HOW NEWSWORTHY WERE THE PROTESTS IN ROMANIA FOR THE GERMAN QUALITY PRESS? CASE STUDY: SÜDDEUTSCHE ZEITUNG

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ABSTRACT. In January 2017, the former Romanian Minister of Justice, Florin Iordache, proposed a decree to decriminalize corruption involving sums of less than 200,000 lei, as well as granting prison pardons and decriminalizing certain offences. On January the 18th, the first 5000 protesters shouted their disapproval regarding the published bills on the streets of Romania. Their number increased daily. On February the 5th, the largest protest in Romania's history with over 500.000 people on the streets was registered.

The international press covered the story of the protests in Romania, but how newsworthy was this subject for the most widely read German quality newspaper, Süddeutsche Zeitung?[1]

How are the Prime Minister Sorin Grindeanu, the PSD-party-chief Liviu Dragnea and the President of Romania, Klaus Iohannis portrayed in the articles?

Keywords: newsworthy, protests, Galtung & Ruge, positive, negative.

Introduction

"News values will determine whether stories are to be pursued. They will determine whether, if pursued, they will then be published. They will determine, if published, where the stories will be placed in the news

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[1] *No.1 at the cross medial range among the daily newspapers, according to LAE (Leseranalyse Entscheidungsträger: http://www.lae.de/), a reader analysis tool.

presentation. Having been placed, news [sic] values will determine to what extent the public will read them."[2]

Walter Lippmann used in 1922 the term "news value" for the first time regarding the selection and presentation of news. According to him, events have certain characteristics that make them worthy of attention or interest. "These properties or message factors determine the message value, that is, the publication worthiness of an event. The more pronounced these properties are, the greater the message value of the event."[3]

The newsworthiness of events is still a widely discussed subject, especially at this moment, where image and text is surrounding us everywhere. Johan Galtung and Marie Holmboe Ruge conducted in 1965 a study[4] and their research focused on international news stories. The goal of their study was to find out what common factors placed them on the international agenda, and what factors did these stories have in common. The two scientists came up with a set of twelve criteria. The first column represents their set of news values. The authors developed their research based on the three news values determined in the same year by Einar Östgard: simplicity, identification and sensationalism.

A second set of criteria relevant for our case study is the one developed by Monika Bednarek and Helen Caple (as seen in column two). They share a "new approach to allow for a systematic and comprehensive examination of how verbal and visual resources that occur in news discourse construct newsworthiness."[5] They're approach, the discursive news values analysis (DNVA), shows how an event is constructed as news, not how it is selected. This approach is relevant to our case study due to the fact that in the content analysis we searched for similar constructions as the ones described in Bednarek[6] and Caple's paper[7].

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[2] David Conley, Stephen Lamble (2006): *The Daily Miracle: An Introduction to Journalism*, 3rd edition. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, p. 4.

[3] Joachim Friedrich Staab (1990): *Nachrichtenwert-Theorie: formale Struktur und empirischer Gehalt,* Freiburg im Breisgau: Alber, p. 26.

[4] Johan Galtung, Mari Holmboe Ruge (1965): *The Structure of Foreign News*, in Journal of Peace Research, Vol. 2, No. 1 (1965), pp. 64-91.

[5] https://www.newsvaluesanalysis.com/what-is-dnva/, opened on 25.01.2017.

[6] Monika Bednarek, (2016): *Inventory of linguistic devices constructing newsworthiness'*, available at www.newsvaluesanalysis.com

[7] Helen Caple, Monika Bednarek (2013): *Delving into the Discourse: Approaches to News Values in Journalism Studies and Beyond, available* at https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:hQnv7nhWULEJ: https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:1f5c6d91-bb1f-4278-a160-66149ecfb36b/datastreams/ATTACHMENT01+&cd=6&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=ro

Galtung & Ruge (1965)	Bednarek & Caple (2016)	Harcup & O'neill (2016)
Threshold	Proximity	Exclusivity
Negativity	Negativity/positivity	Bad news
Frequency	Timeliness	Conflict
Unexpectedness	Unexpectedness	Surprise
Consonance	Consonance	Audio-visuals
Personalization	Personalization	Shareability
Meaningfulness	Impact	Relevance
Reference to elite nations	Eliteness	The power elite
Reference to elite persons	Superlativeness	Drama
Unambiguity		Magnitude
Continuity		Follow-up
Composition		Entertainment
		Celebrity
		Good news
		News organisation's agenda

Tab. 1. News Values

The third column of news values was developed by Tony Harcup and Deirdre O'neill[8] in 2016. In 2001, the authors published in the Journalism Studies one of the most cited articles, entitled "What is news? Galtung and Ruge revisited". Their latest findings related to the news values can be seen in column 3.

Methodology

The present study aims to examine what the German newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung wrote about the protests in Romania and how it portrayed the main three political actors: the Romanian president, Klaus Iohannis, the newly elected Prime Minister, Sorin Grindeanu, and the party chief of the social-democrats, Liviu Dragnea.

The research question of the study is: *How newsworthy were the protests in Romania for the newspapaer Süddeutsche Zeitung?*

To find an answer to this question we used a qualitative research method, the content analysis, and reviewed all newspaper articles from the

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[8] Tony Harcup, Deirdre O'neill (2016): *What is news*?, in Journalism Studies, available at http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2016.1150193

website www.sueddeutsche.de which were related to this subject. The analysis focused on the articled published during a two-week period, from the 22nd of January until the 15th of February. We selected this period, since the protests gathered the highest number of civilians on the streets of Romania in the country's modern history. Our sample consists of 31 articles from the online version of the newspaper.

The content analysis grid contains the following criteria:

Szambolics & Mucundorfeanu
Proximity
Negativity
Emotional impact
Unexpectedness
Consonance
Personalization
Eliteness/celebrity
Continuity
Shareability
Timeliness
Impact/Relevance

Tab. 2. Set of News Values by Szambolics & Mucundorfeanu

We developed our own set based on Galtung & Ruge's, Bednarek & Caple's and Harcup & O'neill's set. The similarities and description of the news values are presented in the following.

Proximity = (Bednarek & Caple), geographically or culturally near; cultural references.

Negativity = (Galtung & Ruge, Bednarek & Caple, Harcup & O'neill), bad news, stories about death, violence; references to negative/positive emotion and attitude.

Emotional impact = using visual elements such as photographs, depicting stories concerning an unfolding drama such as escapes, accidents, searches, sieges, rescues, battles, court cases, celebrations, festivities or joyful moments.

Unexpectedness = (Galtung & Ruge, Bednarek & Caple, Harcup & O'neill), events out of the ordinary, unusual happenings; stories that have an element of surprise.

Consonance = (Bednarek & Caple), references to stereotypical attributes or preconceptions, assessments of expectedness/typicality.

Personalization = (Galtung & Ruge, Bednarek & Caple), having a personal/human face; "news stories that centre on a particular person, and are presented from a human interest angle, are likely to make the front page, particularly if they involve a well-known person"[9].

Eliteness/celebrity = (Galtung & Ruge, Bednarek & Caple, Harcup & O'neill), the media pay attention to the rich, powerful, famous and infamous; role labels; status-indicating adjectives; recognized names; stories concerning powerful individuals, organizations, institutions or corporations.

Continuity = (Galtung & Ruge, Harcup & O'neill), story which is already in the news gathers a kind of momentum – the running story; stories about subjects already in the news.

Timeliness = (Bednarek & Caple), recent, ongoing, about to happen, new, current, seasonal.

Impact/relevance = (Galtung & Ruge, Bednarek & Caple, Harcup & O'neill), stories about groups or nations perceived to be influential with, or culturally or historically familiar to, the audience; of high intensity/large scope.

Shareability = (Harcup & O'neill) Stories that are thought likely to generate sharing and comments via Facebook, Twitter and other forms of social media.

Results

The content analysis is based on 31 articles published on the website of the newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung, during the time span 22nd of January – 15th of February. Our findings show that every article contained at least 10 news values.

We determined the news value "**proximity**" in the following constructions:

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[9] http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:k67iCxrHBmQJ: toolbox.understanding-media.eu/downloads/51396_Handout_Galtung_and_Ruge.pdf+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=ro, accessed on 15.03.2017

"Romania", "Bucharest", "at least 14 other cities from Romania", "Transylvanian academic center Cluj (Klausenburg/Kolozsvar)", "Brussels", "EU-state", "Romania's capital city Bucharest", "states of Middle and Eastern Europe", "Berlin", "Brasov", etc.

Negativity could be established by the use of constructions such as:

"demonstrate", "protest", "coup", "criminal politicians", "suspected of tax evasion and money laundering", "mourning day and strike against the fight against corruption", "protesters", "strong critic from Brussels", "rioters", "crisis", "conflict", "the notoriously corrupt PSD", "the biggest setback of the reforms", "injured and arrested in street protests", "Molotov-cocktails and knives", "aggressive sport fans", "Began to fire with fireworks, torches, stones and other objects", "the police answered with trauma gas", "many form errors, which in their totality constituted an attack on the constitutional state", etc.

Emotional impact

In our approach of analyzing this news value we found 21 images/videos linked to the 31 articles. Many of them came up repeatedly. Some of the most impactful images were published on the 2nd of February, when four policemen and two demonstrators were slightly injured and 20 rioters were arrested.

Fig. 1. Injured protester

Unexpectedness could be determined in constructions as exemplified here:

"Remained open at first", "the step of the government came as a surprise", the government holds on even after the largest protests", "the third day in a row", "pressure is increasing", "surprising", "already during the day", "despite frosty temperatures", "only 161 parliamentarians", "rare sign of hope"m etc.

The news value "**consonance**" was identified in word constructions such as:

"Urged the government once again", "meanwhile, the protest continued", "the government justifies this amnesty plan", "has also condemned", "another ten thousand on the streets", "the protests do not abort", "withdraws controversial decree", "the police confiscated", "already", "For the evening, large-scale gatherings were expected", "thousands on the street again", etc.

Timeliness is used to determine the temporal dimension of the events:

"for three days", "on Saturday", "on Sunday evening", "in the evening", "for days", "later on", "on Monday", etc.

Eliteness/celebrity. The most referred to celebrities in the 31 articles were:

"Romania's Minister of Justice", "president Klaus Iohannis", "chief of the government Sorin Grindeanu", "party chief Liviu Dragnea", "ombudsman Victor Ciorbea".

Impact/relevance was determined in:

"a resignation and minus degrees don't hold the protesters back", "hundreds of politicians from the ruling party are threatened by court processes", "biggest protests", "hundreds of thousands", "the most powerful man", "250.000, about 100.000 only in Bucharest", "massive demonstration", "largest mass demonstrations in Romania's recent history"

The Romanian legislative elections took place on the 11th of December and resulted in the victory of the Social Democratic Party, led by Liviu Dragnea, by gaining 45% of the votes.
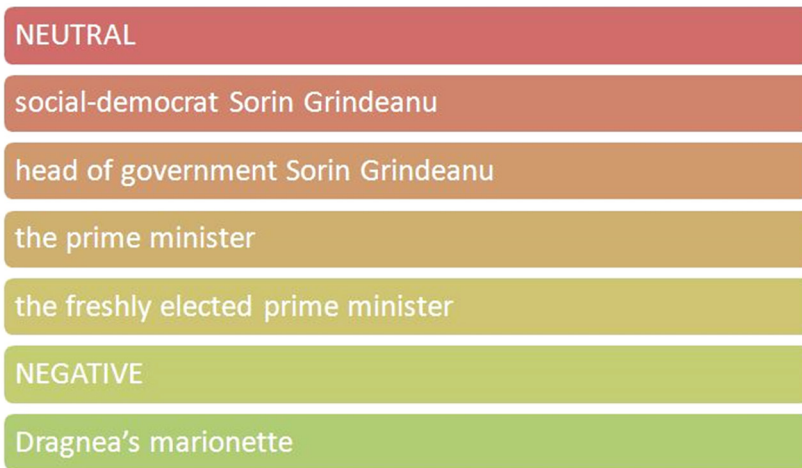
On the 19th of December 2016, Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe) and Daniel Constantin (Conservative Party) signed an agreement with the Social Democratic Party and formed a new coalition government.

Since this protests have started, a few weeks after the new government was formed on the 4th of January, the second goal of the present paper was to analyze in which way the main political actors were presented to the readers of the German quality newspaper.

Sorin Grindeanu

He became the president of the Timis County Council in June 2016. He was nominated by the leader of PSD to form the new government. The Grindeanu cabinet was formed on the 4th of January 2017.

Our findings show that Sorin Grindeanu is being presented in a neutral manner in the articles that we analyzed. A single negative description, "Dragnea's marionette", was identified in the 31 articles.

NEUTRAL

social-democrat Sorin Grindeanu

head of government Sorin Grindeanu

the prime minister

the freshly elected prime minister

NEGATIVE

Dragnea's marionette

Tab 3. Neutral representation of Sorin Grindeanu

Liviu Dragnea

He is a Romanian politician and the leader of The Social Democratic party. He is also the President of the Chamber of Deputies. The proposed emergency decree which led to the biggest Romanian protests after the revolution from 1989, was rapidly connected to Liviu Dragnea and the charges

he is facing. The PSD-chief is serving a two-year suspended sentence for electoral fraud and facing charges of defrauding the state of 25,000 $. The German newspaper repeatedly mentioned what he is being accused of and why he may not be a Prime minister, since he was legally convicted for election fraud.

NEUTRAL

Chairman of the Social Democrats; Chief of the Romanian Social-democrats; Chairman of the Ruling Social Democrats

party head; leader of the socialists

The President of the Chamber of Deputies

PSD-chief; The chairman of the Social Democratic government division

Tab. 4. Neutral representation of Liviu Dragnea

In his case, we determined neutral, positive and negative references as well.

POSITIVE

Romania's most powerful man; the most powerful man in Romania

most prominent beneficiary

the powerful PSD- and Parliaments chief

NEGATIVE

The convicted Dragnea, who is considered to be the key figure in the political crisis

Tab. 5. Positive/negative representation of Liviu Dragnea

Klaus Iohannis

On the 23rd of January, the Romanian president, Klaus Iohannis, dressed in a red ski jacket, decided to join the crowd gathered in Universitatii Square. His words were: "A gang of politicians with criminal problems wants to change the law in Romania and weaken the rule of law. This can't be allowed. It's inadmissible to change the legislation so that tens or hundreds of politicians with law problems have their criminal records cleaned and continue their wrongdoings. Romanians are rightfully outraged"[10]

Klaus Iohannis was depicted by the newspaper in a neutral manner.

Tab. 6. Neutral representation of Klaus Iohannis

Conclusions

The main objective of this case study was to find out **how newsworthy the protests from Romania were for the German quality press.** We reached our objective by using a qualitative content analysis. We applied a set of criteria on 31 articles, that have been published on www.sueddeutsche.de in the time period 23.01-15.02.2017.

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[10] https://www.romania-insider.com/romanias-president-joins-protest-bucharest-against-changes-to-criminal-law/, accessed on 17.03.2017

Based on our findings, we can conclude that the protests from Romania were newsworthy for the German quality newspaper, with an average of 2 articles/day and a total of 8447 words used in the 31 articles.

Proximity, timeliness, continuity, negativity could be identified in each article and the elite persons are depicted in a neutral way.

Limits and perspectives

Although we find the value "shareability" relevant for the study of newsworthiness, in this case study we did not put an emphasis on it. From our point of view, this news value is more suitable to be determined on articles shared on social media, which was not included in the sample.

Furthermore, an eventual future article on the matter could use a larger sample, including more media platforms and a higher number of quality press products from Germany or other German speaking countries, in order to render a wider picture of the way German speaking readers have been informed about the protests in Romania.

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