 30 October and 30 November. Our analysis related to content and was based on interpreting figures (number of distributions, likes or comments, direct observation of attributing sources) as well as on the interpretation of the most significant text clip-outs to reveal the way in which mass media and social media blend.

3. Analysis and results

All journalistic genres are covered on the *adevarul.ro* site, although the most frequently occurring is news text (news spot, broad news articles, updates). As in all Romanian media, there is a growing trend towards opinion-flavored discourse, as well as a growing preference for subjective approaches, a direct consequence of the interlocking between social media and media.

From a topical perspective, the scope of approaches to the event and connected developments is wide and correlative. On the first day after the tragedy, most materials refer directly to the persons involved (deceased, injured, unidentified persons, relatives, friends, participants, witnesses, club owners, members of the band), as well as to donating blood, on-site aspects of the club, messages from officials, etc. In the following days, as events unfolded, the scope widens considerably, with instructive articles concerning donating blood or skin, first aid for burns, national mourning, postponed or cancelled concerts and other events, clubs being closed down or under scrutiny, similar tragedies, sales of fire extinguishers, etc. As of the second day after the event, the first news concerning street demonstrations began to appear. Initially, these demonstrations were intended to express sympathy for the victims and their families.

In the week following the tragedy, manifestations of sympathy gradually turned into street protests, clamors, organized marches, collective demands, etc., culminating in the resignation of Prime Minister Victor Ponta on 4 November 2015. From a topical point of view, content (with text, photo and video) referring to protests was predominant, especially between the second and the eighth day post-tragedy. After the tenth day, the Current Events section featured associated articles regarding the street manifestations and their political consequences. After this period, the subjects of incoming materials related to subsequent deaths, the condition of the victims, an inquiry to establish accountability, the closure of many unlicensed clubs, charitable actions, medical or psychological views concerning the events, etc. Opinion articles continued to be published, but to a lesser degree, a sign that the emotional climax had passed. The subjects of the latter articles focused on victims' profiles/stories, messages from celebrities, personalities and public figures, taken from their blogs or Facebook accounts.

3.1. Blending of social media and mainstream media

The phenomenon of overlap and intertwining between social media and media is present also to a high degree in Romania in the case of the Colectiv tragedy. According to information from the online monitoring platform, Zelist Monitor, during the period 31 October-30 November, the words #Colectiv and various associated words achieved 66,985 Facebook postings and 62,925 occurrences in the online press. Bearing in mind that the Zelist platform only monitors public Facebook profiles, as well as other social networks and blogs, the proportion seems to be clearly in favor of social media, as is natural. The intensity with which the event was addressed on personal Facebook pages cannot be gauged with quantitative instruments, although it can still be interpreted according to the level of popularity of some content that went viral.

The primary context of the tragedy –in particular the late hour (22:23) when the fire broke out, as well as the type of venue (an overcrowded and panic-stricken nightclub)– meant that the first pieces of news were released by the mass media, since journalists from the Current Events section are permanently tuned into the crisis management institutions, such as the Emergency Services and Ambulance Service. In less than an hour, information, pictures, opinions and reactions had already begun to circulate online. Within a very short time, a matter of hours, there was an explosion of social media messages containing a variety of emotional reactions, passionate opinions, calls for solidarity, initiatives to take to the streets, other Facebook-triggered events, an initiative by Facebook users to add a uniform symbol of sympathy to their profile picture, or the sharing of songs by the headline rock band, photographs of victims, footage from the concert taken seconds before the fire broke out, etc.

After the tragedy, social media operated as a tool of maximum utility, with users reacting spontaneously and with great solidarity in a very short time. The first lists with names of the injured were picked up by *adevarul.ro* from social media, where they had begun to circulate shortly after the fire broke out. According to Preda (2015), "The lists were taken from Facebook, and some of the injured may be moved to other medical centers before morning. The article will be updated as soon as new lists appear".

In addition, requests for blood invaded the online and circulated simultaneously in the media and social media. The third news item chronologically from the *adevarul.ro* site regarding the event featured a call from the Romanian

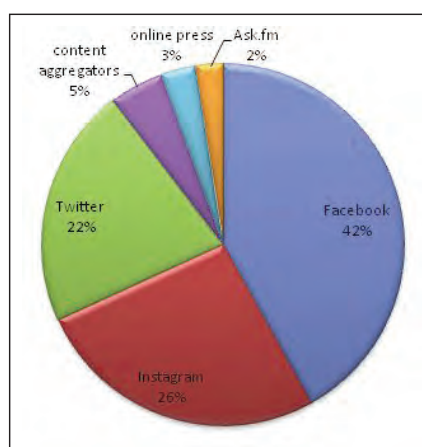


Figure 1. The hashtag #Colectiv on social media in the first 12 days.

authorities for donations of blood. This news item achieved 2,029 distributions, revealing the high level of interest among users for such factual and useful information at the very moment tragedies occur. Very soon, thanks to social networks, firstly in Bucharest and soon after across the whole country, hundreds of people –particularly young people– formed long queues at blood banks as proof of unwavering solidarity.

Another example this time of moral solidarity was the creation of the group “Nimeni in cluburi! Astazi nu iesim in club!” [Nobody in clubs! Today we’re not going to clubs!], the first in a series of Facebook-originated post-tragedy groups. Referring to the popularity of the sympathy movements, *adevarul.ro* wrote on 31 October “Even before this information was made public, over 14,000 people had joined in”.

Further research shows that, even more interestingly, the name of this group was changed to “Nimeni in cluburi! Mai bine in strada!” [Nobody in clubs! Better on the streets!]. This version can be found currently on the Internet. This aspect is important because it shows how user intentions changed and how events evolved a few days after the tragedy.

As is natural, the level of emotional load in the mass media and especially on social media reached its highest point between 1-10 November, after which the intensity of broadcasts and coverage of the tragedy and its consequences declined notably. According to information provided by the Zelist Monitor online monitoring platform, during the first 12 days after the tragedy the hashtag #Colectiv was mentioned 50,588 times and registered 575,006,000 impressions.

The hashtag was mentioned more by men (61%) than by women (39%). Most discussions on the topic originated in Bucharest (68.5% of postings are from accounts with social and demographic info) and in Transylvania (9.5%). The persons who mentioned #Colectiv on most occasions were aged 30-34 (36% of postings from accounts with social and demographic info).

It is interesting to note the two most important articles concerning the #Colectiv tragedy published on social media between 30 October and 11 November. In first place, with 33,912 re-postings and 460 comments, having gone viral in the days following the fire, was an article penned on 1 November 2015 by a journalist from *Gandul.info*, Cristina Andrei (2015), entitled: “With 18,000 Churches and 425 Hospitals, We Are Watching Our Brothers Die on Pavements”. By using a slogan voiced by protesters on the second day of street action, she publicized the idea that Romania had invested more in building churches than in the construction or renovation of hospitals, thus forcing many burn victims to be hospitalized abroad due to the lack of resources to be treated in their own country. In the following days, social media messages regarding the involvement or lack of involvement of the Church in the Colectiv tragedy exploded furiously, aggressively and with a high emotional charge, polarizing entire communities of onliners to extremes. New themes to emerge in the debates included the association of rock music with satanism or the tarnished image of the Patriarch, not to mention several unflattering figures of priests, etc.

In second place in the Zelist ranking is a “letter” published on the *Hotnews.ro* site and signed by a certain Adrian (2015), who calls himself “a surviving witness of the Colectiv Club fire”. The text is both a description of the very tense and painful moments of the tragedy and an indictment aimed at official institutions and authorities whom the author considers responsible for the failures in managing the rescue operation. The source of the letter is not given by the *hotnews.ro* journalists and we therefore contacted one of them on Facebook in order to find out more about the origin of this quasi-anonymous text. The answer received was that the letter had not been taken from social media but rather was handed in by the author himself, who asked for his identity not to be disclosed. Ultimately, this text could have been written by anybody, including one of the *hotnews.ro* journalists themselves. This is a relevant example given that, without having a precise source, the text became very popular on social media thanks to media endorsement and its immediate amplification. The Digi24 TV channel, considered to be the most balanced in news reporting, mentioned the *hotnews.ro* text in three newscasts but without allowing the accused party to defend itself, which is why the channel was fined by the country’s broadcasting regulator. The foregoing shows how, in the interplay between media and social media, emotionally-laden contents are often validated by media and recuperated by social media, thus enhancing their popularity exponentially.

Between 1-10 November, of 758 articles referring directly or indirectly to the Colectiv Club fire, around 122 are opinion columns (included here also are personal perspectives by some politicians). In addition, during this time and with reference to the same number of articles, in roughly 100 we identified full or partial re-postings from social media. We have not included here references to social networks that appear in most of the materials used in the calls for protest.

Between 11-30 November, interest on the part of Romanian media in the Colectiv tragedy declined generally once the protests had stopped. During this period we identified 102 materials containing direct or indirect reference

to the subject. Of these, 12 are opinion articles (or ones containing mostly opinions), and 18 contain full or partial repostings from social media. In a few cases (not included here), although the named source of quoting was mentioned, there is no mention of the location it was taken from. In one case, given that the text is somewhat longer, it is inferred that it may have been taken from a social network.

An analysis of the most popular articles on the *adevarul.ro* site between 11-30 November reveals that no article concerning the Colectiv fire or its consequences figures among the top 30, according to the search engine. However, on 28 November we spotted material signed by Raduta (2015a) that was re-posted from social networks. This highly emotional letter from a mother to her dead son achieved 1,059 shares (most of them within the aforementioned period, on the topic of Colectiv) and was among the texts that went viral online.

Over 80% of the materials that appeared during this period (news, articles, interviews) have informative content or feature topics related to the main theme of the tragedy. The number of shares varies from zero to a few dozen, considerably less compared to the previous periods analyzed.

3.2. The role of influencers in polarizing user communities

In the case of tragedies, opinion leaders become social vectors for the polarization of attitudes and reactions (Zhang, Zhao, & Xu, 2016).

Already a well-known blogger on account of his civil activism, artist Tudor Chirila, who already attracted thousands of likes and hundreds of shares of his Facebook postings, saw his popularity grow exponentially during the period and he became a role model for many young people.

In the wake of the Colectiv tragedy, the involvement of Tudor Chirila, whose blog occupies first place in the

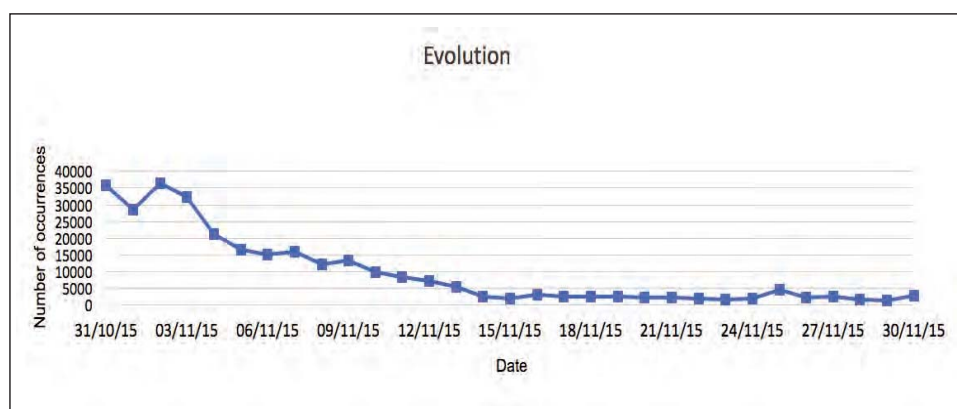


Figure 3. Evolution of #colectiv mentions during the month following the tragedy. [Evolution. Number of appearances].

test. During the anti-system demonstrations on 4 November, *adevarul.ro* republished an entire posting by him in which he incited people to take to the streets. Here is a relevant quote:

“The pressure of the streets has to continue. The political class in its entirety is compromised. Its replacement is difficult and ties consuming. Yet, this must not discourage us. The only solution is our solidarity. We must go out



Figure 2. The most viewed article concerning the #Colectiv tragedy on social media [18,000 churches, 425 hospitals, and we watch our brothers die on pavements. Marching for Colectiv].

Zelist ranking, is the most telling example of a role played by an influencer in the online. After the fire, Tudor Chirila posted on his personal blog and on Facebook several texts calling for mobilization and urging young people to go out and protest.

in the streets until they understand that they have to leave. All of them. And leave their places for others who can do something real for their country. Today there should be more of us in the streets than yesterday. We ought to be wary of their attempts to regroup. Tonight I will go out to the streets again. It is the only and most important weapon I have” (Raduta, 2015b).

On 6 November his most popular Facebook post on the protests achieved 17,106 likes, 3,695 shares and 893 comments and was reposted by a large proportion of Romanian media, including *adevarul.ro*, who reposted it in full, despite its considerable 6-paragraph length (Constanda, 2015).

Another prime example of an influencer is journalist Victor Ciutacu, one of the oldest and best-known journalist bloggers in Romania. We have chosen this example for two reasons: this blogger occupies second place in the Zelist ranking, so his popularity score is very high. The second reason, essential to our study, is that, in the context of the street protests after the Colectiv tragedy, his stance as influencer clashes with the dominant trend on the Romanian online. During the time period monitored, Victor Ciutacu had eight postings on his blog referring to the tragedy and the ensuing protests it sparked. The top three ranked postings in terms of views and sharing rates contain opinions critical of the protests and the protesters.

One of the most widely viewed and distributed of Ciutacu’s (2015b) postings on the topic of the anti-system protests on the most dramatic days after the tragedy (4 and 5 November) was “Revolt. Protest. Coverage. Anger. Blood”. Here the blogger journalist is critical of the protesters, speculating that they might be manipulated by political interests. In other words, Victor Ciutacu is voicing the opinion that the street protests had been appropriated by groups with ideological interests, who took advantage of young Romanians’ naivety, ignorance and resentment. This position is also expressed in a short post entitled “The Angry Caliphate of the Facebook generation” (Ciutacu, 2015a), which was also one of the most viewed and followed.

4. Discussion and conclusions

During the initial hours and also on the first day after the tragedy, social media and the media operated complementarily. Important and useful information featuring lists with names of victims, calls for blood donations, early testimonies and declarations circulated both ways. In one day alone, approximately 80 articles appeared on the *adevarul.ro* site, 20 of them with full or partial re-postings from social media and 9 opinion articles.

From 1 to 10 November, the number of journalistic materials devoted to the fire tragedy reached peak levels. Although the number of news and informative articles was much greater during this period, their popularity on the *adevarul.ro* site and on social media was much lower. During the period of protests, social media constituted the prime and preferred space for communication and organization, as mentioned frequently by *adevarul.ro* and the main TV channels in Romania. During this period of maximum publicity, social media were a precious source of information and completion of articles with opinions and statements.

As of 10 November the number of tragedy-related articles declined dramatically, falling to 102. During this period, the most shared article (1,059) was a very emotional text taken from social media.

On the *adevarul.ro* site, the articles enjoying the greatest popularity during the month following the tragedy were of the non-informative type, together with extremely opinionated and impassioned ones, with emotional confessions pulling on upper-end emotional strings.

The situation on *adevarul.ro* is, to a large extent, emblematic of the approach of the classical and digital media in Romania. The professional press paid special attention to the chain of events generated by the fire at the Colectiv



Figure 4. One of the most viewed postings of an influencer from Romania. [“The angry caliphate of the Facebook generation” Harsh Words’ blog by Victor Ciutacu].

Club, permanently monitoring social media and picking up from here a significant amount of information and, in particular, opinions. The rapid conversion of manifestations of solidarity into anti-system protests and their evolution became predominant themes in the Romanian media. From a quantitative point of view, days 4 and 6 marked the climax. Most materials over the ten days after the tragedy were related to the street protests. Many adevarul.ro correspondents across the country reported that the people, especially young people, were mobilizing via Facebook, switching from simple mobilizing messages and spontaneous civil impulses to creating events and groups dedicated to solidarity movements and anti-system protests, as the manifestations were generically dubbed.

Like the majority of Romanian media the adevarul.ro site functioned during this period as an intermediate vector for the consolidation and enhancement of the transmission of messages from social media. These two functions conferred a twin role on classical media, namely, as a transmitter and at the same time guarantee of the information circulating on social media.

As a professional media entity, adevarul.ro played a filtering role, taking authentic information and attributed opinions from social media, indicating the sources in nearly all cases. This aspect is important in terms of the interweaving of media and social media, given that rumors, false information, highly aggressive personal attacks, and moves towards the political appropriation and exploitation of events were insidious traps for professional journalists.

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