

Investigative Romanian journalism in electoral campaigns: 2000 vs. 2004

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THE Investigative Journalism represents the most difficult and most dangerous type of media but also the most expensive one. Still, if correctly practiced, this type of media is the easiest way to notoriety and prestige. (Ozon, S, Candea, St, 2004).

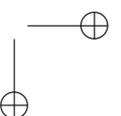
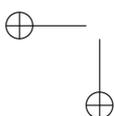
A journalistic investigation starts from the journalist's own idea and initiative. He chooses an unexplored subject which is of public interest. Any evidence which is at the base of an investigation is the result of the journalist's efforts to discover circumstances that others are trying to hide. How clear are the distinctive characteristics of the investigation journalism since the beginning of the 70's till nowadays.

In the reference material it is considered that (Ullmann, J., Colbert, J., 1991):

“...the aptitudes of the investigation journalists – the ability to localize, to understand and to utilize a big amount of files and documents in order to discover the true story- are unknown to the majority of journalists.”

The main theme of this paper is “Investigative Romanian journalism in electoral campaigns” and it presents the results of applying the content analysis technique to investigative articles from the most important Romanian newspapers. The sample used for the content analysis consisted of the investigative articles published in three main Romanian newspapers: The observation period lasted 10 weeks and consisted of 277 investigative articles: 116 articles observed in 2000 and 161 for 2004.

The main objectives of the project were to identify possible answers to the following questions: 1. Which was the role of the investigative journalism in the electoral campaigns (2000 and 2004)? 2. What was the place and weight of the investigative article as journalistic genre in 2000 and 2004 electoral campaigns? 3. Which were the similarities and the differences in the coverage and journalistic style of the investigative articles in both electoral



campaigns (2000 and 2004)? 4. How reflected the investigative articles the relations between the Executive and the Opposition in the electoral campaign from 2000 vs. 2004?

During the monitored periods from 2000 and 2004, the three newspapers analyzed published 116 investigations (from November 13th to December 18th 2000) and 161 investigations from November 13th to December 18th 2004. During the 10 weeks observation, the dynamic of the number of investigations published changed, at a general level, as follows:

1. In 2000 the investigations were more emphatic before the second poll (24 articles) and the smallest number of investigations appeared after the first poll (14).

2. In 2004, the investigative journalism was more present in the three newspapers at the beginning of the electoral campaign and after the first poll (41 articles) and the fewest investigations were published in the 1st week after the elections ended. Thus, one can state that the investigative journalism, as a presence in the written media, has recorded a significant evolution as media style in the three analyzed papers in the period November – December 2004 in comparison with the electoral campaign from 2000. Thus, if the investigations published during the 2000 electoral campaign represented only 8% of the totality of the published articles, the articles published in 2004 represented more than 11%. This may be considered a proof of the growing interest of the leaders of the press headlines towards the investigative articles.

Also, from a comparative perspective with other types of press articles (leading article, opinion journalism, culturally- specialized journalism, economic journalism ...), the press materials which can be subordinated to the investigative journalism, were more often published during 2004 than during 2000. An important characteristic of the investigation material published by the analyzed newspapers during the two electoral campaigns was the type of article most frequently used during the two years. Thus, during the 2000 electoral campaign, the articles most published were “news without photo”, followed by “news with photo”, “stories without photo”, “stories with photo” and, on the last place, the investigative articles. This hierarchy didn’t maintain four years later, during the 2004 campaign, when the number of investigative articles exceeded the number of “stories with photo”.

As for the influences the evolutions from the political field had, in comparison with the investigative press, the results indicated that these ones are

visible in both electoral campaigns studied. Thus, the content analysis proved that there is a growing dynamic of publishing the journalistic investigations as election's day drew near. The number of the investigative articles published before the first ballot from 2000 was higher than the number of investigative article published before the beginning of the elections and even higher in the first week after the elections. During the 2004 electoral campaign the biggest number of investigations was recorded after the first ballot and before the second ballot. Thus, when the "protagonists" of the investigations were nominees to presidency, 90% of the investigations focused on the nominees considered to have the highest chances in the electoral competition. In this way, 16 of the investigations published in the period November – December 2000 had as target the main nominees for presidency: the PRM's nominee – C.V. Tudor- and the PSDR's nominee – Ion Iliescu. As for the 2004 campaign, it was noticed a growth of the investigative journalism's interest toward the activity of the presidency nominees who were in the top of public's preferences: 47 of journalistic investigations had as main character Adrian Năstase (PSD's nominee) and 8 of them had Traian Băsescu as main subject (the YES Alliance's nominee).

As for the "target" followed by the investigation journalists in their articles, the comparative content analysis inferred a change of the investigative articles within the four years. Thus, if in 2000 the investigative articles published aimed especially the illegal facts and the doubtful past of some candidates (especially of those from PRM/ RM Party), in 2004 the majority of the investigators followed the good gear of the elections and the cases of economic, social and political corruption and also the corruption at a more personal level. If during the 2000 campaign, 36 out of 116 investigative articles had as main subjects the public institutions (in general, the Police, The Law Court, Local Administrations: Town Halls, City Councils, ...), in the 2004 campaign they are to be found in 58 out of a total of 161 investigative articles. During the four years there was a significant change not only at the level of the journalistic "aims" but also at the level of political "characters" – the subjects of the articles. If in 2000 the journals' investigations presented corruption cases aiming the candidates for the presidency or for Member of the Romanian Parliament, in 2004 this cases were divided into clearly defined fields and had, socially, matters of a more general interest: economic, social, political. Moreover, in comparison with the investigative articles on corruption published

during the electoral campaign in 2000, one can observe that four years later these articles were included in the specialized sections of the newspapers (“economic”, “social”, “news”) and not spread at random in the economy of the paper.

The comparative dates prove that investigation journalists had been more than “subjective” as media style in 2000 since 62% of the published articles during this year contain equally the presentation of the case and its evaluation, the personal opinion of the journalist or of the journalists regarding the matter. The situation changed in 2004 when in 55% of the cases the investigators had a more objective style, meaning that journalists only presented the cases without including their personal opinion or making value judgments.

Category	Adevărul	România Liberă	Evenimentul Zilei
The journalist presents the case without making an evaluation	13	10	23
The journalist presents and evaluates the case equally	25	28	19
The journalist rather makes an evaluation than a presentation	0	0	0
Total	38	38	40

Tabela 1: The media style used in the investigations published during the 2000 electoral campaign

The figures obtained after analyzing the three national newspapers during the two electoral campaigns (2000 and 2004) indicated a tendency towards

Category	Adevărul	România Liberă	Evenimentul Zilei
The journalist presents the case without making an evaluation	22	34	29
The journalist presents and evaluates the case equally	17	39	26
The journalist rather makes an evaluation than a presentation	2	1	0
Total	41	74	55

Tabela 2: The media style used in the investigations published during the 2004 electoral campaign

the minimization of the presentation of the state authorities as “guilt” and the emphasis of the role of the political men as main “target” of the journalistic investigation.

The tonality approached by the investigation journalists of the three newspapers is not very different in the 2004 campaign.

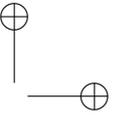
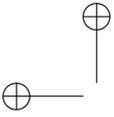
The content analysis shows, also related to the tonality used by the investigation journalists in the investigations written during the two electoral campaigns from 2000 and 2004, that the journalists’ tonality changed substantially during the four years. Thus, if the investigations from 2000 had a more accusatory tone towards the “characters” (55%), in 2004 the situation changed as the journalists adopted a rather neutral tone when writing the investigative materials.

Category	Adevărul	România Liberă	Evenimentul Zilei
Accusatory towards the accused person	18	17	12
Accusatory towards the authorities	8	11	8
Accusatory towards other persons	1	3	5
Neutral	14	12	22
Total	40	32	40

Tabela 3: The tonality used by the investigation journalists in the written investigations during the 2000 electoral campaign

Category	Adevărul	România Liberă	Eveni- mentul Zilei
Accusatory towards the accused person	12	32	18
Accusatory towards the authorities	9	17	11
Accusatory towards other persons	3	3	4
Neutral	22	33	28
Total	37	69	54

Tabela 4: The tonality used by the investigation journalists in the written investigations during the 2004 electoral campaign



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