# Communication Approaches: Tools and Technologies across the Industry

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# Foreword

In June 2022, the Faculty of Political, Administrative, and Communication Sciences of the Babeș-Bolyai University (BBU) hosted in Cluj-Napoca the first edition of the International Graduate Conference on Communication Sciences in Romania. The conference was held in a hybrid format with the participation of Ph.D. students from Chile, Germany, Israel, Italy, and Romania. The University of Bucharest (UB), Alexandru Ioan Cuza University Iași (AICUI), West University of Timișoara (WUT), and the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (NUPSPA) were the organizing partners of the scientific event. The volume includes a selection of papers presented during June 9$^{th}$–10$^{th}$, 2022, in Cluj-Napoca or online.

The book is a theoretical and empirical contribution to communication scholarship, encompassing various topics on which the Ph.D. students are working. The editors would like to thank Prof. Nicoleta Corbu, Ph.D. (NUPSPA), Prof. Camelia Beciu, Ph.D. (UB), and Prof. Camelia Cmeciu, Ph.D. (UB), Assoc. Prof. Ileana Rotaru, Ph.D. (WUT), as well as Assoc. Prof. Gheorghe Ilie Fârte, Ph.D. (AICUI) for their efforts to organize this scientific event and for their thoughtful comments and suggestions aimed at improving the work of the Ph.D. students. We want to thank our colleagues from the BBU, Prof. Ioan Hosu, Ph.D., Prof. Orsolya Hanna Vincze, Ph.D., Assoc. Prof. Ioana Iancu, Ph.D., and Assoc. Prof. Andreea Mogoș, Ph.D., for their feedback to our young scholars during the event.

The first three chapters are dedicated to the challenging field of journalism. Christof Amrhein focused on his chapter on immersive journalism as part of the so-called "emotional turn." After a critical reflection on how the journalistic field has changed lately, immersive journalism is presented as part of the solution to strengthen the relevance of digital journalism and its effects.

Alfred Fellner also talks about resolutions in solution journalism. In a clickbait-dominated information environment, solution journalism represents a new form of telling stories. Journalists are not only pointing fingers at problems but also presenting possible solutions. The author elaborated on the role of photography in solution journalism, in his words, "a practice that could contribute to a better world."

Fake news and disinformation are one of the biggest challenges that society faces. Fact-checking was often identified as part of the solution to fight this phenomenon that proved to be a risk to democratic societies. Unfortunately, disinformation is not exclusively disseminated via social media. Sadly, sometimes, under the pressure of fast journalism, news outlets publish deceiving information. Eduard-Claudiu Gross shed light in his chapter on how internal verification policies are applied to a local newsroom.

The following two chapters of the volume are dedicated to art and communication. Simona Corina Dordea talks about artists' status and communication strategies in the context of the War in Ukraine. In 2023, Timişoara holds the status of European Capital of Culture and thus, a major cultural project is unfolding this year. Manuela Oana Anghelescu discussed the opportunities and challenges the city branding faces.

Business communication was also addressed in the present volume by Gianina Lenuța Jurji, who wrote about the skills needed to be an outstanding negotiator as a purchaser operating in private companies. Moreover, Luminița Oprea emphasized the role of transformational leadership in changing CSR managers.

The following two chapters represent theoretical contributions to advertising and human-computer interaction. First, Lorena Adina Pastor elaborated on the relationship between storytelling, artificial intelligence, and advertising, and Adriana Vlaicu talked about alienation and technology.

Generation Z's media consumption habits and interaction with fake news were the research topic of Nadina Câmpian's chapter. In 2022, the Covid-19 pandemic still impacted our conference, not only from a logistical perspective, but also in the content of some of the presentations. Thus, the following chapter, authored by Claudia Riquelme-Macalusso, focused on risk communication in Chile during the Covid-19 pandemic. Alexandru Ciurean sees the pandemic as an opportunity for digitalization, as remote mediation was possible, and he stressed that it should also be an option after the end of the pandemic.

We hope that not only the communication scholars will find the present volume interesting, but also practitioners from the communication field will find practical ideas in these chapters.

Cluj-Napoca, January 15th, 2023
Delia Cristina Balaban, Maria Mustățea, and Andreea Voina

# Immersive Journalism in the Context of the Current Transformation of the Journalistic Field

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**Abstract:** The development of virtual reality (VR) technologies reached the journalistic field, and the result is immersive journalism, a first-person engagement with the news. In the last decade, immersive journalism emerged not only as a construct but also as a product. It became relevant to well-established media institutions. The main goal of the present research is to elaborate on the role of immersive journalism in current journalism. A discussion about the challenges the journalistic field faces in the digital era is needed. Therefore, the present work represents a critical reflection on how the journalistic field has changed lately and how immersive journalism might change the journalistic field. On one hand, immersive journalism can bring higher levels of user engagement and has an emotional impact on media users. On the other hand, immersive journalism can contribute to bringing fake news to the next level. Therefore, an ethical approach toward immersive journalism is needed.

**Keywords:** crisis, digital journalism, immersive journalism, fake news, media effects.

## What is Immersive Journalism?

The development of virtual reality (VR) technologies reached the journalistic field, and the result is called *immersive journalism*. It is a first-person experience as it "allows the participant to enter a virtually recreated scenario representing the news story" (De la Peña *et al.*, 2010, p. 292). The concept of immersive journalism was first introduced by a group of international scholars under the lead of Nonny de la Peña from the Annenberg School for Communications and Journalism University of Southern California, in 2010. It was the same Nonny de la Peña as the CEO of a California-based immersive production company that showed a piece of immersive journalism at the Sundance Film Festival. The immersive journalism projects that her company produced, *Hunger in Los Angeles* and *Syria,* are well known among the interested public and scholars.

In the last decade, immersive journalism emerged not only as a construct but also as a product. It became relevant to well-established media institutions such as *The New York Times*, *The Guardian, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, ABC, ARTE, BBC Earth*, *CNN,* and *National Geographic Channel* (Hendriks Vettehen *et al*., 2019; Reis & Coelho, 2018; Watson, 2017) or the German quality newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung,* which made immersive journalistic content available to their audiences. That the team of *The Arizona Republic* and *USA Today Network* was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 2018 represents an acknowledgment of the importance and implications of immersive journalism (Gynnild *et al*., 2020). Called by Chris Milk a former music director that produced 360-degree videos "*the empathy machine*" (Bollmer, 2017; Hassan, 2020), immersive journalism enabled audiences to witness a conflict in Sudan in the New York Times production *We Who Remain* or a mediated experience of how a blind person perceives the world in ARTE's VR film *Notes on Blindness,* and a diabetes crisis in *Hunger in LA* (De Bruin *et al*., 2020). In 2015, Chris Milk produced, for the United Nations, a 360-degree documentary on the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan called *Clouds over Sydra* (Hassan, 2020). Regardless of the salient examples presented above, so far creators of 360-degree videos prefer fictional over non-fictional content for their immersive productions. As for the non-fictional type of content, documentaries are prevalent (McRoberts, 2017).

Immersive journalism implies both new forms of recording and dissemination of journalistic content. In the article *Virtual Reality and Journalism*, Reis and Coelho (2018) established a theoretical conceptual framework for the research of immersive journalism. Besides, stressing the importance of immersion and presence concepts for the understanding and empirical study of immersive journalism, they presented an in-brief history of journalism and visual media. According to this study, immersive journalism is a recent actor in the timeline of journalism performed in visual media, following photography, television, and the Internet. Furthermore, well-known journalists of the 20th century such as Martha Gellhorn, George Plimpton, and Walter Cronkite experienced and delivered to the public innovative journalistic products by self-immersion in the stories they tell with the help of photography or cameras.

A discussion about the challenges the journalistic field faces in the digital era is needed. The main goal of the present research is to elaborate on the role of immersive journalism in current journalism. Therefore, the present work represents a critical reflection on how the journalistic field has changed lately and how immersive journalism is affecting journalism.

## The Journalistic Field in the Era of Digital Communication

Any discussion about the current state of journalism should start with its classical definition and the particularities of the field and continue with the implications of digital media. Public communication can take various forms that differ in its social function, normative foundations, and mode of action. Journalism is defined as a form of public communication (Beck, 2013; Merten, 1999). It is a professional field and at the same time a form of public communication that delivers the selection, production, and presentation of topics that are relevant to society. All definitions of journalism highlight the importance of factuality, in other words reporting on current events and facts that are relevant to the public. Several important elements can be observed from this definition, which will be discussed below; we are talking about topicality, relevance, and facticity. Journalism covers all areas of society, assuring a functional system at the macro level. Journalism provides information about politics, economy, sports, culture, social life, science, etc. From the perspective of the system theory, journalism contributes to the self-observation of society. This is the way the watchdog function of journalism is interpreted. Journalism is part of the checks and balances in a democratic society; it should serve the public interest, and not private companies (Beck, 2013).

Storytelling becomes digital storytelling with open narratives. Digital storytelling consists of layered multimodal narratives (Sanchez-Lopez *et al*., 2020). From a normative perspective, journalism plays its role in educating audiences in the public sphere, and in democratic societies, no state interference should be allowed. Democracies are associated with freedom of the press, and no censorship is allowed. However, there are factors influencing journalistic work according to Beck (2013): the subject sphere of the journalist is determined by socio-demographic and psychographic factors, as well as by the socialization in the field, the institutional sphere including work routines and control mechanisms, the media structure sphere consisting of the economic, legal, and normative framework, and the social sphere which refers to the social and historical conditions of journalism, such as its relationship to the political system and journalistic cultures. From communication one-to-many applied to mass communication, digital communication is a form of many-to-many or many-to-one communication. For traditional journalism, the public was the spectator, for digital journalism the public is a content creator, distributor, and commentator, as it can engage in digital behavior such as posting, liking, sharing, and commenting. Digital media creates a virtual space of collective empowerment (Brailas, 2021).

Let us take a closer look at how patterns of media consumption evolved, by following some examples. Two decades ago, a typical middle-aged German media user woke up in the morning and went downstairs to pick up a hard copy of the newspaper – or even newspapers – for which he or she subscribed. The media user started their morning with breakfast, and while drinking coffee or tea, he or she would read the newspaper at the breakfast table, a habit inherited from their parents' generations that was carried on. Reading a quality newspaper took time, as in Germany these publications have a lot of pages, so people are often not capable of reading the entire issue in one day. Some users took the newspaper with them to work and/ or come back home in the evening and continue to read some of the articles. Listening to music or following the news on the radio was also something a typical German media user was doing, as mobility is an important aspect of daily life, and the radio was accompanying the person on the way to work and back home. The main television news show of the German public broadcaster was a must, so people followed ARD (now ERSTE) *Tagesthemen* live at 8 PM.

Currently, media consumption patterns look different. Nowadays, media users wake up in the morning and instinctively look for their smartphone, which typically is in a distance range of 50 cm. Smartphones are the first thing people usually see in the morning and the last thing they see before falling asleep. The contemporary typical young media user will start their day by accessing social media applications depending on socio-demographics (mainly age and education) this will be Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or even TikTok. Quality journalistic content that is relevant from the societal perspective will alternate with other non-fictional content, mainly posted by friends. News about political development, conflicts around the world, inflation, or energy crisis news are part of an information feed in terms of topic and source. The feeds we refer to (we could have also called them Facebook or Twitter timeline, Instagram stories, reels, or TikTok for you feature) accommodate information about a close friend that was traveling or had a party, a fresh new product endorsed by a favorite social media influencer, as well as an article from *The New York Times, The Economist,* or *The Guardian*. The source of the posted news can be a well-established media outlet that the user already liked or followed, but also others from media outlets that are not familiar to the user, based on algorithmic creation. Look-alike journalistic pages engaging in disinformation campaigns might have found their way into the newsfeed of the user we refer to in this example. Furthermore, the appetite of a typical young user for traditional media is limited, as podcasts are preferred over the radio, and streaming services such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, HBO Max, and Disney+ over linear television. Newspaper and magazine subscriptions are replaced by mobile applications with possibilities for in-app-purchase. The media offer is rich, so one can talk about tailored media menus setting different media tenors.

In the era of digital communication, in a new so-called *culture of connectivity* (Van Dijck, 2013), public communication forms suffered changes. Therefore, journalism as a field and profession suffered changes as well (Adolf, 2017). Not only has media changed due to technological developments, but also the way people engage with the media. The typical use of media is changing alongside the diversification of media channels (Hasebrink & Domeyer, 2010), as well as communication practices (Hepp, 2013). As the distinction between sender and receiver blurred and communication processes intensified, we witness *the mediation of everything* (Hepp, 2013) and *mass self-communication* within the network society (Castells, 2007).

The proliferation of digital media in the context of the *platformization* of society (Van Dijck *et al*., 2018) has several implications that will be discussed below. First, it changed the journalistic profession, and the role perception of journalists, and generated new professional communicators, such as bloggers and social media influencers. Second, the journalistic process has changed, and newsrooms transformed (Boczkowski, 2004). New business models of media were developed, and old ones were transformed to survive in a highly competitive market (Godulla, 2017). Third, the audiences changed in the way they consume information, and so did the way journalists engage with the audiences. Media consumption underwent massive changes regarding not only users' media diets, but the way the information reception processes (Kümpel, 2019) take place, as human attention capital is limited. *Shareability* was added to the list of news values. Therefore, clickbait journalism, a digital much more problematic version of the headline journalism of tabloid media, emerged. Storytelling practices in journalism have changed in the search for appealing topics, and multimedia storytelling is an alternative preferred by consumers (Eberwein, 2017). An emotional turn took over the journalistic field as the competition for the audience's attention and positive attitudes intensified (Lecheler, 2020; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2020).

The digital changes in journalism are salient and challenge both the public sphere (Oschatz *et al*., 2017) and the journalistic profession at its core. In traditional media settings, the journalist once held a monopoly over news production, selection, and publication. In the new media logic, however, audiences hold an active role (Harcup & O'Neil, 2017). The competition for the attention of the public, a commodity of its kind, intensified (Godulla, 2017). Newsrooms changed by accommodating multimedia production capacities that enhance interactivity (Boczkowki, 2004). In the era of user-generated content, collaboration is important as news audiences get engaged with digital news production. Citizen journalism is a salient form of journalism (Robinson & DeShano, 2011). In Germany, the consequences of climate change have become a central topic of the news, which engendered climate journalism as a new concept (Brüggemann & Engesser, 2017).

People's engagement with the news and the way audiences consume media have shifted (Karnowski *et al*., 2017; Kümpel *et al*., 2015; Nedelcu & Balaban, 2021). Social media enhances incidental news consumption (Boczkowski *et al*., 2018). Users who experience a so-called *news-find-me perception* as algorithmic curation based on prior user behavior and preferences determine the information displayed on the timeline of the social media applications (Gil de Zúñiga *et al*., 2017).

News producers and distributors are actors in a highly competitive economic environment that survived a system crisis caused by media development and several economic crises within the last decade. Adding to those crises, a crisis of trust has been taking shape throughout recent years. Fake news refers to disinformation, to false information that looks like it has been produced under genuine editorial standards, but it is not the case. The intention to deceive is an additional element of the definition of fake news as disinformation (Lazer *et al*., 2018; Tandoc *et al*., 2018; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). Political disinformation and polarization are the results of news consumption delivered only by social media (Tucker *et al*., 2017). Moreover, fake news is not only defined as disinformation but also as a label of mistrust (Egelhofer & Leheler, 2019), which in German is referred to as *Lügenpresse.* Labeling news media journalists as liars, often by alternative media and conspiracy theories' followers, affects the essence of democracy.

### Is Immersive Journalism Part of the Solution?

How immersive journalism developed in this challenging new journalistic field is a question to be addressed in the present work. We are reserved when it comes to evaluating the outcomes of immersive journalism and stressed the idea that it is far from being the unique solution to make journalism appealing again to large audiences. A closer look at the particularities of the reception followed by the implications of this new type of journalism will be presented here.

Previous research highlighted the idea that the classical linear model sender-channel-message-receiver no longer applies in the VR media (Lopezosa *et al*., 2021). As users decide what they see by moving their eyes or their body, the distinction between the media, the message, and the receiver is blurred. The engagement with immersive journalistic products needs a quiet place where the user can put the HMD equipment and immerse in the story and experience the feeling of presence (Hofer, 2016). Spatial and self-presence representation are key elements in describing the media reception processes in immersive journalism. The first describes the feeling of being in the media location and the latter is the feeling of being part of media events (Lee, 2004).

The journalistic field was affected by several crises such as shortages in economic resources in a highly competitive environment, fragmentation and polarization of audiences, and mistrust in the news media generated by the proliferation of disinformation in the era of post-truth. The journalistic profession has changed as well as the patterns of media reception in a society where the attention of audiences is a commodity. It is time now to close the circle and after analyzing empirical data generated with the help of an experiment and additional survey, after interviewing the experts, a final reflection on the role of immersive journalism in the context of the ongoing changing of the journalistic field is needed. Immersive journalism is part of the emotional turn (Lecheler, 2020; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019). The affective outcomes of the user's engagement with 360-degree that the present study showed are a confirmation of this idea. Even though we did not look at empathy as a dependent variable in our studies, emotions, as well as high levels of spatial and self-presence that we observed, entitle us to stress that this emotional turn is a positive outcome of the immersive journalistic. Humans have always been fascinated by good stories. What has changed is the modality and the way the media tells our stories. The immersive quality of the story, as well as the narrative techniques that capture the attention of the public, are strengths of immersive journalism. Therefore, immersive journalism can be a solution for counterbalancing the fragmented patterns of media usage established by social media such as focusing on a second screen. However, VR technologies must be available and affordable and the production of immersive journalistic content, as well as the distribution, should not be just a niche.

The high levels of presence and the feeling that the user is experiencing a real world outside of the real world is also a challenge in the context of the development of deep fakes. Disinformation is a major challenge that the journalistic field is facing in this so-called *crisis of credibility*. Therefore, when working with immersive journalistic content and cinematic VR, producers, and developers need to be committed to democratic values and embrace an ethical perspective (Gynnild *et al*., 2020). In this regard, the present dissertation supports the idea expressed by Sanchez Laws (2017) that immersive journalism should be empathetic and ethical. Also, privacy should be considered as the expert stressed that the use of VR technology is related to sensitive data in the sense that each user generates data that make him or her unique and therefore easy to identify.

## Conclusion

VR technologies found their application in the journalistic field. Immersive journalism as a part of digital journalism has an impact on the journalistic field. However, the impact is yet limited as there is not yet widespread usage and mass production. On one hand, immersive journalism can bring higher levels of user engagement and has an emotional impact on media users. On the other hand, immersive journalism can contribute to the proliferation of fake news at the next level. Therefore, an ethical approach toward immersive journalism is needed.

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# Solutions (Photo)Journalism. Introductory Theoretical and Applied Concepts into a Journalistic Practice that Could Contribute to a Better World

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**Abstract:** Today's media landscape makes more use of photography than ever before. There is hardly any media content from TV, press, and online that does not show an accompanying image. The visual presentation form of photography as part of photojournalism takes on positive or negative traits depending on the topic presented and its intention, known as solution-oriented or problem-oriented photojournalism. This concept is very current in photojournalism but has long had its place in traditional journalism practice, known as solution or problem journalism. Professional literature hardly offers a clear definition of these journalism categories, nor a clear theoretical boundary to Peace Journalism, Constructive Journalism, and Positive Journalism, to which solution-oriented journalism has similarities. Experimental and theoretical studies from the USA have shown the effect of solution-oriented or problem-oriented (photo)journalism on recipients. However, this approach has not been studied in the Romanian-speaking area, based on Romanian media. This theoretical paper aims to provide an overview of the theory of solution journalism, based on previous findings and comparison with other similar journalism concepts. Furthermore, it can be understood as a guide for (Romanian) media makers and journalists who have recognized and want to apply the importance of solution journalism.

**Keywords:** problem-oriented journalism, solution-oriented journalism, visual communication.

## The Beginning and its Pioneers

The birthyear of solutions journalism was 1948, when German researcher and publicist Robert Jungk founded the *Good News Bulletin* in New York. This organization sent out pages printed with good news to editorial offices and universities once a week. Jungk is thus considered a pioneer of solutions journalism, as he was the first to address it practically as well as theoretically. In his texts, Jungk discussed the work of the newly founded WHO, UNESCO, and UNICEF.

Because *The New York Times Magazine* turned down one of Tina Rosenberg's proposed topics saying it was too depressing, the book and editorial writer decided to rewrite her work. This time, she presented her research about people in Africa suffering from AIDS who cannot afford the medication, with a solution approach. This take on the same subject landed on page one of the magazine. Tina Rosenberg has been writing for the New York Times since 2010 about solutions to problems around the world. In 2013, Tina Rosenberg, David Bornstein, and Courtney Martin founded the Solution Journalism Network, which helped journalists almost everywhere have access to information about solution-oriented reporting methods, best practices, educational materials, and events (Kramp & Weichert, 2020).

This has not been the only movement toward solution-oriented journalism. On June 22, 2013, Impact Journalism Day was held for the first time. 20 daily newspapers from a total of 19 countries from all over the world joined this project. The aim was to print news on special pages of the newspapers, which exclusively informed about working projects and approaches to solutions for different social challenges. The participating newspapers were among the most important in their countries, including the French *Le Monde, the* Italian *La Stampa,* the Belgian *Le Soir,* the Danish *Politiken,* the Polish *Gazeta Wyborcza,* the German *taz,* as well as newspapers from India, China, Mexico, and Brazil. The *taz* had previously applied the idea of solutions-oriented reporting and achieved success on the newsstand each time. The Whitsun 2009 issue headlined "Eine andere Welt wird sichtbar" (Eng. Another world becomes visible) crossed the newsstand counter as the best-selling issue of the year. The other issues following this concept brought a five to ten percent increase in sales (Krüger & Gassner, 2014). Christian de Boisredon, the founder of *Sparknews,* the organization that coordinates Impact Journalism Day, joined forces with colleagues back in 2003 to launch *Reporters d'Espoirs*, which translates as Reporters of Hope. Back then, they were already advocating for more solution-oriented reporting. Their actions were not always met with enthusiasm, however, in 2012 Christian de Boisredon persuaded the French newspaper *Libération* to fill a large part of one issue with solution-oriented news. This issue was the best-selling of the year (Krüger & Gassner, 2014).

### Defining Approaches to Solutions Journalism

Solutions-oriented journalism (also referred to as solutions journalism) is a much-studied phenomenon, given the problem diversity of our century. Solutions journalism refers to this type of reporting whose claim is to provide answers to social problems, situations of people who, alone or in institutions and communities, dedicate themselves to finding solutions are the object of investigation of solution journalism. The focus is not only on approaches that already work, but also on the questions behind the way they work or do not work (Curry & Hammonds, 2014). Solutions journalism looks at what is being done or can be done to help those in need, at the same time illuminating the effort to help address important societal challenges (Curry *et al*., 2016). Importantly, in solution-oriented journalism, for the sake of positive reporting, solutions are not to be invented. The journalist should research the solutions that already exist and provide information on what possible steps could still be taken. (Hooffacker, 2021).

The Solution Journalism Network gives the following definition of solution journalism:

> "Solutions journalism investigates and explains, in a critical and clear-eyed way, how people try to solve widely shared problems. While journalists usually define news as "what's gone wrong," solutions journalism tries to expand that definition: Responses to problems are also newsworthy. By adding rigorous coverage of solutions, journalists can tell the whole story" (Solutions Journalism Network, 2020).

Solutions journalism is perceived in some respects as an effective tool in the fight for good. Thus, journalists with well-researched social or environmental-based problems, when confronting decision-makers, cannot easily be brushed off with the excuse that the best possible has already been done to solve the problem, if they show what solutions have been successfully applied in other localities. However, solution journalism must not become biased and advocate for a particular solution, but report soberly on what exactly has been done in problem solutions and what has demonstrably worked, or on the contrary, has not worked. It also considers the questions of why and what the limits of a project are (Solutions Journalism Network, 2020). Solution-oriented journalism brings new thinking to the practice of journalism. Through this type of reporting, journalists are encouraged to think about the effects of what they report on. Questions about the social responsibility of the press and the consideration of social welfare come to the fore (Lough & McIntyre, 2018a). Solution-oriented reporting has become a newsworthy factor in recent journalism practice (McInyre & Kyser, 2021).

Tina Rosenberg, co-founder of the Solution Journalism Network, finds solution journalism unsuitable for stories of short duration, such as political current affairs, much more fitting features, or other forms of presentation with a long format. Short-form texts would not be sufficient to get enough prior knowledge of the topic being covered, thus going beyond the problem, and bringing its solution into focus. Moreover, it is important that the topic tackles a common problem that affects many people, just as it is important that many people have already tried to create a solution approach or find a solution. It is precisely these already existing approaches or solutions that can become the subject of solution-oriented reporting. In solution journalism, the central question, besides the five established W-questions: who, what, when, where, why, mainly revolves around the how. In most cases, reporting is chronological, starting with the problem that has remained unsolved up to now and ending with other solution attempts and their success status (Kramp & Weichert, 2020). The particularities of solutions journalism become more understandable with the help of Table 1; here, solutions journalism is shown in comparison to established and much-used investigative journalism.

Table 1

Distinctions between conventional forms of journalism and solutions journalism

| Level | Investigative | Solution-oriented |
|---|---|---|
| **Function** | Identify reasons for previously unknown social problems | Investigate possible solutions for known societal problems |
| **Questions** | Who, what, when, where, why | + How |
| **Role** | Hold problem originators accountable (watchdog) | Report on answers to societal problems |
| **Goals** | Build public pressure, to demand solutions | Discuss (critical) concrete solutions scenarios and show perspectives |
| **Focus** | Problem centered on actors | Solution centered on topic |

***Source:*** Kramp and Weichert (2020)

## Solution Journalism Guidelines

The Solution Journalism Network's mission is to bring the practice of solution journalism into mainstream reporting. According to their view, all solution-oriented reporting should adhere to as many of the following guidelines as possible. These are intended more as guidance than as set rules.

The text should explain the cause of a problem and show a suitable answer to the problem. The text should refer to the problem solution and to the detailed description of the solution modalities, with the problem-solving process being the core of the text. Evidence of results related to the solution should be included in the text. The text should state the limitations of the solution. An insightful or instructive character is important, yet the text should not read like a puff piece. Sources that have well-founded expert knowledge should lay at the foundation of the text. Further, it is important that the attention falls on the reaction and less on leaders, do-gooders, and innovators (Curry & Hammonds, 2014; Solution Journalism Network, 2020).

***The Four Pillars of Solutions Journalism.*** The Solutions Journalism Network identifies four pillars of solutions journalism: response, insight, evidence, and boundaries.

Solution-oriented reporting focuses on the answer to a social problem/ issue. The aim is to see why the answer was successful or unsuccessful. A good solution story provides insight. It makes the answer accessible and relevant to the public. Solutions journalism looks for evidence in the form of data or qualitative results to prove how effective or not the solution is. Journalists are open with the evidence and present both sides of the evidence to the audience – what it says and what it does not say. Certain solution-oriented reporting on innovative measures, even without a large body of evidence, can work well. But it is also important to address the lack of evidence. Solution-oriented stories also highlight the shortcomings of policies or initiatives. No strategy is perfect or universally applicable with success. What works in one situation may fail in another. It is important that what does not work is also reported and that the limitations are addressed (Solution Journalism Network, 2020).

***Solution-oriented Journalism as a Research Subject.*** The importance of solution-focused journalism has been explored through several studies. These have been conducted primarily in the United States. Curry *et al*. (2016), for the Engaging News Project and the Solutions Journalism Network, used an experiment with 834 adults to examine the behavior of recipients when they read news stories about problematic issues that included solution and non-solution approaches. The 834 participants were asked to read, online, one of two news stories about the problems of the working poor whose headline and accompanying photo were identical. Only the content of the text differed with respect to the solution approach. While one text referred to the problem alone, the second informed about possible solutions to this situation. In the same context, two field tests were conducted in cooperation with the Desert News website. Visitors to the online news site happened to see two versions of two articles. Two of the articles were those already used in the experiment, on the topic of problems facing the working poor; the other two were about unemployed U.S. veterans. The results of this study showed that solutions journalism could influence both readers and news organizations. Specifically, this form of reporting was found to elicit feelings of optimism and self-efficacy in readers. Further, it was shown that among participants, the intention to engage in problem solving increases. The field test part of the study generated relevant results, especially for media professionals. It was shown that readers of solution articles spend more time on the news page than readers of non-solution articles, that readers of solution-oriented texts left the website more often than readers of non-solution articles, and that the commenting behavior of readers of both types of articles was similar (Curry *et al*., 2016).

Another study conducted two years earlier came to similar conclusions; Curry & Hammonds (2014) found that readers of articles that are solution-focused claim to be better informed and to want to continue to engage with the topic. The tendency of solution-oriented texts to cause a follow-up action can be explained by the fact that readers feel motivated to work for solutions to the problems addressed. In addition, Curry and Hammonds found that, through solution-oriented reporting, the connection between media consumers and news organizations is strengthened.

Studies in this area tend to be one-sided. They examine the impact of solutions journalism on recipients, but rarely examine solutions journalism from the perspective of media makers. Using 14 interviews with journalists who are familiar with solution-oriented ways of working, Lough and McIntyre (2018a) aim to gain insights about perceptions of this reporting style and changes in traditional journalistic practice and thinking. The interviewees view solutions journalism as an intriguing way of reporting, with great potential for growth. Solutions journalism is applicable to many topics, especially fit less complex issues, as well as topics related to social issues, interviewees revealed. There is always the risk of loss of objectivity, which can be circumvented through convincing evidence and rigorous reporting. In addition to the obstacles encountered, the success of this type of reporting also depends on management providing the necessary resources (Lough & McIntyre, 2018).

A recent study whose approach appears to be unique to date provides findings on the shift of an entire newsroom to solution-oriented reporting. Lough and McIntyre (2021) examined the *Montgomery Advertiser* in Alabama, a long-running daily newspaper and news website, using surveys, social-media analysis, and newspaper analysis. This was done before and after the newsroom's shift to solution-oriented reporting. The results only partially support a shift in newsrooms. For example, the first part of the study found that the switch did not have a positive impact on audiences in the period studied. Partially, the results were negative, as they showed readers visited the website less often, feel less informed, and trust national television less. As for social media, there are positive changes, especially on the editorial Facebook page. After the introduction of solution-oriented reporting, an increase in positive sentiment could be measured in posts and comments. Among other things, unlike the survey, the *Montgomery Advertiser*'s analysis shows that readers are visiting the page more often and staying on it longer. The authors believe that there are several external factors that cannot be controlled but influence the results. Therefore, it would be negligent to conclude from these findings that the transition to solutions journalism would have a negative impact on the audience and the editorial staff (Lough & McIntyre, 2021).

***A Plea for Solutions Journalism.*** In the previous section, some studies on the effect of solution journalism on recipients were described. Another study deals with the opinions of journalists who have a connection to solution-oriented reporting. It is also important to name the expectations, or the opportunities and advantages that solution journalism brings with it. These can be divided into three levels.

At the micro level, solutions journalism can serve as psychological hygiene for producers and recipients (Krüger, 2016). Evidence that this type of reporting has a positive effect on the individual is provided by the studies mentioned so far. Reports that contain solution approaches trigger positive and optimistic feelings in the recipient, as well as the need to commit to solving the problem. In addition, recipients often turn away from media topics if the problems described appear difficult to solve. On an emotional level, a negative message can trigger such emotions, which can only be counterbalanced by a greater number of positive messages.

At the meso level, solutions journalism can be beneficial to media companies, promising eventual economic prosperity (Krüger, 2016). Experience from the global daily press has shown that solution-oriented editions of newspapers sell noticeably better than the others (Krüger & Gassner, 2014). Earlier studies, dating back to the 1980s, concluded that predominantly positive news coverage leads to a more positive view of the newspaper than bad news coverage. In addition, readers find this type of reporting more objective and beneficial to society. The study also showed that, due to the higher proportion of good news, among participants the will to subscribe to the publication increased (Haskins & Miller, 1984). If media companies take this into account, the change in thinking towards solution-oriented reporting could increase circulation and sales and thus generate financial growth.

On a macro level, solution-oriented journalism can contribute to general social progress. People can learn from reporting why some projects succeed, and others fail (Krüger, 2016). Given the fact that solution-oriented journalism can, among other things, increase people's willingness to deal with the problems it addresses, it can be assumed that it also plays a socially awakening role.

The Solution Journalism Network publishes a series of arguments in favor of solution journalism on its homepage. According to the network, journalists consider their work to be over once a scandal has been uncovered. This speaks against the journalistic conviction that addressing social problems would contribute to change. The Solution Journalism Network justifies this assumption in the following way:

> "It's often not enough for journalists to simply describe what's wrong and hope society will create better laws or provide more oversight. The world's problems are simply too complex for that and change too quickly. People feel empowered to work for better conditions when they hear about credible solutions. In this context, journalists must expand their traditional understanding of their role and also shine a spotlight on approaches to solutions for deep-seated social ills. Why else practice solutions journalism?" (Solution Journalism Network, 2020).

Furthermore, the Solution Journalism Network argues very pragmatically: *"It's just good journalism"*. Following their motto: *"The whole story",* the Solution Journalism Network believes that previous journalistic forms of presentation can gain accuracy and completeness through solution journalism. Reporting creates, by leaving out solution journalism, an unclear view of reality, which can even be harmful to society. In this way, the feeling is created that no one has done anything about it and that solutions to problems are being found. Another argument is about the storytelling approach that solution-oriented stories can skillfully apply, which can help keep readers attentive for a longer time. It creates excitement by asking questions about how someone managed to find the solution. The idea that consumers of solution-oriented media content stay engaged with the content longer and respond more positively is confirmed by research from the Engaging News Project (Solution Journalism Network, 2020).

***The Legitimacy of Solution-oriented Journalism.*** The concept of solution-oriented reporting is not problem-free in its application. Critical voices accuse this concept of lacking journalistic care. From the ranks of media makers often comes the argument that journalistic work must be based solely on facts, regardless of whether they are positive or not. It is not the task of the journalist to select the nice news from the less nice news (Krüger & Gassner, 2014). The counterargument to this is provided by David Bornstein of the Solution Journalism Network, who claims that even when reporting on problems, by omitting the reactions and attempted solutions related to them, the information is incomplete. It is only half the story (Krüger & Gassner, 2014).

Another discussion around the topic of solution-oriented journalism concerns funding. Since circulation is continuously decreasing, publishers are forfeiting financial losses. Given this fact, it is not uncommon for editorial offices to often rely on funders, such as foundations, entrepreneurial corporations, or patrons for their livelihood. Here, as a matter of course, the question arises whether this has an influence on the reporting of topics that deal with large corporations and their finances. Bornstein assures that the donors have no influence on how the money is used and which research projects are financed with it. If there were any attempt to influence, they would end the collaboration. The fact is, the funders support certain resorts specifically; for example, the Gates Foundation's finances are directed toward research on education, while the Rockefeller Foundation supports work on climate change (Krüger & Gassner, 2014). Both organizations, the Gates Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation, are controversial because of their positive stance on green genetic engineering and agricultural technology, which critics claim only exacerbates poverty and hunger. So freelance journalist and author Kathrin Hartmann questions the interest of these funders in promoting *world-saving journalism* (Hartmann, 2014). Hartmann offers two other criticisms of Bornstein's handling of solution-oriented texts. First, she mentions Bornstein's columns, "The Future of Clean Water", from *The New York Times*, which addresses the fact that nearly one billion people lack clean drinking water. The solution Bornstein mentions, and Hartmann criticizes, is the water.org project, which essentially gives microloans to people to invest in their water supply. In addition to PepsiCo, which supports this project even though it is accused of water theft in India, Hartmann (2014) argues that so far, no serious study has been able to show to what extent the granting of microcredits helps poor people out of their poverty.

Another point of criticism Hartmann mentions is the way topics are framed in solution journalism. The complexity and the facts of a problem would not be sufficiently illuminated, which leads to the fact that it is easier to present solution ideas or solution initiatives (Hartmann, 2014, cited in Krüger, 2016). Extracting social problems from complex contexts is interpretive. People understand problems differently based on personal attitudes, interests, basic assumptions, and experiences. Problems arise from social negotiations, for this reason problems cannot be understood as results of a single cause, but of a multitude of causes. Accordingly, proposed solutions would need to be addressed in a more complex manner (Stray, 2012 cited in Krüger, 2016).

In journalism, there is a requirement to examine each piece of information using multiple different sources. When reporting on solution stories, usually the protagonist of the invention of a solution is the only source. There is a risk of falling into PR (Krüger & Gassner, 2014) or lobbying (Krüger, 2016). However, Rosenberg (cited in Kramp & Weichert, 2020) says, the flip side of the solution, the failure in finding a solution, also belongs in the reporting. Journalists must do critical and thorough research work, but not focus on the problem; instead, they must look for possible solutions. In doing so, the journalist must report what is factual and not make inventive suggestions. There is a lack of studies or criticism for many of the solution approaches, according to Reiner Metzger, deputy editor-in-chief of the *taz* (cited in Krüger & Gassner, 2014).

***The Solution Journalism Network Today.*** *"Transforming news is critical to building a more equitable and sustainable world,"* (Solution Journalism Network, 2020) is the basic idea of the organization. The Solution Journalism Network sees itself as a leader in the change process of journalism, focusing on what is often missing from the news: the fact that people are trying to find solutions to problems. Success or failure, both are equally instructive, according to the project.

In 2013, the organization's inaugural year, the project was supported by seven funders, including the Gates Foundation, Knights Foundation, and Rockefeller Foundation. In total, the financial assistance amounted to nearly $760,000. Years later, 28 foundations were funding the organization, which by 2020 employed more than 35 people. According to its website, in 2022, the organization employed 46 employees. In 2018, the Solution Journalism Network, had approximately five million U.S. dollars available. This is used for consulting and training for newsrooms, in the U.S. and around the world (Kramp & Weichert, 2020), as well as for scholarship programs.

Based on the last published report for 2020, the organization's network includes 20,833 journalists and 218 journalists trained to teach solution journalism. Total revenue for the same year was $14,753,615 (Solution Journalism Network, 2022). The Solution Journalism Network offers the Solution Story Tracker on their homepage; it is a solution journalism database that offers the ability to choose from over 13,100 solution stories written by 6,000 journalists from 1,700 news organizations based in over 187 countries. Some of the Solution Story Tracker topic areas from which solution stories can be selected are Climate Change, Building Racial Equity, Economic Mobility, Advancing Democracy, Public Health, Immigration & Refugees.

### Journalism: Similar Models

Journalism essentially has the task to present society the relevant events objectively, thus neutrally. In doing so, no positive or negative tendencies should be apparent. (Fink, 2017). However, during journalism history, the reporting modalities have divided into several genres. Based on the topic, the type or the expectation of the reporting, subcategories have developed such as: solution-oriented and problem-oriented journalism (Curry

& Hammonds, 2014; Curry *et al*., 2016; Kramp & Weichert, 2020; Lough & McIntyre, 2018a; McIntyre, 2017; Their *et al*., 2019), peace journalism (Hacket, 2006; Kempf, 2019; Wetzstein, 2018); positive journalism (Fink, 2017); constructive journalism (Hooffacker, 2020, 2021; Kramp & Weichert, 2020; Krüger, 2019; McIntyre, 2015; Meier, 2018). Some of these categories overlap in their characteristics and content claim and cannot be perceived as completely distinct types of journalism. This study is limited to the genres that are closely related to solution journalism and attempts to define them, thus creating a clear overview of the particularities and commonalities of these types of (photo) journalism.

Although this study focuses on one of the visual modes of journalism, and that is photojournalism, the following chapter will highlight different genres of holistic journalism. Some of the journalistic genres listed above can also be found in the field of photojournalism. Accordingly, approaches of the genre-specific journalism theory can be transferred to photojournalism. It is called visual solution and problem journalism or solution-oriented or problem-oriented photojournalism (Dahmen *et al*., 2019; McIntyre *et al*., 2018).

***Constructive Journalism.*** Ulrik Haagerup, former editor-in-chief of Jyllands-Posten, then Denmark's largest circulation newspaper, later Executive Director of DR, Denmark's public broadcaster, spoke publicly in 2008 about journalists not doing their job well enough and the need for more constructive journalism. The fact that, according to Ulrik Haagerup, a good story has to become a bad one in order to make the news, caused him frustration. These became, eventually, the motivation to think about reorienting journalism. In 2014, he published his book, *Constructive News*, which serves as a manifesto for an alternative approach to reporting. Three years later, Haagerup became co-founder of the Constructive Institute, which in addition to scholarly activity, awards many grants for research and teaching purposes (Kramp & Weichert, 2020). Thus, Haargerup and the Constructive Institute, of which he is executive director, are of great importance for the entry of constructive journalism into today's reporting.

The original idea of constructive journalism, however, goes back several years. Already in the 1990s, the practice of not only addressing problems from the surrounding area, but also searching for possible solutions and organizing dialogues and interactive forums, developed in the USA, primarily in editorial offices that practiced local journalism and public journalism (Meier, 2018).

Hooffacker (2019) equates constructive journalism with solution-oriented journalism. The latter should be critical, objective, and balanced. Constructive solution-oriented journalism should also build bridges, be future-oriented, nuanced and contextualized (Hooffacker, 2019). The claim to factual sources must not be neglected. In addition to the solution-suggesting approach of solution journalism, constructive journalism insists on showing hope and perspectives. Constructive journalism aims to achieve certain effects with the recipients. These should occur on the micro level, directly with the user, on the meso level in relation to the bond with a media company and on the macro, contribute to the progress of society (Meier, 2018). Krüger (2019) defines constructive journalism as not being event-focused, but rather focused on long-term processes. Social problems should not only be described but should stimulate the search for solutions through debate. Constructive journalism adds a few questions to the classic W-questions that are usually asked in journalistic research. Questions such as: And now? How should it continue? are attempted to be answered. By explaining context, connections and possible solutions, the focus should be on the future, not just the past.

Journalists orient themselves in their work, consciously or unconsciously, to certain strategies. In journalism theory, these are called reporting patterns. The uniform approach of the representatives of constructive journalism and the strategies they use reveal such a reporting pattern (Meier, 2018). This latter author attempts to answer the question of how constructive journalism works. The purpose of his work is not to highlight the different approaches in constructive journalism, the focus is to analyze its goals. Following the studies of McIntyre (2015) and Curry and Hammonds (2014), Meier (2018) conducts an experiment that, unlike the two studies mentioned, does not use an online survey, but face-to-face interviews to provide quantitative and qualitative results. The results of the study, with 130 interviewed participants, show that constructive contributions are perceived more positively than non-constructive contributions, but mostly with only small differences.

***How Solution Journalism Relates to Constructive Journalism.*** The debate as to whether solutions journalism can be clearly separated from constructive journalism, or whether they are two distinct concepts, is far from resolved. Professional literature offers virtually no clarity in this regard, and many texts do much more to equate the two genres. Few scientific papers separate the two concepts, an example being the text by Kramp and Weichert (2020). Other scholars who address this debate define solutions journalism as a subcategory of constructive journalism (McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2017), and others find solution journalism is just another name for constructive journalism (Greck, 2018).

Ulrik Haagerup from the Constructive Institute and Tina Rosenberg from the Solution Journalism Network represent different genres of journalistic reporting but agree on one point: constructive or solution journalism, both are based on the same original idea – the prerequisite is always a social problem that is documented and known. The constructive or solution approach can only be built if the characteristics of the problem have been sufficiently addressed and clarified in advance. The two approaches are not contradictory, they focus on different aspects, according to Ulrik Haagerup. He describes constructive journalism as an umbrella, even over solution journalism. Tina Rosenberg also sees solution journalism as a subcategory of constructive journalism. The latter's task, according to Nina Fasciaux of the Solution Journalism Network, is primarily to propagate a change in mentality, while solution journalism is about communicating methodological approaches.

There are also differences in the way of teaching. The Solution Journalism Network has an instructional focus, with a focus on disseminating instructional materials and organizing training for newsrooms. The goal is to introduce the approaches and methods of solution journalism to as many journalists as possible. The approach of the Constructive Institute is much more open. The discussion between practice and science, as well as questions about solution elements, mediator roles in journalism and dealing with complexity, are part of the understanding process (Kramp & Weichert, 2020). Their intention is to bring about a rethinking in the direction of constructive journalistic understanding by means of a cultural and structural change in editorial offices. The Solution Journalism Network, on the other hand, is concerned with conveying technical know-how in everyday journalistic practice. The target audience of the two organizations differs considerably. While the constructive approaches are directed at the management level of the respective news organizations and justify this with the fact that the change has to come from the decision-makers in the editorial offices, the Solution Journalism Network aims at individual journalists. As many of these as possible are provided with training, webinars, guidelines, or examples (Kramp & Weichert, 2020). Unlike the Constructive Institute, the Solution Journalism Network seeks its path to change from lower levels of newsrooms. Kramp and Weichert summarize the differences between the two journalistic schools of thought in Table 2.

**Table 2**

Differences of solution journalism and constructive journalism

| Focus | Solution journalism | Constructive journalism |
|---|---|---|
| **Strategic approach** | Methodological changes | Change of mentality |
| **Mediation** | Instructive | Discursive |
| **Addressed level** | Craft dimension<br>(content and research level) | Structures & rules<br>(editorial organization, relevance criteria, news values) |
| **Target groups** | Individual journalists | Editorial management |
| **Scope (journalistic forms of presentation)** | Journalistic long formats<br>(features, research-intensive pieces) | All areas of journalistic content production |
| **Formative organizations** | Solutions Journalism Network, founded 2013 | Constructive Institute, founded 2017 |
| **Origin & Distribution** | Starting from North America first, South America, now gradually Europe | Starting from Scandinavia to other European countries |

***Source:*** Kramp and Weichert (2020)

For better comprehension, it is worth pointing out the differences using the W-questions to which journalistic forms of presentation usually respond (see Table 3).

**Table 3**

Differences of solution journalism, constructive journalism, and investigative journalism

| | Investigative journalism | Solution journalism | Constructive journalism |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Questions** | Who, what, when, where, why | +How | +And now<br>+How should it continue |

***Source:*** Own representation based on Kramp and Weichert (2020) and Meier (2018)

***Positive Journalism.*** Although, as indicated earlier, some of the journalistic genres cannot be sharply separated, positive journalism does have differences from solution-oriented journalism. To contribute to the understanding of solution-oriented journalism, this section deals with the specific characteristics of positive journalism. Fink (2017) defines positive journalism as a genre whose intention is to "*evoke positive cognitive, affective, and motivational effects*" in the recipient. In this context, positive journalism is not considered with a focus on the type of reporting, but on the intended effect. To view positive journalism as simply reporting positive events would be to limit perceptions about the world. Positive journalism, however, is not limited to the thematization of positive events. Through form and language, negative topics can also be part of positive reporting by adapting the wording or including positive outlooks. In this context, Fink (2017) speaks of the *agenda setting effect,* which states that people think more intensively and longer about topics they consume from the media. The more positive the content shown, the more positive the audience's attitude. Negative-heavy contributions lead to negative thoughts.

Positive journalism also raises issues of journalistic objectivity, for example, it should be avoided that only positive topics are included in the reporting, because this would lead to a reduction of the perception of reality. It is equally important not to present negative topics in a positive light, as this would distort reality (Fink, 2017).

***Peace Journalism.*** The roots of peace journalism lie in peace and conflict studies. Social psychology, media research, and journalism must also be mentioned here. However, they all have one thing in common, and that is the effort to counteract escalation-potential reporting. The kind of reporting that may promote escalation can, under certain circumstances, be called war propaganda. Peace journalism thus emerged as a distinction from war-oriented reporting (Reimann, 2019). Like positive journalism, peace journalism focuses on the good aspects in reporting, and has pacifist and de-escalating intentions. As the name implies, topics are highlighted here, around peace or its absence, thus peace journalism is thematically limited (Fink, 2017). Proponents of peace journalism accuse mainstream journalism of being conflict oriented. For example, international journalism only addresses conflicts when they have reached the threshold of escalation. As a conflict-oriented approach, they lose their function as early discoverers of situations with conflict potential (Wetzstein, 2018).

What is most important, especially in the early stages of a conflict that threatens to escalate, is for peace journalism to react to the given situation. This requires journalistic tact to identify grievances that threaten peace as early as possible. A set of *peace conditions* has been created for this purpose (Reimann, 2019). The discussion about what exactly can be called peace is crucial for reporting and causes disagreement among peace journalism researchers. Johan Galtung understands peace as the absence of violence, in both direct and indirect forms, in contrast to Wilhelm Kempf who sees peace as a "*way of dealing with conflict,*" characterized by all parties putting aside their interests in order to reach a solution satisfactory to all through deliberation. Both Galtung and Kempf, despite differing views on the concept of peace, see peace journalism as more than just the renunciation of violence (Kempf, 2019). The specialist literature sees the following five tasks in peace journalism: first, peace journalism should realistically and transparently present the background and framework conditions of the emergence of conflict and the facts and options available to both sides; second, to give each party involved the space to present its views; third, to disseminate creative ideas that contribute to the resolution of the conflict, its development, peacemaking and, above all, peacekeeping, fourth, to expose lies and cover-ups on all sides and to expose the suffering that peoples have done or have had done to them; and fifth, to focus attention on peace stories and post-war developments (Mcgoldrick & Lynch, 2012).

### Visual Solutions Journalism/ Solution Photojournalism

Although the concept of solutions journalism in its theorization and operationalization is relatively new in media and communication studies, there are nevertheless solid theoretical and practical approaches. These, as well as relevant studies, were explained in the previous sections. The majority of these examine solution journalism in its written form. The situation is different for visual solution journalism. This has hardly been dealt with scientifically. For this reason, the previous work has dealt extensively with solution journalism to create an understanding of the general concept of solution-oriented reporting, which can be applied to solution-oriented photojournalism.

***Visual Solution Journalism: A Theoretical Approach.*** Photographs play an important role in journalistic reporting. Because simply looking at a photograph requires less thought than reading the text, far more consumers look at the images and fewer devote time to the text as a whole (Meckel, 2001 cited in Holtz-Bacha & Koch, 2008). Images have a major one meaning for readers (Lough & McIntyre, 2018b). Nevertheless, photography has been considered by academia, as well as by industry, as a companion product to texts (Dahmen & Midberry, 2019). Photography must therefore be given special attention in any journalistic storyline with a solution-oriented approach. Images are an important tool in solution-oriented reporting, and their power could be exploited (Dahmen & Midberry, 2019). Journalists and researchers of visual communication are therefore trying to work out an appealing, comprehensive and, above all, ethical way of visual reporting. For this purpose, regulations from photojournalistic theory and practice are transferred to visual solution journalism.

Dahmen and Midberry (2019) propose to use insights gained from solutions journalism and its goals, as well as from visual communication research and photojournalism ethics, to offer a wealth of suggestions on how to apply visual solutions journalism. As mentioned earlier, solution-oriented journalism is not about showing certain, preferably positive facets of a story, but about providing a comprehensive picture of the whole. This is also true in visual solutions journalism. Like text, where certain parts are emphasized or relegated to the background by the way they are reported, in visual reporting, photographs are chosen to show something specific of the whole. This framing is determined firstly by the photographers, by deciding on composition and content, but also by the editorial team, which decides which image material is used or not, or whether only certain sections of images are used. Visual solution journalism should therefore, as in the written form, be comprehensive (Dahmen & Midberry, 2019) and reflect the facts as realistically as possible (Deutscher Fachjournalisten Verband, n.d.). Thus, it is important whether through solution-oriented photography only problems or solutions are illuminated or both. The framing of the photographic report can affect its reception. Thus, photographs that mainly present problems can lead to compassion fatigue, as well as images of solutions, the idea could transfer that, the problems have already found their solution (Dahmen & Midberry, 2019).

Dahmen and Midberry (2019) cite precision as another goal of solutions journalism that applies to visual reporting as well. One might think visual solution journalism cannot be comprehensive and precise at the same time, however, in this context precision is understood as the prerequisite to reproduce the story in terms of content, true to reality; above all, the picture treatment and the picture sources. Practice shows that media companies often resort to methods of alienation of photographs, in relation to their sources. In essence, this means that editorial offices for articles, get images from photo agencies. The text is thus accompanied by an image whose creation has no direct connection to the reported event. The final contextualization of the photographs leads to the alienation of their meaning (Dahmen & Midberry, 2019). This practice is used in situations where no editorial staff is present at the scene of the event, as the research work is done from the reaction. The photojournalistic craft emphasizes that it is necessary for the photojournalist to be personally present at the scene of the event; only in this way can the authenticity of the reporting be contributed to. (Deutscher Fachjournalisten Verband, n.d.). The third goal for visual solutions journalism that Dahmen and Midberry (2019) mention is humanization. Images should evoke empathy and humanize issues.

## Conclusions

Even if researchers on the topic of solution journalism do not agree on all points, the theoretical perspectives show that solution journalism is clearly different from other journalism genres in many respects. By adding the question of *how*, the focus is not only on approaches that already work, but also on the questions behind how they work or do not work. Through its strong social component, solutions journalism looks at approaches that are already working as well as future solutions to help solve widespread problems. As a *fighter for good*, (visual) solutions journalism longs for some changes that affect journalistic practice. These could be proven by studies for both sides. For readers and consumers, solution-oriented reporting in text and images has a much more positive and motivating effect. For the media makers, articles that are consumed more often and for longer mean profit growth. The present theoretical excursus thus speaks for an increasing attention to solution-oriented reporting in text and image which, in view of the manifold worldly problems, can contribute to finding solutions.

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# Pre-publication News Verification in Local Newsrooms: A Theoretical Approach

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**Abstract:** The role of fact-checking and news verification in the fight against false or malicious information is often discussed. Most of the time, researchers investigate the role of the user in fact-checking the information to which they are exposed. The process of verification is a time-consuming task and requires the individual to possess certain skills and abilities to sift through information. This paper focuses on another important part of the mechanism of news verification, namely the journalist. This study aims to identify the internal verification policies of these newsrooms and who oversees news verification in a small publication. Given the scarcity of data, this is a theoretical effort to gather the existing information regarding the topic of news verification in local newsrooms. In the theoretical part of the paper, a necessary delimitation regarding fact-checking and verification of information by journalists will be assessed. Given that they work at a fast pace with the pressure to disseminate information as quickly as possible, this paper aims to investigate what challenges the newsroom face and whether time constraints mean that the verification process is put on a secondary level.

**Keywords:** fact-checking, journalism, local journalism, news verification, verification practices.

## Introduction

When it comes to verifying information, the users' responsibility to verify the veracity of the information to which they are exposed is often mentioned. This paper seeks to address a different aspect, namely the responsibility of journalists to verify news before publishing it. In the first section of the paper, the limitations of the fact-checking approach will be discussed, the effects of this approach, and why users are vulnerable to falling victim to disinformation. In the next part of the paper, the work environment in newsrooms will be discussed with a special emphasis on local newsrooms, which are particularly important for dealing with topics close to local communities. This paper aims to identify practices of fact-checking in newsrooms, difficulties journalists face, how newsrooms change, and whether there are commonalities in terms of fact-checking. There already are practices that include either internal or external fact-checking services in newsrooms.

As classified by Graves and Cherubini (2016), fact-checking approaches fall into two models, the newsroom model and the non-governmental model. The first model is in minority and is often dependent on editorial interest and financial support provided by the media company. The fact-checking teams of media companies have a vast reach and significant impact in comparison with independent fact-checkers. By providing accurate and timely information to viewers, they help ensure that the public has access to accurate information about the world around them. This, in turn, helps to create a more informed and engaged citizenry. In addition to data and editorial support, larger newsrooms also bring more resources to bear on the business of fact-checking. Regarding the non-governmental model, the work takes place outside newsrooms and unlike the newsroom model, which is predominant in Western Europe, the non-governmental model is predominant in Eastern Europe. The mission of this model is to strengthen democratic institutions. As Graves and Cherubini (2016) elaborate, these organizations partner with news agencies but lack the financial and editorial resources on which the newsroom fact-checking model is based. On the other hand, the non-governmental model benefits from greater editorial freedom. There are currently three fact-checking initiatives in Romania, which this paper will describe in the next section.

## Fact-checking Initiatives and Platforms in Romania

Fact-checking initiatives in Romania have only been researched to a limited extent. This paper aims to build further on existing studies covering the Romanian setting and to add a quantitative analysis of the themes addressed by fact-checking initiatives. The three publications considered for this research are veridica.ro, factual.ro, and afp.verificat.ro. Today's media landscape is described by researchers as one of *post-truth*. Such a climate is very permissive of any opinion, even if distorted. Fact-checking emerged as an answer to this problem, but the effectiveness of this practice is often questioned (Walter *et al*., 2020). Opinions on fact-checking are divided and the implications of this practice have been discussed in various contexts. What is truth? How can it be established through fact-checking? What are the interests of the platforms, and is there a political bias? Is fact-checking effective in correcting false opinions? If information reaches only a limited audience, how effective is the practice? Fact-checking is the process of verifying the validity of claims that have reached the public space through some form of media. The result of a fact-check is often published alongside a decision, which ranges from completely true to completely false (Picha Edwardsson *et al*., 2021). The fact that the work of fact-checkers happens after the claims have reached the public space is one of the biggest limitations.

Evidence from a study (Porter & Wood, 2021) on populations in Argentina, Nigeria, South Africa, and the United Kingdom reveals that verified news increases factual accuracy and decreases belief in misinformation. The emergence of fact-checking platforms is a positive development, especially as it is impossible for all information to pass through an analytical filter. Because of the speed with which information must be published and the competition between news outlets, false information is becoming increasingly common. Fact-checking comes as a corrective measure. As mentioned in the introduction, in Romania, fact-checking platforms have not been investigated. Out of the three platforms that this study will analyze, there are only two studies on the factual.ro platform (Busioc *et al*., 2021; Călin, 2022). The study conducted by Călin (2022) concentrates on fact-checking by the Factual.ro platform on public statements from high-visibility public figures. The study is very important for understanding the platform's methodology and the impact made by debunking. The study's findings are explanatory for the lack of confidence that Romanians had during the COVID-19 pandemic. The amount of misleading information is almost double the number of truthful statements made by the authorities. Another study (Busioc *et al*., 2021) considers the Factual platform to be a reliable source for verifying political discourse and its veracity. According to Busioc *et al*. (2021), the most verified statements come from the following areas: politics, justice, finance, electoral, and coronavirus.

Veridica is a platform specialized in monitoring and dismantling disinformation campaigns in Central and Eastern Europe. The project is led by the International Alliance of Romanian Journalists, supported by non-governmental organizations, diplomatic representatives in Bucharest, and sponsorships from companies. The objectives of the platform are to raise awareness and understanding of the phenomenon of disinformation and to promote democratic values. In addition to monitoring, the platform publishes interviews, analyses, and editorials; organizes training courses for journalists; develops media literacy activities. The editorial board is transparent and organized as follows: board (5 members), team (9 members), and contributors (15 members) (Veridica, n.d.).

Factual is the first fact-checking website that monitors public statements in Romania. They aim to show that there is a public looking for the right information in the noisy media landscape. The project is implemented by the Funky Citizens Association. The funding source is transparent and comes from donations from the volunteer team, reader donations, and 5 grant-funded projects. The editorial box is transparent, and the team is composed as follows: the internal team (11 members) and the team of voluntary experts (10 members). The principles of the factual team are fairness, transparency, transparency regarding the funding, methodology, and honest correction policy (Factual, 2021).

AFP Verificat first appeared in France, subsequently expanding to over 80 countries. The service first appeared in Romania in 2020. The team is transparent and can be checked on the fact-checking service website (AFP Verificat, 2022). The AFP Verified service is also linked to Facebook news verification, with Romania becoming the eighth country in the European Union to adopt the service. The steps of the Facebook verification process work as follows: (1) users report fake content on Facebook, (2) Facebook sends the information to AFP via an app, (3) AFP decides on how to categorize the information (totally false, partially false, misleading, altered, out of context or satire), (4) Facebook marks the post as such and provides a link to the AFP verified news (Dobrescu, 2020). We thus have three different approaches with a common goal, to combat misinformation in the media landscape.

### Limitations of the Fact-checking Model

Disinformation is produced in staggering quantities and is easily consumed by users, who frequently distribute false content without hesitation. The reasons behind disinformation are frequently political or pecuniary (Galeotti, 2019). Moving to the fact-checking approach, one could think that the process is very straightforward, the article containing disinformation surfaces, gets debunked by fact-checkers, and follows the same natural course as those who consumed the original news that turned out to be false. The process of dismantling fake news also has cognitive implications which are difficult to fully comprehend. According to Chan *et al*. (2017), disinformation continues to affect individuals even after debunking and continues to shape attitudes about health and political beliefs. Thus, the effectiveness of the fact-checking model is often questioned. The biggest limitation of the fact-checking approach is that the response time must be fast. In a series of experiments conducted by Brashier *et al*. (2021), participants were told to read false and true headlines taken from social media. Labels of false and true appeared before, during, or after participants read each headline. Participants in the control group were not given any information regarding the truthfulness of the headline. One week later, participants reassessed the headlines. The study concludes that if participants see the correction immediately after they read the headline, it reduces misclassification of the headlines. Regarding the algorithmic approach to news-checking, there are other discussions worth considering, such as governmental attempts to impose what the truth consists of.

No one can dispute, for sure, the removal of content containing homophobia, racism, or hate speech from platforms, but dangerous initiatives such as the controversial project in Romania to combat propaganda caused by the war in Ukraine leave room for speculation. According to the draft, anyone who criticizes the executive during the war in Ukraine is classified as a propagator of Russian propaganda (Ofițeru, 2022). The draft was harshly criticized by non-governmental organizations and was eventually not implemented. The politicians use the power that censorship with a noble purpose brings and create initiatives that manage to beat Orwell's fictional Ministry of Truth. As Andersen and Søe (2019) argue, fake news is an act of communication, therefore people must make efforts to interact with disinformation, rather than trying to remove it.

### Differences between Fact-checking and News Verification

As Picha Edwardsson *et al*. (2021) argue, there are fundamental differences between fact-checking and verification practices inside the newsrooms. Fact-checking is the process by which the veracity of the information or political statements is verified after they have reached the public space through some form of media (e.g., in Romania there is the Factual.ro platform that verifies the statements of politicians after they have already reached the public space, returning with a verdict on their veracity). Newsroom verification is part of the journalistic process and is carried out before publication or during publication in the case of live reporting. As mentioned in the previous part, once it reaches the public space, misinformation produces effects and changes mentalities.

An example of falsehoods that change mindsets is the famous retracted article on vaccination and the incidence of autism cases, which undermines vaccination efforts for major HPV vaccination campaigns carried out in Denmark and Romania (Hansen & Schmidtblaicher, 2019; Pența & Băban, 2014). The given example illustrates the inability of debunking methods to correct information reaching public space. In the journalistic verification approach, the undesirable effect is prevented by pre-checking the material before publication. While in theory, this approach sounds ideal and much of the responsibility is shifted to journalists and the newsroom, in reality, verification efforts are slowed and often stymied by certain factors. The first major factor that slows down the news verification process is working under time pressure (Thomson *et al*., 2020). Another limitation is the existence of the possibility of false information getting past the verification filter imposed at the newsroom level due to the journalist's inability to verify false information. The results of a study conducted by Himma-Kadakas and Ojamets (2022) investigating journalists' debunking ability suggest that although conventional methods such as checking sources, critical thinking, and knowledge of topics outside the journalistic sphere might be sufficient to debunk false information, a lack of time, blind trust in authorities, and what appears to be the official channel of communication might favor the publication of false information.

### What Are the Challenges in a Small Newsroom?

Journalism is in a constant state of change. According to a report published by Pew Research Center (2021), newsroom employability decreased by 26% from 2008 to 2020. At the same time, digital news platforms' employee numbers increased by 144% over the same period. This phenomenon is also visible in Europe, where in Switzerland the number of employees in the media sector decreased by a quarter from 2011 to 2019, as journalists migrate to other lucrative professions due to the financial stress felt at the newsroom level (Romy & Turuban, 2022). It is inevitable that the work environment will change, while the problems encountered in traditional newsrooms will also migrate to digital news platforms, so these challenges need to be highlighted. A report by Radcliffe *et al*. (2017) that includes responses from 420 employees in local newsrooms across America reveals the following four main workplace issues:

- Declining staffing in newsrooms: 59% of respondents indicated that the number of employees has consistently declined since 2014;
- Recruitment: Attracting new employees is discouraged by bad pay, long hours, and reduced opportunities for career advancement;
- Work culture: A large proportion of respondents indicated that they work more than 50 hours per week;
- Job security: 51% of respondents said they felt insecure about their job, and another 29% were neutral about job security.

The pressure to publish ahead of the competition increases the speed of news production while newsrooms are understaffed to cover stories (Korunka *et al*., 2015), in some cases, editors are prepared to sacrifice the quality of stories to publish ahead of the competition (Reinardy, 2010), and to save time, journalists proceed to publishing PR materials and press releases (Reich & Godler, 2015).

### The Working Environment in Romania

The overall perception of time pressure in the newsroom is different for each geographical area. To take the pulse of this phenomenon, Harro-Loit and Josephi (2019) conducted a comprehensive study comprising 63 countries and over 17,000 respondents. Journalists who responded to the questionnaire could be grouped into three different clusters expressing the level of time pressure; the first cluster signifying high pressure where working hours increased, and research time decreased, the second cluster medium pressure, and the third low pressure. According to the survey results, over 54% of Romanian journalists are in the first cluster, followed by 18.5% in the second and just over 27% in the third, indicating low time pressure. Considering the percentage of journalists in the first two clusters (72.7%), it is clear that the working environment is a stressful one, where the pressure to publish prevails over checking stories in advance.

Following on from this pre-pandemic perspective, this paper will present the findings of a report by the Centre for Independent Journalism (2021) on the obstacles faced by newsrooms, from money received from the government to declining freedom of expression. As Lupu (2021) writes in the report's preamble, the year 2020 which marked the onset of the pandemic split the Romanian media landscape in two, on the one hand, some struggled and made sustained efforts to inform the public and on the other, some got rich and turned the pandemic into a media spectacle. The losers of the pandemic were the local press itself, because after the state of emergency came in, small businesses cut the advertising costs from which small press organs often operate and direct newspaper sales dropped to almost zero. The local press proved its necessity during election campaigns or even when it had to report at the onset of a state of emergency. Further reasons why local journalism suffers are listed, namely, it is the competition with the public media that comes with high salaries and quiet life, black or gray money, pseudo-news websites, and dependence on money from politicians that comes with editorial restrictions (Lupu, 2021). These problems were exacerbated by the lack of workers to sell the newspapers at the kiosks, as many of the vendors were retirees, and the delay in the delivery of subscriptions with the Romanian Post Office by several weeks. Local newspaper publishers reported a 70–90% drop in revenue. In response to falling revenues of the press organisms, the government came up with an advertising fund to help the press out of this economic crisis, an idea heavily criticized as damaging freedom of expression. The main beneficiaries of this measure were the media trusts that could have overcome the crisis, local radio stations, and TV stations without audiences or political control (Lupu, 2021). It is safe to say that the problems highlighted in 2019 were exacerbated in the two pandemic years, and the financial measures taken by the government only reached a few beneficiaries and came at a high editorial price, with the fiscal stimulus coming at the same time as the election campaigns. Some media outlets in Romania refused government money in a double election year (Tăpălagă, 2021).

## Conclusion

This paper succinctly discusses the main differences between verification and fact-checking, focusing on the importance of verifying information before publication. The moment before the information reaches the public is a crucial one, which unfortunately due to lack of time, stress, and work under pressure, is either omitted or done superficially. Although there are disinformation agents where there is no question of verifying information, the aim of which is to disinform, there are also times when the press is a participant in its dissemination. The local press is important because people live in small communities, so information in their vicinity is often more important than national news. The importance of the local press is particularly apparent during local election campaigns, so a local media outlet that is not tied to municipal funding can make all the difference in an election race.

People are the main victims in a world where the local press disappears or is subservient to political interests. Further, it is necessary to make efforts to support quality journalism and to try to find new and more efficient practices for verifying information. The next research step in terms of the Romanian space is to survey local newsrooms for an in-depth understanding of how they operate and what their verification practices, sources of revenue, and long-term strategy are, specifically, whether they want to migrate to a full digital working environment in the future. There are clear signs that print media are in a continuing decline and digitization of newsrooms is an inevitable step, a shift to digital will not make the issues simply disappear.

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# Art in Times of War: The Multiple Roles Performing Arts Play during the War in Ukraine, and Their Communication Strategies in Reach for Peace

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**Abstract:** "Make art not war!" seems to be one of the most frequently mentioned slogans surfacing social media at present, during the current war between Russia and Ukraine. Next to the multiple humanitarian and social prompt reactions to the situation, performing arts are among the first industries to take a stand in the global reach for peace. Cultural institutions show one of the first and most visible reactions of solidarity within the cultural and creative industry (CCI), while opera companies across the globe send messages of amity and charitable appeals, thoroughly communicated through online platforms. Saddened by the war in Ukraine, opera artists join their talents and efforts for the common objectives of raising awareness and sensibility, engaging millions of social media followers, attracting donations for the refugees, as well as supporting fellow Ukrainian artists, during these difficult times. Music and dance once again transpire as a universal language – that can surpass ethnicity, culture, and divergent histories, in a plead for common understanding, empathy, and acceptance. In the current circumstances, this article pursues the actions and communication strategies of two world leading opera companies: *Opéra national de Paris* and *Teatro alla Scala di Milano*, in their common aim for peace. What role do performing arts play in such hostile times?; How do opera companies communicate their support of the delicate matter?; Which are the communication strategies used by them to voice their peaceful request? and How important is it for artists to take a stand for peace and solidarity? are the research questions guiding the current study. The research concludes with the key role online communication and social media have in this context and highlights the way performing arts surpass their artistic mission, as culture becomes an intercultural channel of communication.

**Keywords:** online communication, opera companies, performing arts, social media platforms.

## Introduction

The world has paused with shock and disbelief at the end of February 2022, when news about the recently started war between Russia and Ukraine emerged across all continents, raising concern about the dramatic effects it might bring worldwide. Shortly after the Coronavirus Pandemic has diminished its threat, the war in Ukraine has overshadowed society and all industries, once again, bringing serious concerns both on a political, as well as on a social level. Apart from the inevitable repercussions such battle contexts bring – upon the implicated countries and their people – serious warnings and disturbing dangers were projected on an international level, determining most countries and nations to react.

However, during these turbulent times, the humanitarian aspects seem to prevail over political issues, people all over the world, across all industries, organizations, and brands, showing their unanimous support and desire to help the Ukrainian people and all those affected by the war, while promoting peace. Among the most philanthropically involved industries, *performing arts* have become a highly visible and influential communication platform for peace, empathy, and solidarity.

A special participation is shown by the world's greatest opera houses and orchestras, which raised their voices, talents, and instruments in support of the people of Ukraine. Within the first week of war, music institutions and opera artists made a public statement of reconciliation, hope, and peace, warning against prejudice, and showing acceptance of all nations and people (Salazar, 2022a).

Performing arts and the opera genre activated solidarity campaigns worldwide, launched impressive fundraisings, benefit concerts, charity performances, and humanitarian aid. Thus, from artistic epicenters of society and a leading cultural sector, with internationally acclaimed artists and creatives, opera institutions now become a voice of reason, empathy, and world peace ambassadors. Once again, classical music and dance reconfirm their position as a *universal language* – that can surpass ethnicity and divergent histories.

It is in this context that the current paper intends to unpack the role and impact opera companies have in a war crisis, in their reach for peace and brotherhood. To do so, this study follows the actions and online communication strategies of two world leading opera companies: *Opéra national de Paris* and *Teatro alla Scala di Milano*, that were among the first ones to react and take a firm stand for peace, within the culture and creative industry.

These objectives are followed through four research questions, meant to lead us through the research process:

**RQ1.** What role do performing arts play in such hostile times?

**RQ2.** How do opera companies communicate their support on this delicate matter?

**RQ3.** Which are the communication strategies used by them to voice their peaceful request?

**RQ4.** How important is it for artists to take a stand for peace and solidarity?

The paper will answer them with the help of two qualitative content analyses conducted on Facebook, by studying the communication strategies of both opera companies mentioned above. The research concludes with the key role online communication has in this context and highlights the way performing arts and opera companies surpass their artistic mission, as *culture becomes an intercultural channel of communication*.

**Literature Review**

*Performing arts* represent a cultural and organizational structure that involves all art forms expressed through voice, instrumental music, movement, and dance implying and aesthetic dimension, that is performed by actors or artists, in order to provide entertainment that can be enjoyed by the general public (Hamilton, 2022)combining universal and historically conditioned features. The article is in two parts. The first is less historical, although it aims to characterize the modern concepts of art and entertainment. In this part, the article steers a middle way between the mod-ernist view that art and entertainment are mutually exclusive, and the postmodernist view that they are indistinguishable. It also rejects the modernist assimilation of entertainment and popular art. More specifically, Section 1, Against postmodernism, argues that entertainment aims to give pleasure or delight by amusing, exciting or otherwise diverting the audience, requiring from them little or no concentrated effort; art, in contrast, has a conscious aesthetic end and richly rewards aesthetic attention. Entertainment is consistently audience-centred, while art has a more complex relation to an audience. Section 2, Against modernism, argues that art and entertainment are not polar opposites but complementary and interpenetrating concepts and practices. Pure entertainment is art only in the sense of skill, but the highest art can entertain-there are artist-entertainers. Section 3 discusses how it is common misconception that entertainment is popular art; not all 'popular art' is pure entertainment-the category of artist-entertainers is essential-and not all entertainment is popular. The second part of the article is more directly historical; it holds that the categories of art and entertainment are not eternal, and one must consider their historical contexts and development. Sections 4 and 5 considers how the modern system of the arts, crafts, entertainment and sports form a loosely connected conceptual system. Like art, entertainment existed before the modern era, but not as an overarching, self-conscious concept. The article thus rests on, while developing, Kristeller's thesis of the modern system of the arts through four further claims: (i. The performing arts sector includes a series of elements: actors, artists or dancers, event organizer, audience, concept event, character of the event, time, frequency, duration, and the artistic level of the mentioned event.

Performing arts are highlighted, among all other art sectors, precisely by the direct and live nature of their performances, which makes the audience a witness and a part of the creative process and staging of the events. Thus, authors and researchers of this field consider a performance to be "the ensemble of creative elements and actions that capture the attention and interest of audiences, impress and generate public reactions throughout an artistic expression" (The Romanian Academy Dictionary, 2016, p. 1145). The past decade has co-opted the term of *performance* to media culture, looking to identify and promote public artistic actions and entertainment (Apple, 2020).

As part of the Creative and Cultural Industries (CCI), and regarded as one of their major sectors – *performing arts* is considered to be thriving both on an artistic and symbolic lever (Lluis Bonet & Hector Schargorodsky, 2017), as well as on a financial one –, as they are currently reporting an annual international income of $389.1 billion, while currently representing 3% of the global GDP (EY Consulting, 2021) – a noticeable growth from the numbers in 2015, when the cultural sectors attracted $208 billion. Performing arts also provides 30 million jobs now, which points out a considerable growth rate by 7.34% from 2018. Impressed by these numbers, experts predict that CCI will reach the value of 10% GDP in a four-year time (Giovinazzo & Williams, 2019).

Not only are they attracting impressive revenues, but performing arts are also highly regarded due to the cultural tourism they stimulate, opera companies determining a major part of this sector (Opera Base, 2022). Also, their continuous innovation ability, cultural heritage, and symbolic values attract millions of audiences with every occasion (Pellegrin-Boucher & Roy, 2019).

*Opera companies:* Within this generic outlook upon performing arts, the *opera genre* and the institutions that present it are an essential component of the CCI, achieving international fame and importance. Opera is considered a "unique blend of poetry, drama, and music [...] holding music and theater in high regard as both art forms and means of entertainment" (Sadie & Langridge, 2017), while it defines the sole and most complex art form that combines music, acting, ballet and dance, choreography, stage direction, and scenography as part of the visual arts. Since its beginnings in the 16th century, in Italy – where noblemen and aristocrats praised it while naming it the supreme art, or "divine art" (it. *Arte divina*) –, opera has had a fascinating and rapid spread across Europe and would become a global phenomenon by the 18th century (Pottinger, 2018).

Its image has been memorably portrayed by composers like W. A. Mozart, G. Verdi, G. Rossini, G. Donizetti, G. Bizet, R. Strauss, P. I. Tchaikovsky and many more, whose names have been powerfully linked to the world's first and most prestigious opera houses: Opéra national de Paris (1669), Royal Opera House London (1732), Bolshoi Theater din Rusia (1776), Teatro alla Scala di Milano (1779), Bolshoi Theater (1825), Wiener Staatsoper (1861). Although they were among the first historical theaters to create and share art and music, these institutions continue to be just as appreciated and successful today, managing to bring together their treasured cultural heritage with more modern and visionary projects.

The last two centuries have offered opera houses a far larger audience than the initial society elites, managing to attract – through diverse and innovative performances, as well as lively communication strategies – publics of all age ranges, who are presented with an *art accessible to all* (Tarondeau & Agid, 2010). This newly gained popularity reflects in the ascending performance numbers, which maintain classical titles among the most admired and trending operas, at present: *La Bohéme* (G. Puccini), *Carmen* (G. Bizet), and

*La Traviata* (G. Verdi) are performances to each manage to reach up to 1,000 yearly performances (Gillis, 2017), presented to over 400,000 yearly spectators per title (Opera Base, 2022). It is precisely this great interest in the opera genre that encouraged a *globalization of opera* (Abfalter, 2017), artists like Renée Fleming, Placido Domingo, or Roberto Alagna are world renowned singers, constantly invited to perform on the greatest lyrical stages, magnetically attracting the international public and immediate sold out performances. The greatest opera companies have thus offered a new meaning to *cultural tourism*, by attracting audiences from across the globe at Teatro alla Scala di Milano, the Paris Opera House, Wienner Staatsoper, or Metropolitan Opera New York, which continue to be regarded as artistic epicenters, constantly visited by opera enthusiasts (Van der Borg & Russo, 2005). It is precisely this passion and long-standing legacy that determines these opera companies to set their program with five or six years in advance, highlighting their star-singers and allowing the public to book their favorite performances in advance, while eagerly looking forward to those unique stagings.

Opera houses achieved an even more profound significance during the past two years, during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Shocked by the global lockdown of 2020, as many other industries directly affected by that crisis, opera companies quickly reacted by transferring their entire artistic activities online, which they have communicated and promoted through creative resilience strategies. The major European lyrical houses were the first to promptly launch the new virtual form of opera, by creating a wide and varied cultural program, including: famous performance recordings broadcasted online; live streamed interviews with opera and ballet celebrities; virtual tours of the oldest and most prestigious opera houses, online musical games and special educative session for children and the young public; or even live streamed rehearsals with the companies' ballet ensembles, orchestras, and lead singers. These immediate reactions and very inspired resilience strategies attracted the international public who could at least witness and actively participate, as online users, to the creative and artistic process of their famous opera houses, otherwise hardly accessible to them throughout the years, on an economic and geographic level. The great success this creative industry captured during the pandemic impressed The United Nations, UNESCO, and The World Intellectual Property Organization, which praised the CCI as one of the main industries to help people stay united emotionally and socially during the worse Covid-19 intervals, precisely through their online creative projects (Vecco *et al*., 2022). The public's post-pandemic longing for live performances was reflected in major incomes reached by the main European opera companies, which The European Union and The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development now consider to be among the main cultural institutions that will help the continent's post-Covid economic recovery (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2020). Culture is now regarded as the "social concrete of the post-Covid-19 world, while art has a cathartic power that will accompany the post-pandemic society on its way to resilience", as D. Sassoli, President of the European Parliament, affirmed (EY Consulting, 2021). It is not at all surprising that UNESCO has declared the first year of post-Covid recovery, 2021, to be “The International Creative Economy Year for Sustainable Development”, as the culture and creative industries (CCI) earning $2,250 billiard, while recapturing their initial force and international cultural and economic impact. The current year, 2022 (UNESCO, 2022), has already reached the promising value of $3 billion, reconfirming the power of CCI and opera companies – a major component of the creative industries. The world’s most celebrated opera houses cherish their brand identities as well as their secular heritage, perpetually updating their image, artistic perspectives, and communication strategies with the large public (Bonet & Schargorodsky, 2017; Scheff & Kotler, 1996).

## Online Communication

A central place and importance in the communication strategies of opera houses is occupied by the online component. These institutions were among the first ones within the CCI to acknowledge the crucial and vital role digital media plays in the longevity and power of a *brand identity* that wants to be perceived as constantly contemporary and modern. Thus, the European opera houses were among the first to implement well-structured and constantly sustained online communication strategies, in the early 2000s, having created for themselves the image of innovative, digitalized cultural brands. The online presence of cultural brands should be based on the same principles as their classical communication strategy: the definition of their *core* and brand essence – through the mission, vision and values; and stating their *brand position* and *emotion*, by also differentiating them from the rest of the CCI in the public’s perception (Abrudan & Balaban, 2009).

The digital revolution has decisively redefined the image of opera companies, regarded as some of the oldest cultural brands in the world, that have been given a new artistic and social meaning, new means of interaction, production, distribution, and cultural consumption (Bonet & Schargorodsky, 2017), thanks to the online platforms to which they adapted. Authors like Pellegrin-Boucher and Roy (2019) consider the culture and creative industries as some of the best and most suitable sectors for the development of digital technology. This offers cultural brands a much closer interaction with their publics, as well as a wider perspective upon the audiences’ needs, desires, and interests, while inviting spectators to become online co-creators, directly involved in the creative process of the institutions. This intensifies the entire artistic experience, both for the opera representatives, as well as for the public, reunited not just inside the performance hall, but in virtual communities and in front of virtual stages, as well (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016). The status of *virtual co-creators* that online users reach through digital media (Balaban & Racz, 2020) has become an essential part of what authors call *Culture 3.0* – a model launched by Sacco (2011), who studied precisely the impressive evolution the culture’s international image and popularity have reached once the public was free to access and share online content. Authors consider that this *artistic partnership* between artists and online audiences fulfils the cultural experience, both on a symbolic level, as well as on a social one. This will ensure the long-lasting success and fame of opera companies, as new media and the digital experiences offer these institutions a modern and innovative image among their own industry (Mutibwa, 2019).

### Social Media Platforms

A fundamental component of an opera house's online communication strategy is earned by social media, defined as "a group of Internet-based applications, that build on the ideological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). This content is published on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, Pinterest, or YouTube, with an important popularity among international audiences, which impacts both users across the world, as well as the image and identity of organizations and brands of all industries (Kaplan, 2015). Social media thus generates and facilitates what specialists call Electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM), offering online users notable power upon online content, with a multiplied speed and a continuous evolution and diversification of tools and options (Lee & Youn, 2009; Predergast & Ko, 2010; Rothschild, 2019; Smironva *et al*., 2019; Trusov *et al*., 2009). Another important aspect about promoting a brand through social media is that it brings along the considerable advantage of segmenting the target audiences by geographic, demographic, and psychological characteristics, having the benefit of content flexibility and real-time feedback from the consumers (Balaban, 2021a). Currently, *Facebook* is the largest and most popular social media platform in the world, as it reaches 2,934 billion monthly users (Meta, 2022; Statista, 2022b). Greatly appreciated by all industries, as well as the cultural and creative sector, Facebook offers brands the possibility of informing and interacting with their public, increasing their popularity and brand loyalty. This attractive platform created in 2004 provides brands with a friendly virtual environment where they can publish images, video content as well as simple text posts, which they can also personalize with tags, hashtags, creating a more focused and attractive image and content for their audiences.

The likes and comments users can leave on these posts are of great importance, by permitting and encouraging their feedback, as well as stimulating interaction and engagement. Another important Facebook option used by organizations, institutions, and brands – on their official Facebook page – is that of online shops linked to their account, which facilitates promotion of their products to an international and diverse online public, achieving great benefits for low prices, while significantly helping brands to evolve. Communication specialists and authors appreciate Facebook to be the platform that includes users with the widest age ranges, thus helping brands to reach all types of target-audiences (Bonet & Schargorodsky, 2017; De Veirman *et al*., 2017; Goldsmith & Clark, 2008). Platforms like Instagram (with a current number of 1,386 billiard monthly active users), YouTube (2,1 billion monthly users), as well as the quickly raising TikTok (1 billion users) are also thriving platforms with great popularity and interests both from the general public, as well as from worldwide brands wishing to be seen and heard online (Statista, 2022a; Statista, 2022b; TikTok, 2022). The current study is concentrated on the communication strategy that the two mentioned opera companies from Paris and Milan apply on Facebook, which is currently their most popular social media platform. As this paper will reveal, Facebook not only offers them a space for promoting their artistic products and performances, but also a means of sharing their core values, visions, and resilience messages in this ever-changing world.

## Methodology

The research design of the current paper is structured on the main objective of pursuing the actions and communication strategies of opera companies during the war in Ukraine. The study is guided by and aims to answer four research questions:

**RQ1.** What role do performing arts play in such hostile times?

**RQ2.** How do opera companies communicate their support on this delicate matter?

**RQ3.** Which are the communication strategies used by them to voice their peaceful request?

**RQ4.** How important is it for artists to take a stand for peace and solidarity?

Given the unforeseen context and novelty of the topic – and, thus, the lack of materials and earlier studies concerning the response of opera institutions to the war situation in Ukraine, shortly after its emerging in late February 2022 – the author finds it best for the current study to be conducted through the qualitative research method of content analysis. Qualitative research is appreciated by authors for their ability to engage in a complex process of analysis and understanding (Creswell, 2013), uses rich and detailed techniques aiming to describe all communication content objectively, systematically, in a detailed and consistent manner (Berelson, 1952 cited by Chelcea, 2022), while approaching both its visible as well as its latent aspects (Chelcea, 2022).

The two world leading opera houses representative for the CCI, Opéra national de Paris and Teatro alla Scala di Milano, were selected for being among the first opera institutions to react to the war in Ukraine and take a public and very visible position for peace. The analyses were conducted on their Facebook official accounts, which are their main and most popular social media platforms (Statista, 2022b). Our study was conducted in the time frame of February 25 and March 31, 2022, as this is the immediate period after the war began and it represents a peak of the conflict and war crisis, to which all industries reacted. In order to achieve well-structured, specific, and easy to compare data, both content analyses followed a series of nine *analysis categories,* applied to The Opera in Paris, as well as La Scala Theater in Milan*:* Analyzed Period; Total number of posts; Number of posts dedicated to the war in Ukraine; Messages on the topic of war; Tone used in the posts dedicated to war; Keywords used in those posts; Total number of likes attracted by the peace-themed Facebook posts; their Total number of comments; and Total number of shares.

The results of the two content analysis highlighted the prompt and implicated reaction the mentioned opera houses had to the war situation in Ukraine, through their main social media platform. Their communication strategies on the official Facebook accounts showed the impact the classical art sector can have in such crisis situations, uplifting both spirits, as well as peace messages to the international public.

## Results

***Opéra national de Paris.*** One of the oldest and most appreciated opera companies in the world since its inauguration in 1669, it is renowned for its international visibility, repertoire, artists, and public. The French institution is associated with its two grandiose venues, Palais Garnier and Opéra Bastille, which host daily performances for 4,800 spectators per evening, while 20% of their daily audience is represented by foreign spectators that consider The Paris Opera to be a main attraction and destination of cultural tourism (Robert, 2019). The official Facebook social media account of Opéra national de Paris currently has 496K Facebook followers (Opéra national de Paris, 2022), and thus a very important and visible online presence, both in its own industry, as well as among the international cultural brands.

During the analyzed period mentioned in the methodology, the Paris Opera made a total of 45 Facebook posts, among which 11 posts were dedicated to the war situation in Ukraine. I intend to showcase and detail the main posts on this topic, as the following ones either reiterate or share the same announcements and messages of solidarity. The institution's first post on this topic was published on the first morning after the conflict has excaladed, on February 25, 2022, showing an immediate and involved reaction to this European crisis. Subsequently, the French Opera displayed the blue-and-yellow Ukrainian flag on the facade of Opéra Bastille, its modern performance venue, as a symbol of solidarity and a powerful message of international aknowledgement and wish for peace.

The French institution's official war-related public statement was published on Facebook on March 2, 2022. This highlights the opera company's *solidarity* with the people of Ukraine and all Ukrainian artists in need of shelter and help. The institution opted for a well-balanced tone, not accusing Russian people, but instead highlighting the important role Russian composers and artists had on the classical repertoire, passed from generation to generation across the world. Opéra national de Paris shows its appreciation for this legacy, as well as for the vital role it plays in the company's heritage. The French Opera affirms that this will not change, it will still cherish and promote Russian composers and artists, but the Opera management will estrange itself from any artists who encourage the war. This official statement (Opéra national de Paris officiel, 2022), issued by Alexander

Neef, General Manager of the French Opera company, attracted 3,5K likes, 250 comments of solidarity and appreciation, as well as 582 shares.

Shortly after this Facebook declaration, the Opera house posts an official announcement according to which the Paris Opera also took in residence the entire *Ensemble of the Kyiv City Ballet* reuniting thirty Ukrainian dancers, which happened to be on a France performance tour when the war began in their country (Opéra national de Paris, 2022b). Thus, the Paris Opera company instantly showed solidarity with fellow artists and offered them places to stay, as well as a stage to rehearse and perform for as long as needed (Jackson, 2022). Confronted with the dramatic situation, the Kyiv's Ballet Director and principal dancers declared:

> "We were not prepared morally, physically or emotionally [...] The fact that we are now in France is pure luck. The situation is terrible [...] Now every performance is a small victory for us, here. We are very grateful to be able to share art with the French people, we want to give something back. To dance is probably the best thing we can do right now, to share art and to share Ukrainian culture with the world" (Brut UK, 2022).

Due to this coincidence, the Paris Opera decided to organize a first war awareness event and solidarity performance dedicated to the people of Ukraine, together with their Kiev ballet dancers. Entitled *Soirée exceptionnelle avec le Kiev City Ballet et des danseurs de l'Opéra national de Paris*, the "exceptional evening", as it was considered by opera critics, raised both international awareness, as well as donations for all war victims, while its dedicated Facebook post reached a number of 4,6K likes, 1,2K shares, and 255 supporting comments (Théatre du Châtelet, 2022). Shortly after, impressed by the impact its initial acts for peace had, the French opera house declared in a later Facebook post that it will symbolically dedicate all performances presented in March, 2022 to the people of Ukraine (Culture Prime, 2022).

The last fundraising event organized by the Paris Opera during the analyzed period is a Concert for Peace (fr. *Concert pour la paix*), scheduled at the end of MaMarch022. The public's reaction was reflected in a full house at the Palais Garnier venue, as the event brought together the entire Ballet Ensemble, soloists, Choir, Orchestra, and special guest artists from Ukraine. *Solidarity* and *peace* were the event's key-words accentuated on Facebook as well as in the French press (Gault, 2022), as the opera house affirmed that all the involved artists would participate without payment with all proceeds being donated to the Alliances Urgences Collective in Ukraine, which brings together six national and international NGOs (CARE, Médecins du Monde, Action contre la fain, Handicap International, Plan International, and Solidarités International) in their common strive for Ukrainian peace (Opéra national de Paris, 2022c). The institution's involvement and thorough Facebook campaigns were rewarded with the raising of 300.000 EUR (Salazar, 2022), in support of the war victims. The Facebook post communicating this success reached 6,5K likes, 110 comments, and 2,9K shares by users from across the world, impressed with the event, as well as the involvement of the French artists (Opéra national de Paris, 2022d). All the eleven Facebook posts that the Paris Opera concentrated around the Ukrainian war are followed by three significant hashtags: #pourlapaix, #notowar, #westandwithUkraine.

The humanitarian performances held by the French institution have all begun with the tuning of the Ukrainian national anthem, a symbolic gesture adopted by the international opera companies involved in this solidarity objective. I have thus encountered a series of articles in classical music publications and magazines which highlight this common message of peace, in performance hall across the continents, showing their powerful message: "from Paris to New York, the Ukrainian hymn resonates in the entire world. Demonstrations by the music world of solidarity [...] have included passionate speeches and moving musical moments such as performing the Ukrainian national anthem prior to concerts" (Gramophone. The World's Best Classical Music Reviews, 2022). These French, Italian, and American projects have managed to stimulate a series of similar operistic and choreographic events hosted by other international performing arts institutions throughout March 2022, raising financial aid, awareness, and amity (Culture Prime, 2022).

All messages highlighted by the French Opera house during the research interval use a moderate yet firm approach to this matter, calling for peace, brotherhood, and understanding among the two fighting countries. All these pacifying messages are connected to performances which hold a subliminal peace message, while raising awareness about the distressing situation. The tone used throughout the analyzed posts is an empathic one, showing generosity and care towards those affected by the war, as well as advancing faith and optimism in its ending. The Parisian Opera constantly uses a series of powerful concepts on Facebook, which we consider to be key words during its war communication process and online strategy: *peace, solidarity, friendship, together,* and *help*. All of these messages seem to have a great response and engagement from the institution's followers, who appreciate the war posts with a total number of 69K likes. The opera house also attracted a number of 8,394 shares to its eleven posts peace promoting peace, as well as 1,451 comments from international users, showing their admiration for the institution and its peace initiatives, while also showing support for the people of Ukraine that they encourage in their comments and directly help through donations. Among these comment, I also noticed emotional interventions of Ukrainian online users, who thank for the French institution's values and actions.

***Teatro alla Scala di Milano.*** Looked upon as the central opera institution in Europe since its inauguration year of 1778, it is associated with the most prolific composers and artists of all times, like: although it treasures its cultural heritage above all, the Milan lyric theater also has a modern and innovative spirit, promoting visionary and atypical projects and performances, in its desire to stay relevant both for the Italian public – known for its profound love for opera – as well as for the international audience, who represents over 50% of the theater's early public (Li Cauli, 2017). The Italian opera theater currently has 424K Facebook followers and a considerable reach and engagement (Teatro alla Scala di Milano, 2022).

During the interval of our content analysis, Teatro all Scala made a total of 62 Facebook posts, among which 14 posts were dedicated to the war situation in Ukraine. This study concentrates upon the main messages in these posts, and highlights them in the following analysis. Similar to the Paris Opera, the Italian theater reacts rapidly to the war crisis, after it occured. La Scala's first post on this theme was published on February 27, 2022, expressing a firm position and belief in peace, as the best and sole solution for a prospering world. On this occasion, La Scala also displays the *peace flag* on the led screen across its entire stage, which will continue to be projected during the following concerts, as a constant symbolic message for understanding and unity shared with the entire public (Teatro alla Scala di Milano, 2022a).

The opera company's public statement on the war situation is published on Facebook a day later, on February 28, 2022, through the following compelling message:

> "Us, as theater and city of Milan, demonstrate in all contexts the refusal of war, and the pacifist belief in understanding and reconciliation [...] we should all think at the fragile nature of humanity and find a solution to peace. Let us respond to war with its opposite: union, a feeling of solidarity that we hope to transpire through our art. Culture is designed to bring us all closer" (Gramilano, 2022a).

Next to the messages of peace promoted through Facebook post, the famous Italian theater also organized two *charity event and performances* dedicated to the people of Ukraine. The first one, a *Concert for Peace* – like what we noticed at The Paris Opera in the earlier analysis – was announced and advertised through a first social media post on March 11, 2022. "Concerto per la Pace" is declared to be a means for the theater and its artists "to express their firm condemnation of the war and their solidarity with the victims of blind and senseless violence". Their solidarity and belief also transpires through the decision of all La Scala artists involved in the event to perform for free, while all the proceeds raised from the concert were donated to the Italian Red Cross to further help the Ukrainian victims (Teatro alla Scala di Milano, 2022b). This post attracted the interest and likes of 6K users, 854 comments, and 545 shares from followers appreciating and supporting the theater's vision about the humanitarian crisis.

The second event dedicated by the Milan Theater to the people of Ukraine was, just as in the case of The Paris Opera, a ballet gala. *The Pace for Peace Gala*, presented in mid-March 2022, featured La Scala's principal dancers, as well as a former principal dancer at the Bolshoi Theater, precisely showing the uniting power of art. Like the Opera in Paris, La Scala is impartial and does not blame or wish to cancel Russian artists, it solely condemns the acts of violence and the concept of war. Furthermore, they believe and affirm the entire international artistic community to be a circle of friendship, which surpasses any national or political considerations (Gramilano, 2022a). Their belief, expressed publicly through the mentioned La Scala's Facebook posts, states the following: "Dance has the power to move, to unite [...] the rich history of classical dance and its traditions are deeply linked to Ukrainian and Russian cultures. We will use the strength of our passion [...] to help Ukraine and show the world that we remain united for peace" (Giornale della danza, 2022; Gramilano, 2022a). This message was appreciated by Scala's international online audience with 1,1K likes, 407 comments, and 1,147 shares. As a response to the visible support and involvement users showed the company, La Scala expressed its appreciation for "an overwhelming wave of help and support", as the theater affirmed in a later Facebook post. This thought is continued by the opera company's CEO in a later interview, by encouraging people across the world to reflect upon this modern day tragedy of war, and "continue this incredible example of humanity and human kindness" (Gramilano, 2022a) that artists have given through their own artistic initiatives.

Both the concert and the gala were held under the #milanoaiutaucraina hashtag, representing the humanitarian project with the same name, which is a donation fund created by the city of Milan for all charity initiatives dedicated to the Ukrainian victims (Teatro alla Scala di Milano, 2022c). This unanimous activation for peace is also supported by other legendary opera artists, like Placido Domingo and Riccardo Muti, whose names are closely linked to La Scala Theater granted their numerous collaborations with the Italian house, and who also express their admiration for such humanitarian initiatives, as they become symbolic ambassadors of these projects and expand their thoughts and hopes of a more united world (Opera Life, 2022).

Additionally, the same conductor R. Muti conducted a concert in Chicago, where he extended the Italian message of hope and peace through an emotional discourse in which he dedicated the performance of Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 (also known as the symphonic version of "Ode to Joy", a piece dedicated to the victory of brotherhood) to this ideal of peace, preceded by the conductor's spoken message:

> "We make music that means joy and peace. But we cannot play this Symphony dedicated to the joy and brotherhood without thinking about the people of Ukraine [...] we will thing at that moment that joy without peace cannot exist. And so, I hope that from this wonderful hall, from the chorus, from the orchestra, from you, a message should arrive to all people not only in Ukraine, but the world, are creating violence, hate, and a strange need for war. We are against all that" (Chicago Symphony Orchestra, 2022).

Along with the two special benefit events it has hosted, La Scala also affirms that it symbolically dedicated all its March 2022 performances to the people of Ukraine, as musical message of peace.

Under the same sign of hope, both The Paris Opera and La Scala Theater, alongside the Chicago Symphony, the Metropolitan Opera, and other Austrian and German orchestras and opera companies joined a common initiative that brought them together, via Facebook live streaming, in singing the Ukrainian National Anthem, which was broadcasted on the official Facebook accounts of all the involved institutions (Wiener Konzerthaus, 2022).

All the Facebook posts mentioned above are followed by a series of symbolic hashtags: #MilanoaiutaUcraina (Eng., *Milano helps Ukraine*); #LaMusicaNonDivide (transl. *Music does not divide*); and #artforukraine, highlighting the company's plea for unity and acceptance.

Concomitantly, the Milan theater also expressed its values and visions about solidarity and brotherhood in an article published in the theater's official magazine – *La Scala Magazine* – which was also shared through a Facebook post, citing: "let us respond to war with its opposite: union, a feeling of solidarity that we hope to transpire through our art" (La Scala Magazine, 2022).

Applying this precise belief, the theater also announces through a further Facebook post that it will open the next Season 22/23 with a Russian opera production "Boris Godunov", thus showing acceptance and cultural appreciation (Gramilano, 2022b). The Italian theater approaches the situation of Russian artists with understanding and realism, considering they are not to be blamed or held responsible for the political situation. The company's CEO, Dominique Meyer, decided to cast the world famous Russian soprano Anna Netrebko for a special La Scala performance during May 2022 – opposite to most decisions within the opera world, that decided to temporarily stop any collaborations with the singer, shortly after the war outbreak –; however, the Italian theater reacted solely according to artistic and talent considerations. Aside from this decision, La Scala also decided to include a series of Russian operas in the new Season's program – which the Italian genre truly appreciates and treasures within its own repertoire (Gramilano, 2022c).

## Conclusions

Despite the rather few online materials published within the first trimester of 2022 discussing the war outbreak in Ukraine from an artistic implication and perspective, this paper intended to find, highlight, and understand the actions that the opera sector took and their impact as ambassadors of peace. The findings represent a primary perspective upon this topic, as it followed the communication strategies of two European leading opera companies, Opéra national de Paris and Teatro alla Scala di Milano, which were among the first to voice their opinion on the humanitarian situation concerning the entire world, on all levels. By studying the communication plan of the two institutions, we reached the answers to the four research questions which guided this paper.

Opera companies have proved to play an essential role in humanitarian crisis situations. Their prompt reaction to the war situation in Ukraine attracted the attention, action and help of the public, as they become ambassadors of peace. These conclusions observed through the study of the French and Italian opera companies have therefore answered the first research question (**RQ1**) concerning the role that performing arts play in such hostile times. **RQ2** finds its answer in the amplified social media strategy constructed by these institutions, which connect art performances, public statements, and benefit events with the message of reconciliation, solidarity, unity, acceptance, empathy, avoiding prejudice. Through their Facebook communication strategy, the analyzed institutions managed to not only convey these messages to their own online fans and followers, but to further their humanitarian beliefs to an international audience, art enthusiasts from around the world, as well as other institutions, organizations, and corporations, or NGOs, that can – and some of them actually did – raise and articulate their own voices, actions, and initiatives in search of peace. **RQ3** is elucidated by the digital media research, which helped notice the concentration of war-related messages the two studied institutions promoted through their social media platforms, as Facebook continues to be the most popular social account for both the Parisian, as well as the Italian opera company. The platform offers them a space for direct, firm, and easily viral messages. Complementary to these, both institutions rely on their official websites, where their benefit performances are detailed in terms of artistic programs, casts, and donations for the war victims. **RQ4** found its answer in the numerous related articles and interviews promoted by the two analyzed companies on their Facebook accounts. They all indicate the vital importance artists' voices and involvement have, as internationally known figures with impactful statements for good. The study stresses the belief that artists should not be asked to take a political stand, but rather show humanitarian solidarity. As the Opera in Paris and Theater in Milan affirm, art should never cancel Russian opera culture, which must remain just as appreciated and promoted in the future. Art does not divide. As Teatro alla Scala earnestly remarks. Music and dance can become a powerful and universal language of understanding, that can rise above bombs and politics, bringing people together in empathy and resilience. Through the work and collaboration of the entire artistic community, all these initiatives and actions can contribute by helping those in need, understanding, and reconnecting people.

Due to the limits involved by this paper, as the study focused on the immediate period after the Russian invasion, this theme has the potential of being continued through future research with even more detailed studies, both on a qualitative as well as a quantitative level, to see the evolution of these artistic initiatives and their impact upon the culture and creative industry on the long term.

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# Storytelling and City Branding in the Approach of a Large-scale Cultural Project. Case Study: Timișoara European Capital of Culture 2023

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**Abstract:** This theoretical introduction to an analysis of the image crisis of the city of Timișoara from 2016 until the implementation of the title of European Capital of Culture aims to analyze the conceptual perception of the visual and identity unity of cultural operators and actors involved in the process of developing a large-scale cultural project, with the case study of the cross-cutting communication project for 2021, in the run-up to the implementation of the title Timișoara European Capital of Culture 2023. In this introductory study, the author aimed to investigate whether the lack of an initial conceptualization, but especially the absence of a visual identity and branding, fostered a breeding ground for internal and external conflicts. In this sense, the attempt to stabilize the communication relationship between the cultural operators involved in the project, the public administration and the consuming public revealed an unexpected phenomenon. The lack of explicit transmission of basic concepts, but especially the elliptical branding toolkit, fostered confusion and lack of coherence in the delivery of the main message. Using the interview method through a brief analysis of a set of interviews conducted with several cultural operators involved in the process, the author processed cultural management concepts that can simplify future procedures related to the implementation of large-scale cultural projects. Using structured interviews as a research method, a thematic analysis was conducted on a set of 10 interviews conducted between November 2021 and January 2022.

**Keywords:** brand, city branding, consumerism, cultural product, storytelling.

## Introduction

In the context of a dynamic environment in terms of digitalization and changing circumstances, cultural space has become a consumer product with specific management requirements. Regarding big scale cultural products as Timișoara European Capital of Culture 2023, there were some specific issues that the author identified during a one-year research (2021–2022), while working with different organizations (Beta Timișoara Biennial of Architecture, Meta Space, Impuls Festival organized by the French Cultural Institute in Timișoara, Basca Theatre, and Timișoara 2023 Association) in planning and implementing different communication strategies for the main event planned for 2023. While interviewing the different cultural operators and cultural managers, the author aims to identify indicators that could justify the lack of coherence in implementing cultural events, in order for the public to understand that all of these organizations' work is embedded in the main project: Timișoara European Capital of Culture 2023. Therefore, the two hypotheses involved in the research are the following:

**H1.** The organizations involved in a project lack a coherent storytelling strategy;

**H2.** The lack of human resources makes the projects hard to implement in feasible terms.

To link these two hypotheses to the undergirding theoretical framework, I further explain the terms that are useful in understanding the overall concept of Timișoara Capital of Culture: the cultural product, storytelling in public relations, and city branding. Far from being exhaustive, this approach shall be monitored in the following months to re-evaluate or deepen the proposed topics for explaining the Timișoara European Capital of Culture 2023 phenomenon.

## Theoretical Framework

As Fillis (2006) argued, consumption in the arts and cultural sectors is different from other types of products:

> "Consumption of art differs from many other products, aesthetic pleasure plays an important role in this process. Art is seen as a carrier of a variety of qualitative, intangible messages that conventional marketing frameworks cannot interpret. Another differentiating factor between the visual arts and other market sectors is that art, as a product, has little or no functional or utilitarian value" (Fillis, 2006).

In this context of an evolutionary leap from the cultural act as a product to the management of this product in the field of communication and market positioning at the level of image and branding, a clarification of the notions with which one works in this cultural sector is required. Although the arts and culture community often reject the materialistic conception or material association of the term *product* when applied to their creative and cultural production, this is a phenomenon that takes place (Fillis, 2006). There is a need for conceptualization at a formal, informal level, but especially through social media, which have become "crucial communication channels for brands through awareness, engagement and word of mouth" (Castillo-Abdul *et al*., 2022). In this sense, the positioning on the consumer market of cultural products, of different terminologies related to the artistic sector, Levitt (1980) notes that in the marketplace, differentiation is everywhere and that everyone is trying to differentiate their offering from the others. Emphasizing the importance of structure in positioning a brand in terms of communicating to different audiences, Levitt (1980) conceptualized a product, in our case a cultural product, as consisting of four distinct elements, each contributing its own distinct value to a defined target market: generic product, expectation management, expected product, enhanced product, and potential product.

Going further into the need for conceptualization, Kotler (2000) added an additional level, namely the notion of *core benefit,* to Levitt's (1980) model, which distinguished between core benefit provided, generic product benefit, expected (or tangible) product, enhanced product, and potential product. In this sense, the cultural product can be exposed to several audiences, from the public can be exposed to industry professionals. Although the cultural product as market positioning is a consumer good, the arts and culture community often rejects the materialistic dimension of this concept and the association with the term product (Fillis, 2006). A definition of the cultural product is provided by Zecheru (2002): "the result of the internal process of a cultural institution (concert, museum exhibition, performance, etc.), materialized in cultural goods or services intended to satisfy spiritual, moral, artistic, aesthetic, etc. needs, is called a cultural product" (p. 138). Specific by its nature, the cultural product is supposed to be unique, and its evaluation is difficult since value is often a reference only within the institution that generated it. In this sense, according to Toffler (1997), the specific character of cultural values, their differentiation, are determined by the specific nature of human acts, the activities of producing material goods or ideal ideas or representations. In addition to their symbolic and artistic value, cultural products also have an economic value.

This is also what is at stake in positioning cultural products on the European market, whereby the European Capitals of Culture have the primary aim of revitalizing spaces both from an artistic perspective and the infrastructure one, encompassing the economic and marketing dimension. In this sense, city branding is an absolute benchmark for positioning the city in question on the economic map of the area to which it belongs. In this way, the city itself also becomes a cultural product in which investment is made, both in terms of capital and image. Thus, the concept of market positioning becomes as important a factor as the message that the cultural product itself conveys. Balaban (2021) explains that "positioning refers to the identification of the perceptual space, where a product, a brand, is or should be located in the consumer's mind" (p. 59). In this sense, positioning is based on the acceptance of new information in the context of the connection with previous information and is always related to the current market situation (Balaban, 2021).

However, the current socio-economic context and demographics identify a growing inclination towards the concept of sustainability, in the context of the emergence of themes with an ecological tinge and awareness of the environment and sustainably sourced goods. In this sense, the notion of branding has also been considered in Romania during 2016–2022, through this dimension of positioning the cultural product on the market. Terms such as slow fashion, slow food, organic, and eco-friendly have entered the context of cultural goods or services as a necessity in the correct positioning on the European cultural services market, as well as in Romania. Hence, a cultural product that wants to be part of a conglomerate of cultural products that can form the basis of a country or city brand will have to go through the same phases and stages to provide coherence at the symbolic level, image, social representation, but also as positioning on the market. It is also important to distinguish between four different aspects of the brand itself: brand identity, brand image, brand purpose and brand equity (Anholt, 2007). Thus, brand identity is the central concept of the product, clearly and distinctly expressed, including a range of associations, memories, expectations, and other feelings that are linked to the product, service, or company. These feelings are important factors that determine people's behavior, so brand image is a critical concept when talking about nations, cities, and regions.

As in our case study, it concerns an umbrella branding strategy in the cultural sector, a marketing practice that involves selling several related products under the name of a single brand. Therefore, if a particular brand has gained the trust and credibility of customers, they will consider each new brand offering a high quality product because of previous positive experiences. In this sense, a single mistake can destabilize the image of the entire umbrella brand conglomerate. This is the case of the studied organizations mentioned above (Beta Timișoara Biennial of Architecture, Meta Space, Impuls Festival organized by the French Cultural Institute in Timișoara, Basca Theatre, and Timișoara 2023 Association) that have had a difficult time operating to generate a credible image in the eyes of the different publics that consume specific types of cultural products.

### City Branding or About Generating Unified Behavior

Linked to the concept of city branding, most cities communicate with the rest of the world by accidentally or intentionally creating their reputation through six natural channels:

> "tourism promotion, as well as people's direct experience of visiting that space, their export brands acting as ambassadors of each city's image abroad, through the city's political and administrative decisions, the way the city presents itself to the business public, through cultural exchanges, cultural export activities, the

city's leading personalities, the way they behave when they are outside the city space" (Anholt, 2007).

In this respect, brands have a particular way of accelerating and propelling changes in public perceptions by creating a competitive identity. Branding being a concept made to develop a product, city branding "is a city marketing strategy with the aim of strengthening relationships and building a good image of the city with visitors" (Chan *et al*., 2021, pp. 330–331). In city branding, strategy means creating an identity shaped both by administrative efforts and through promotion to internal and external audiences, the aim being to create a city dynamic made up of investment, efficient, and sustainable use of resources, promotion of the various cultural and business sectors, all representing a joint and united effort to create an environment that differentiates the city from others in terms of image. To measure the effectiveness of city branding, Hexagon Branding delivered by Anholt (2007) used six aspects to measure the effectiveness of city branding by analyzing the presence of the city in the internal and external public space (the status and position of the city in the eyes of the international community), place (aspect that measures how the physical aspects of each city are perceived, from how beautifully the city is structured, weather, safety, and comfort), the potential of that place (aspect that assesses the economic and educational opportunities offered to visitors), the people (people assessment refers to the residents of the city), the pulse (measures the nuances of the urban lifestyle), and the precondition or precondition (describes the potential audience based on a city, in terms of comfort, availability of accommodation and other access infrastructure (Chan *et al*., 2021). According to Ashworth and Kawaratzis (2009), city or place branding aims, among other things, to find or create uniqueness, which becomes the difference between that city and other cities. City branding should pay attention to culture and history, economic growth and social development, infrastructure and architecture, landscape and environment, among others, can be combined into a marketable identity that can be accepted by all (Zhang & Zhao, 2009). As a holistic approach, city branding serves as a promotional tool to create a unique image of a city. Thus, the image of a city can be considered as one of the most important keys of concern for both city identity and city branding. In this sense, the city branding strategy should be deeply connected to the umbrella branding strategy of the different organizations that operate the cultural sector in Timișoara.

### Public Relations and Storytelling in City Branding

At this contextual stage a notion comes into play that is used in various forms in the world of public relations, marketing and communication, both internal and external, of promotion in the digital space, but also in the physical space: the notion of *narrative*. In this sense, Marcus and Proudfoot (cited in Edwards & Hodges, 2011) identify the relationship between building a story as the first step in turning products, events, and other customer news into stories, allowing them to build a framework of ideas and test them with customers without interference from the media. Not designed for an external audience, at least not in the planning phase, narratives help consolidate information, from messaging and positioning documents, to articles, brochures, sales packages. Just as Lyotard (cited in Edwards & Hodges, 2011) suggested that all knowledge is based on narrative, so do marketing and public relations communication increasingly rely on this idea of narrative building to differentiate one product from another; just as in our case of the concept of city branding or city branding, the narrative must contain the essential elements that form the desirable image of the space in question. In this sense, the importance of local community events has become increasingly evident in the process of place branding, as they are recognized as a means of increasing the attractiveness of a place to residents by creating a sense of community, contributing to an improved quality of life.

From sensemaking, storytelling, and discursive practice, public relations involve a discursive way of narrating stories that are appropriate to audiences, in the interests of the employer and with profitable meaning (Edwards & Hodges, 2011). In this respect, the term *storytelling* provides a unique term framed within the notion of narrative. Edwards and Hodges (2011) provide some additional starting points in exploring public relations practices and reflect the importance of discourse, presenting storytelling within two bodies: one grounded in management theory and another that prioritizes sociological and cultural analysis, providing narratives about organizational life. The first part studies organizations and organizational constituents. In doing so, management theorists have drawn on storytelling approaches, including folkloric and literary accounts of stories, in a variety of ways. For public relations researchers, this opens up greater opportunities to draw on the stories practitioners tell about themselves, their work, their organizations, their clients, and their working relationships as a potentially rich source of information about the profession. These social interactions draw on deeply rooted notions of how communicative acts make sense from the perspective of narrative and storytelling theory in an attempt to create more appropriate models of role, its co-creation, and its effect on both democratic processes and consumer behaviors (Salmon, 2017). In this sense, to create a meaningful connection with the potential customer, the concept of storytelling occupies a significant role, in addition to the connection with personal elements and shared culture. In large-scale projects, storytelling and conceptualization of the elements that converge towards the realization of the unity of the project in question are segments that once defined correctly can make the difference between the success or failure of the project at the level of image cohesion. Oguztimur and Akturan (2014) used thematic analysis to define brand communication and online branding as two of the five dimensions of place brands. They classified official place websites as indicators used by researchers in their analyses as the use of digital platforms for data collection in the field increases, and in other research topics.

In the case of Timișoara, the findings reported on place branding and city branding come from several local studies, including Vesalon and Crețan's (2019) work, who concluded that

> "the general perception that the break with the socialist past would somehow naturally imply the idea of neoliberal competition between cities in the region has also led to mimetic efforts to transpose urban policies from the global level, often in an unsystematic and contradictory way" (p. 31).

## Methodology and Results

The methodology used for this research is qualitative, consisting in the analysis of the different perspectives illustrated by the cultural operators and managers involved in between 2021–2022 in the implementation of different cultural projects. Therefore, using indicators as positive or negative, I have realized a scale of the positive or negative approaches in how the projects have been implemented as well as how they have been approached by the operators. It turned out that all interviewed operators had a hard time in coordinating the umbrella type branding strategy in order to make the public understand that the implemented events have been part of the preparation process for the main event: Timișoara European Capital of Culture. The questions in the interview were related to the satisfaction factor related the implementation of the projects, whether it was easy for the public to understand the purpose of the projects, and how the operators felt during the implementation (whether they had the impression that they were part of a city branding strategy or they have been left on their own). The methodology was inspired by a document entitled *Cultural Strategy of the Municipality of Timișoara 2014–2024*, a public policy document used as a guide by the Municipality of Timișoara in the field of culture, where several necessary steps to be followed by the cultural sector to achieve the proposed common vision are discussed. Formulated in the framework of the cross-border project Cultural Poles – Cultural Policy, a tool for community and regional development, this strategy is mentioned as being different from the Cultural Capital of Culture Program. This problem of identity unity is therefore visible both at the level of the local government and at the level of the independent sector, the two entities not being united in a unitary vision of place branding, not place identity, as suggested by Oguztimur and Akturan (2014). However, the expert team mentions in the formulation process that Timișoara City Hall and the Timișoara Intercultural Institute involved the Timișoara European Capital of Culture Association and that the stake of the *Cultural Strategy of the Municipality of Timisoara 2014–2024* was the long-term development of the city through culture, "in cooperation with other cities in the country, the region and abroad" (p. 8). In relation to a ten-year vision, the methodology of the document stipulates some basic principles, which were the basis for the elaboration of the cultural strategy. In relation to the identity of the space, the public administration is aware and understands that the visionary Timișoara of 2024 "is a construction of all its citizens in which the future is socially constructed through the interaction of individual and group motivations, expectations, symbols and actions"

(p. 9). However, the 30 interviews carried out with the team involved in the framework of the Transversal Communication Program Timișoara 2023, European Capital of Culture (a different project for which a larger study will further be performed) show that there is not even an ideational branding unity of the cultural operators working in this sector in the last ten years.

However, as Vesalon and Crețan (2019) point out in their study, despite efforts to give a branding unity to Timișoara through efforts in the cultural sector, the norm in branding remains the search for a monolithic identity of place, in which place branding "not only ignores the complexity of place identities, but also ignores its own influence on identity formation" (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013, p. 74). In this respect, there is a diversity of disparate elements used to construct the branding identity of Timișoara, only that the result seems to be an "unstable, [...] even contradictory collage of images and representations of Timișoara resulting from the ad hoc production of branding discourses" (Vesalon & Crețan, 2019). Just as Vanolo (2017) argued, as in the case of other European cities, business environment and economic growth are also used in the case of political discourse as tools for branding Timișoara, only "symptomatically imported in post-socialist cities, as the case of Timișoara shows" (Vesalon & Crețan, 2019). In this respect, the findings showed that the development and growth of the city is used as a branding tool and not a cultural strategy, as intended in the study announced by Timișoara City Hall in 2014.

At the level of identity of place, this Bid Book imagined a journey "from solitude to belonging, from light through darkness and back again, traversing three Territories addressing the challenges facing Europe today: People, Places and Connections." Thus, the journey was imagined by traveling through six Stations, along eighteen Trails describing the process of Timișoara becoming European Capital of Culture in 2021. With a strong emphasis on the public, the Cultural Program invited the public to explore the bright and dark spaces of history and the future, the related European theme being cultural citizenship, materialized through Reflections, a first Station that invited the public to look towards the construction of their own identity. Regarding the concept of place identity, which in Kalandides' (2012) view is a process, never fixed or immobile, inviting the public to reflect on the construction of its own identity seemed a good idea as a branding strategy. Speaking to the same idea, the Bid Book mentions different *trails* that follow the journey through our daily routines and habits. European themes were also thought of, correlated to the different categories. What was not clear to the public but emerged as an explanation through the analysis of the interviews with the cultural operators involved in the application program, was that the public did not perceive the preparation process as an essential part of the 2021 Cultural Program event, postponed to 2023. What did not reach the public as information was precisely this integrative process through which citizens should have understood the connotation of cultural activities at the level of the unitary branding of Timisoara as European Capital of Culture.

## Conclusions

As mentioned by Vaid (2003), branding is associated with a certain type of attachment, and for the most part this process is associated with a design, be it conceptual or image. In this respect, the European Capital of Culture program has not been uniformly implemented by the cultural operators involved, as there is no clear procedure for doing so. Far from creating a sense of belonging to a common movement that could have brought added value to the city of Timișoara, the branding unity at the level of cultural programs, part of the great program launched by the Timișoara European Capital of Culture Association, left something to be desired from the start, regardless of what was reflected in the local and national media at the project management level.

However, at the level of the search for a common identity of the Timișoara space, a project called "Moving Houses" is mentioned in the strategic document. This concept was an attempt to bring back the memory of the community's real-life stories of migration in the area, such as forced relocation, unemployment, or political conflicts, especially undocumented stories. In this sense, the collective and multilingual volume *The Stories of Moving Homes* was a brave attempt to bring together contemporary authors to tell a story that brings together the different aspects of a culturally diverse and complex area. In this respect, Lucarelli (2018) talks about this intention to create a common identity of a space, by "analyzing the political dimension of place branding as urban policy" (Lucarelli, 2018). As Lucarelli points out, this requires an investigation not only of the communicative outcomes and reception in the targeted markets, but through the so-called *politics of place branding*. Lucarelli (2018) brings into focus the recognition of place branding activities as politically appropriated by interests that are not considered to be the primary targets of branding efforts. Such a situation is also reflected in the case of the Timișoara European Capital of Culture project, as the main chance of association at the level of image and identity of the space, with the issues raised at the level of public administration being a source of sociological and image research through which the phenomenon of dispersion at the level of the brand unit of the space can be understood through a not-so-clear storytelling strategy.

In the analysis of the situations that have influenced in a positive, negative, or neutral way the image of Timișoara, in a further study we must go through the dynamics between the actors involved in the process, comparing similar situations in the European space, but especially the perspective of the direct beneficiaries who were most affected and involved in the process.

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# The *Purchaser's* Role in Private Companies: The Skills Needed to Become an Excellent Negotiator

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**Abstract:** The purpose of the research is to create a profile of an excellent negotiator, applicable, especially to purchasers operating in private companies. To carry out this study, an online questionnaire was created and applied to graduates of communication sciences of the West University of Timișoara. The author found that among the top skills needed to become an excellent negotiator are effective listening, adaptability, and communication. Most communication sciences graduates of the West University of Timișoara stated that effective listening is among the skills needed to become an excellent negotiator, which means that effective listeners are also excellent negotiators. There is also a need for adaptability, as effective communicators must be able to engage with a wider audience and adapt quickly to ever-changing circumstances. In addition, effective communicators are skilled negotiators. Effective communication requires careful listening followed by a concise articulation of one's ideas in a way that is easy to understand.

**Keywords:** communication, listening, negotiation, purchaser, skills.

## Introduction

In this study, the author set out to study the skills necessary to become an excellent negotiator, applicable especially to the purchasers operating in private companies, as following an overview of specialized studies, we found that there was no research in this direction, especially in Romania. So, this represents a new element for scientific research in Romania and beyond.

In terms of defining negotiation, it is a process in which two or more parties interact to develop future agreements to provide guidance and regulation for their future behavior

(Sawyer & Guetzkow, 1965). Thus, negotiation is a communication-based activity in which parties try to reach understandings, agreements, or contracts that specify the parameters of their future dependence. As a result, negotiations have conflicting motivations because through social connection, parties can cooperate and compete (Druckman & Wagner, 2021).

The reason behind this study is that organizational success depends on the success of negotiations. This need is present in a wide range of organizations, including public, private, and not-for-profit. Organizations have a real interest in creating skilled negotiators because of the stakes – both distributive and integrative – involved in negotiations (Chapman *et al*., 2017).

The problem from which we started in carrying out this study consists in the fact that when disputes arise, disagreements in personal or professional relationships practically intervene, and thus necessary efforts are needed to keep the connection between the parties. But these unpleasant situations can be turned into fruitful conversations. However, for these, negotiation skills are necessary (Adair *et al*., 2001).

Effective negotiation skills are especially important for every professional or businessman, regardless of age category. The essence of a successful negotiation is to understand as clearly as possible the position and motive of the other party. But this requires listening skills and patience (Phillips, 1993). The research question we thus aim to answer is:

**RQ:** What is the profile of an excellent negotiator?

In this study, we aim to apply research on communication science graduates. Young professionals should be prepared to negotiate effectively. When feasible, they should be included in the negotiating team. The theories taught in the training courses will be reinforced by practical training. When theory is put into practice, learning really happens (Perreault *et al*., 2017).

## Theoretical Framework

A negotiator must demonstrate special qualities and skills that make them perfect for the job. They must possess the ability to read events and anticipate possible consequences (Barchi & Greco, 2018). Effective listeners are also excellent negotiators. Thus, the secret to mastering the art of negotiation is to hear both what is said and what is not said, which means that a good negotiator must be alert to the non-verbal cues of the person with whom they communicate (Giunipero *et al*., 2006).

An effective negotiator must be able to interact with a wide range of audiences and adapt quickly to all ever-changing situations, especially since situational adaptation is a talent that is quite difficult to master; in this case, novice negotiators should focus on developing new and creative communication strategies (Zhu & Carless, 2018). In the case of negotiators, it is very important that they communicate effectively. However, effective communication first requires careful listening, after which one presents one's own ideas in a way that is as simple as possible for those around to understand (Stek & Schiele, 2021).

The negotiator must be patient and discuss the issues step by step without rushing things. As negotiators, they cannot act on emotions. Basically, an excellent negotiator must know how to keep calm and not let go of emotions in any form (Humphrey *et al*., 2022). A negotiator must also be calm and persistent. An excellent negotiator must be assertive, that is, express their point of view and support it in a non-offensive manner. In addition, they must have the ability to put themselves in the shoes of another person and see things from their perspective (Recalde & Vesterlund, 2022). By combining assertiveness and empathy, negotiation will always be win-win (Cho *et al*., 2019).

Another important skill that determines the success of a negotiation is emotional intelligence. In this, for the negotiation to be successful, the provision of value should be centered on bringing benefits, and impediments should be countered in time (Brooks, 2022).

## Methodology

The research question we aim to answer is: **RQ: What is the profile of an excellent negotiator?** The purpose of the research is, thus, to create the profile of an excellent negotiator. To carry out this study, an online questionnaire was created and applied between November 27–December 5, 2022, to communication sciences graduates of the West University of Timișoara.

The questionnaire was created in Google Forms and distributed on Facebook groups to communication students from the West University of Timișoara. To be able to participate in the questionnaire, the criterion that the respondents had to meet was that of being a graduate of communication sciences, regardless of generation. N=30 valid answers were collected.

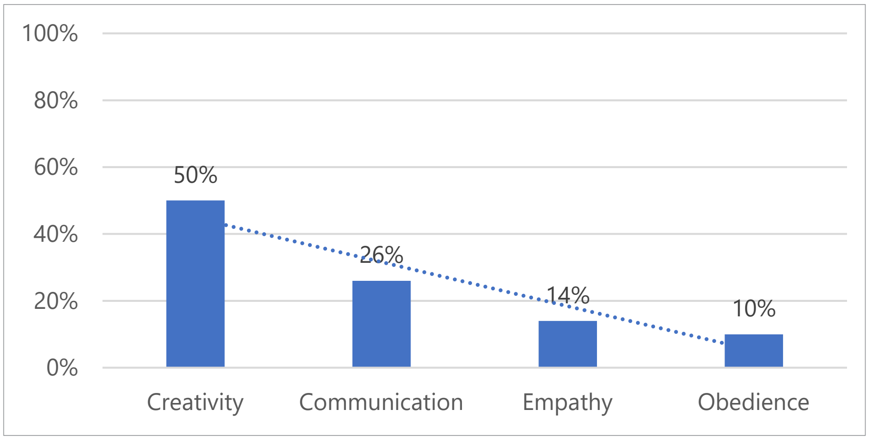
The graduates received 7 questions, 2 of which were filter questions, with the aim of selecting the study participants, they had to be graduates of communication sciences and work in the field where negotiation is used. Then, they were asked 3 questions about negotiation, what led them to work in this area of negotiation, the essential skill of an excellent negotiator, and their appreciation of the level of importance of negotiation. Then, socio-demographic data: gender and age, were collected. This study is merely exploratory and aims to map coordinates for further research.

## Study

In terms of motivations for working in areas where negotiation is needed, 50% of the communication sciences graduates of the West University of Timișoara mentioned creativity, 26% of graduates mentioned communication, 14% of graduates mentioned empathy, and 10% of graduates mentioned listening.

Table 1

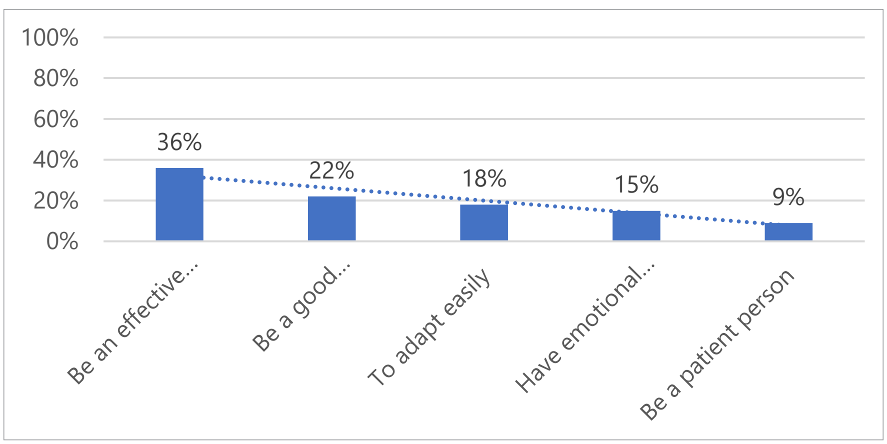
Motivation to work in the field of negotiation




As for essential skills of an excellent negotiator, 36% of graduates mentioned being an effective listener, 22% of graduates being a good communicator, 18% of graduates mentioned adapting easily, 15% having emotional intelligence, and 9% being a patient person.

Table 2

The essential skills of an excellent negotiator




On how important it is for the negotiator to know how to communicate, all respondents deemed it was very important for the negotiator to have this skill.

In terms of socio-demographics, there were 90% female respondents and 10% male respondents who participated in this survey study.

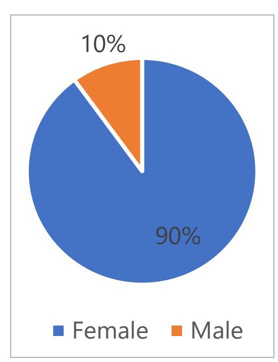


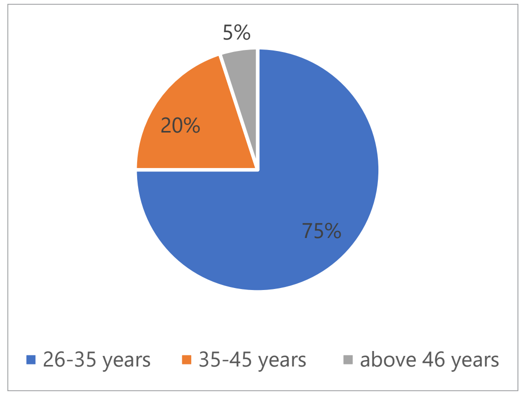

Table 3

Gender of respondents

In terms of age, 75% of respondents were between 26–35 years old, 20% of respondents between 35–45 years old, the other 5% above 46 years old.

**Table 4**

Age of respondents

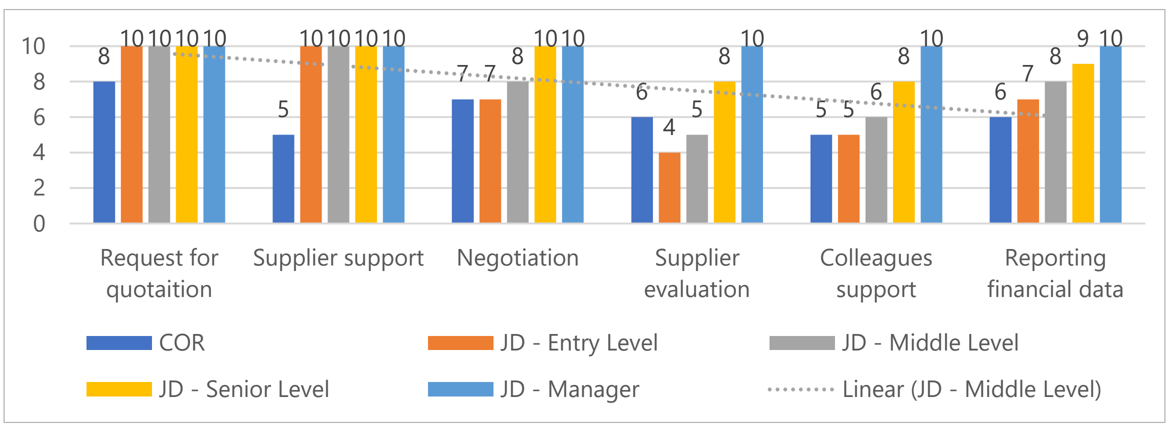



Starting from the results obtained from the questionnaire, we set out to analyze 4 job descriptions to find out what the requirements for an excellent negotiator within a company were. Thus, we used a mixed standard assessment scale (SESM) adapted to the Romanian setting by Pitariu and Iliescu (2004). We analyzed 4 job descriptions with different levels of experience, comparing their content with the legislative requirements. Thus, we obtained the following results:

On the part of general tasks, we can see the part of quotation request, supplier support, negotiation, supplier evaluation, colleague support and financial data reporting for levels.

**Table 5**

General tasks

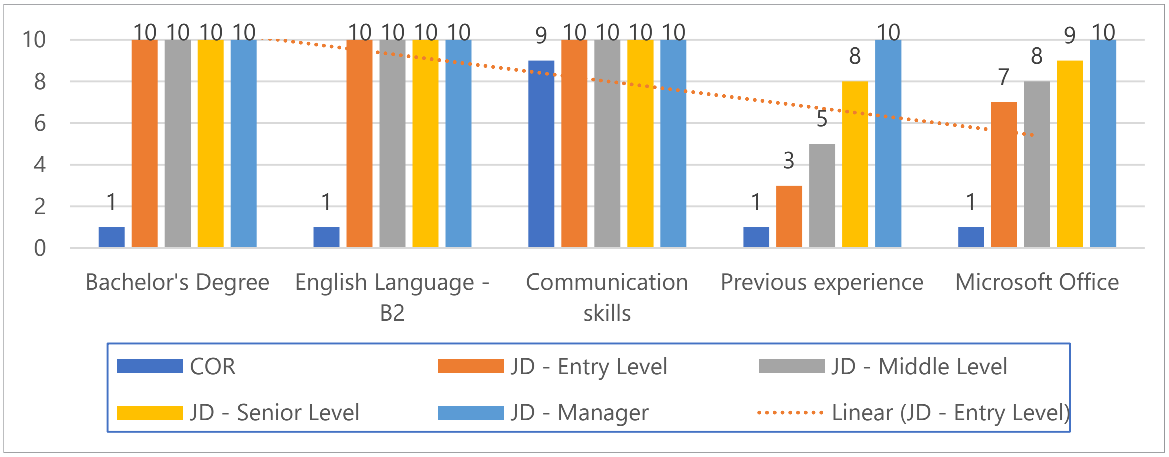



As content units, we used 4 job descriptions and as a recording unit, we used Communication and Negotiation from the general task list. Thus, we found that the job description at the workplace requires: a bachelor's degree, English language, communication skills, and Microsoft Office for levels.

The daily tasks are established by the employer through the job descriptions that are attached to the individual or collective employment contract. Thus, among the daily tasks stand out: negotiation of suppliers, internal and external communication, management of daily situations using the communication technique, participation in meetings and active listening for levels.

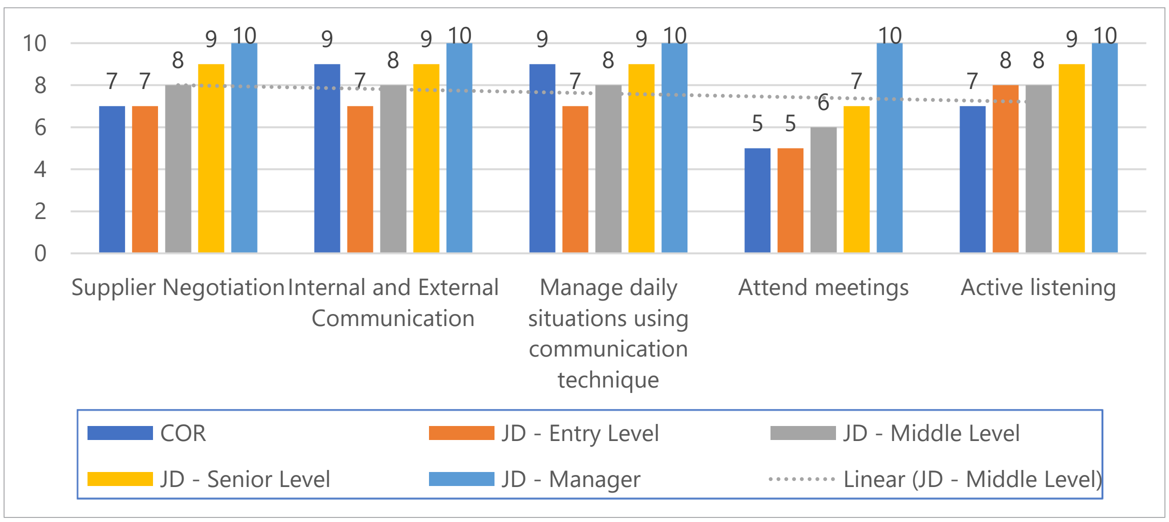
**Table 6**

Job description requirements




**Tabel 7**

Daily tasks




While it is true that job descriptions are tailored to a particular organization's line of work, so must be the expertise and skills required. The last thing to consider is that the actual job description analysis does not correspond to the job analysis.

Note the same job code and description of Contract and Procurement Agent, as this profession is part of the Procurement Department subordinated to the General Manager or the department coordinator. Undoubtedly, as mentioned before, the content is adapted to any field of activity. However, it is worth noting that in every job description, higher education is a prerequisite, regardless of the company's field of activity.

The main functions relate to the negotiation, selection, and evaluation of suppliers which require specialist expertise and skills, and the ability to understand the technical complexity of requests from internal customers. In addition, this profession offers complete freedom in organizing the work schedule, appointing meetings with suppliers or potential suppliers considering the 8-hour/day interval and the requests of internal customers to prevent shutdown due to unavailability. However, the skills required to fill a job that allows for flexibility must be analyzed and verified so that they are compatible with the values of the organization and the general level of training and expertise.

This allows the individual to manage time considering all the members involved.

In terms of responsibilities/ tasks based on passive observation, in other words, researching the activities of people working in this field, it is necessary for them to have the habit of actively listening to the problems encountered by suppliers and assisting them with the various complicated situations that might arise.

In addition, it emphasizes the importance of establishing a relationship based on trust, honesty, and safety with the supplier. A win-win negotiation occurs only after each condition is met. However, to see the overall impact of the buying profession within a company, regardless of its field of activity, we can examine the scale of the organization by simply calculating total purchases minus total invoiced. Thus, negotiation remains decisive in this profession. Through the functional analysis of these job descriptions, a method based on the preparation of a list of tasks by the employer. We can find these lists in every job description, and they all describe its actual function, and then use a mixed standard scale (MSS).

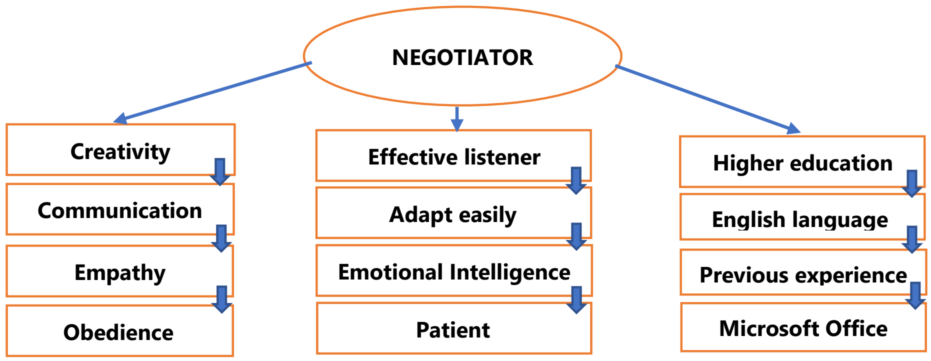
Each job description requires the same mental, motivational, and social traits, more specifically: efficiency in decision-making, cooperation in interactions with individuals, establishing an appropriate relationship with suppliers, examining the profile market, and acting with probity and integrity, adherence to values and code of ethics of the organization. Analyzing the list above, we conclude that this profession encompasses observable and measurable skills, but also immeasurable skills related to each individual social interaction skill. If necessary, follow the steps presented above.

There are many methods we could use to analyze job descriptions and more specific legislative requirements against market requirements. This article is for illustrative purposes only and attempts to highlight the importance of the buying profession within private companies. Moreover, this profession involves a complex process whose purpose is to buy goods or services at the lowest price, without compromising quality. So, we find that a crucial component of any corporation is its team of negotiators. Professionals who practice negotiation create a special way for a business to communicate with its employees and vice versa. The ability to negotiate is essential if one wants to establish himself as an indispensable member of the company. Starting with the research carried out, we created the profile of an excellent negotiator.

Thus, an excellent negotiator must have creativity, communicate effectively, be empathetic, be patient, be a good listener, adapt easily, have emotional intelligence, and be a good listener. On the training side, an excellent negotiator must have a higher education, speak English, have previous experience in the field, and know how to operate Microsoft Office.

Figure 1

EXNE - Model regarding the profile of an excellent negotiator




## Conclusion

The purpose of the research was to create the profile of an excellent negotiator. To carry out this study, we created an online questionnaire applied between November 27–December 5, 2022, to communication sciences graduates of the West University of Timişoara.

As a result of the research, we found that among the top skills necessary to become an excellent negotiator, stand out effective listening, adaptability, and communication. This is also supported by Zohar (2015), who refers to the ability to feel and express feelings as well as the ability to think clearly are both strongly influenced by emotions. It is essential for negotiators to understand the emotional language used in conversation, to be aware of their emotions and to develop mature emotional speech. It is essential that the negotiator looks for ways to minimize rather than increase tensions during the session, as positive emotions improve relationships, which greatly increases the potential for problem solving.

Also, the results are supported by Pistone (2007), who states that every negotiation skill that has been developed, even the best mediation tactics, strategies, and procedures, can be derailed by the inability to listen effectively. A negotiator often comes across ideas to be heard, opposing viewpoints to understand, or a new person to meet, rather than a problem to be solved. Like the process of teaching and learning, negotiation involves suspense and surprise, as well as an encounter with the unexpected. When listening, a negotiator must be patient in waiting for surface understanding and trust in the end of the process.

Kern *et al*. (2020) indicate that the goal of a cooperative style instead emphasizes fairness and fostering connections while pursuing amicable solutions through information gathering and sharing. To keep expectations high and maintain enough focus to achieve them, this style requires tenacity and some aggression. By focusing on balancing the needs of both parties and applying problem-solving approaches, an integrative style attempts to end conflict. Negotiation techniques can be strengthened by an appropriate mix of diverse styles.

Also, the results of this study indicated that negotiators need: creativity, empathy, effective listening, patience, emotional intelligence, and to adapt easily, and we would add the part of ethics. Johnson and Johnson (2012) show that professionalism is characterized by making ethically correct decisions. Ineffective and contested reconstructions of past events and perceptions serve as the primary basis for decisions during negotiations. However, ethical philosophy has a role in negotiation ethics because both the ideal of justice and the ideal of truth are genuine, even though they may not be fully realized. The pursuit of virtue, loyalty, courage, and other ageless ideals is still important.

The study by Liu *et al*. (2015) shows that the final element of successful negotiation underpins all others and is the essential component of professionalism: timeless values. These virtues include perseverance, honesty, fair play, tolerance, loyalty, and courage. In negotiations, timeless principles establish power, shape relationships, and lay the foundation for the most important attribute, which is trust. This final element of successful negotiation requires confirmation of timeless ideals, a vital component needed to successfully overcome professional obstacles. In addition, an excellent negotiator must have at least a bachelor's degree, speak English, have previous experience in the field, and know how to operate Microsoft Office.

Regarding the profession of negotiator, they must hold a degree in Communication Sciences or Economic Sciences. But in addition to this, periodic professional training in negotiation is also mandatory. The profession of negotiator is a career option for graduates of communication sciences. Thus, employers also have a fundamental role in developing communication and negotiation skills for existing employees without specialization in Communication Sciences. They have implemented an on-the-job training system and are constantly sending their employees on these courses to familiarize themselves with procurement and develop their personal skills. The negotiation profession is central to organizations and has a significant measurable impact on their economy.

Starting from these results obtained from the research, we created the model called EXNE – The model regarding the profile of an excellent negotiator (acronym for excellent negotiator). This model aims to support Romanian negotiators to improve their skills needed in this field of activity. The proposed theme is a new one, as it has not been studied in Romania, to the best knowledge of the author.

The limits of this study consist in the fact that this research was applied to a small sample of 30 graduates of communication sciences of the West University of Timișoara. At the same time, we analyzed only 4 job descriptions. Therefore, the data cannot be generalized.

Regarding future research directions, we aim to study the influence of leadership on the quality of negotiation in organizations, as leadership style might also influence negotiation style.

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# The Impact of Transformational Leadership of Hierarchical Leaders and OCB Subscales on CSR Managers


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**Abstract:** The actual business leaders and the future management leaders of the 21st century need to understand how best to manage, overcome challenges and create momentum for sustainability and social change. Putting CSR into practice or bringing CSR to the most of its potential requires more than company policies. CSR managers are responsible for formulating CSR strategies, implementing them, and coming up with new initiatives. In this regard, they need to be recognized and sustained. This can be a struggle if CEOs do not understand their role and give them vital importance and support. Empirical research was conducted with CSR managers in multinational and national companies that reveal a clear image of how the five components of Transformational Leadership (TL) of their hierarchical superiors (primarily CEOs) are perceived by the Romanian CSR managers. The objective is to prove a possible predictor of TL to be considered by CEOs in their working relationship with CSR managers to generate deep involvement, going beyond expectations and engaging in strategic CSR. The research data was collected through a questionnaire with 30 responses from multiple companies in Romania. For measuring perceived TL dimensions "Transformational Leadership Questionnaire" of Rafferty & Griffin, 2004) was utilized, and for measuring organizational citizenship behavior, Spector's (2012) Behavior Scale (OCB-C) was applied. From an initial group of 100 people, the final research group included 30 CSR managers.

The Transformational Leadership Questionnaire (TLQ) built by Rafferty and Griffin (2004) was applied as a research instrument to assess dimensions of transformational leadership and the Organizational Citizenship Behavior Scale (OCB-C) to evaluate organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). Statistically significant correlations were identified between transformational leadership and organizational OCB and between transformational leadership and personal OCB.



**Keywords:** CEO transformational leadership, organizational citizenship behavior, corporate social responsibility, hierarchical leaders.

## Introduction

One of the significant forces directly impacting organizations is the external environment. Peter Schwartz (cited in Hickman, 2010) characterizes the current period as the third Great Transformation. Hai and Van (2021) refer to this as the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Globalization, terrorism, racism, environmental change, geographical migration, and the emergence and accelerated development of new technologies are reshaping contemporary society and demonstrating the impact of interdependence, requiring organizations to take a total systems approach by meeting the needs of multiple stakeholders. The challenge and significance for organizations is to practice a systems perspective through responsible business behavior. In that regard, corporate social responsibility (CSR) and transformational leadership (TL) are essential for organizations bridging the company-stakeholder gap. In addition, the emergence of new forms of collaboration is changing how organizations – to keep their license to operate – think about their business in this cut-throat landscape.

This paper addresses how executive leaders support their corporate social responsibility (CSR) managers by analyzing the dimensions that make up transformational leadership (TL). Putting CSR into practice or bringing CSR to its full potential requires more than company policies and procedures. CSR managers are responsible for formulating CSR strategies, implementing them, and coming up with new initiatives. This can generate motivation or de-motivation whether the CEO understands the importance of the role of CSR managers and gives them the necessary support.

The theme of the paper takes us in the direction of better understanding the level of those elements of transformational leadership that can influence the creation and support of successful CSR strategies. The study objective is to identify which dimensions of transformational leadership impact increasing or decreasing the corporate citizenship behavior of CSR managers, resulting in increased bonds reflected in performance levels. The literature includes numerous studies that have concentrated on the impact of transformational leadership in terms of organizational performance, corporate climate, employee behavior, organizational learning, and implications for managerial practice: see, for instance, Garcia-Morales *et al*. (2008), Korek *et al*. (2010), Nahum-Shani & Somech (2011), Suliman, Rao, & Elewa (2019), Caillier (2016), Yahaia & Ebrahim (2016), Arif (2018), Peng *et al*. (2019), Effiyanti *et al*. (2021).

However, so far, there has been no solid groundwork identifying the most relevant aspect of transformational leadership from the perspective of CSR department heads, let alone a country-specific approach. Hermkens *et al*. (2020) investigated through an interpretive analysis the roles of the middle level of management in organizational change projects, concluding that implementation and synthesis contributions appear to be of great worth and significance concerning continuous enhancement efforts. The performance of middle managers was also the subject of research for Kiehne *et al*. (2017), who considered their role in implementing strategic projects. They drew attention to the fact that most studies dig into the topic from a denotative viewpoint, with only a small number of studies examining the participation of the middle echelon from a normative mindset angle. In addition to these issues, in the literature, there is a trend of addressing leadership styles as anticipators (of avant-garde job attitudes – Khan *et al*., 2012; of individual outcomes – Ismail *et al*., 2010), of decision-making styles (Khan & Nawaz, 2019), of business performance (Xenikou & Simosi, 2006). As mentioned above, no research addresses which dimensions of top managers' transformational leadership act as possible predictors of managers' CSR engagement.

## Literature Review

To carry on competitive in today's ambiguous and uncertain economic environment, companies need to undertake get-up-and-go strategic adjustment actions. (Johansson & Heide, 2008) As a result, the pressure on executive leaders to implement and sustain organizational change has increased enormously, considering that 70% is the failure rate attributed to corporate change initiatives (Hughes, 2011).

21st-century leaders must understand how to manage, overcome challenges, and create momentum for sustainability and social change. That social responsibility is a contemporary imperative of the business world is demonstrated by recent research showing that the correlation between CSR and managerial effectiveness is not random. The growing importance of the concept can also be seen in the rankings of Fortune 500 companies that mention CSR in their annual reports. It is also due to the pressure of European directives and the promotion of the concept among non-governmental organizations and consumers. However, Yucell *et al*. (2014) report a lack of studies in literature investigating normative engagement among senior leaders.

Unlike transactional leadership, which results in compliance only, practicing the dimensions of transformational leadership achieves above and beyond employee performance expectations (Bass, 1985; Yukl & Michel, 2006). Thus, transformational leaders create a strategic vision, communicate it, and consistently translate it into their way of being (Avolio, 1999). Gumusluoglu and Ilsev (2009) believe that transformational bosses motivate their workers to make an extra effort and deliver beyond expectations results by giving meaning and aligning individual goals with the firm's mission (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Balancing the logical with the psychological, fostering a powerful push regarding faithfulness, autonomy, mastery, and purpose among personnel drives them to act as change agents and produce these extraordinary results beyond the set goals (Kinicki & Kreitner, 2008). Therefore, the leader must be the first to encourage change and progress. And to lead the way, they must understand the attitudes and motivations that produce change. When change does not happen, it is because of inadequate or unsatisfactory motivation, not a lack of economic or technical knowledge.

Performing beyond set goals has also been researched by Ding *et al*. (2017) who demonstrated that transformational leadership generates progressive change by empowering, motivating, and inspiring employees to follow shared principles and have faith in their aptitudes. In this way, the values underpinning the vision create a sense of unity and give meaning to employees' aspirations, motivating them to improve. Felfe *et al*. (2004) and Yukl and Michel (2006) state that these transformational leadership outcomes are described regarding managers' solid and long-lasting results on their employees. From this point of view, Northouse (2016) states that the transformational leadership approach (TLS) is how a leader, through charisma and vision, awakens and elevates employees' passion, zeal, and morale. The relationship between transformational leadership (TL) of executive leaders (CEOs) and superior management echelon achievements was studied by Suliman *et al*. (2019). They found that offering a boost for metamorphosis and out-of-the-box thinking is essential in moderating the transformational leadership-performance growth and organizational success relationship. In the era of "open innovation" (Chesbrough, 2003), the ability to innovate should be understood as an integrated and cooperative process where different internal stakeholders can be involved. Thus, we can say that the performance of organizations is the performance of employees, and leadership is the parameter that affects it (Jing & Avery, 2008; Yildiz *et al*., 2014).

### The Components of Transformational Leadership

To examine the components of leadership at a detailed level, the most common and comprehensive tool used is the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) which has its roots in the FLR (Full range leadership) leadership assumption thought by Bass & Avolio (2003). It has a double approach: transactional and transformational. The Transformational Leadership Measurement Scale is an assessment tool that reflects approaches to conceptualizing and measuring transformational practices based on four core dimensions – idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and personal appreciation.

The idealized influence was analyzed by Ngaithe *et al*. (2016) concerning staff performance. Using the layered arbitrary investigation, they selected a population of 163 senior managers. The authors remarked that idealized influence was strongly associated with employee achievement.

Employee performance was also a topic of interest for Yue *et al*. (2019) who examined how idealized influence directly impacts both logical and psychological. Cognitively, the impact is achieved through clear communication of collective goals and values, providing insight into the entire organizational system, and emotionally through charisma. Afshari (2022) has also focused his research on employees. His area of interest is identifying the differences that may exist in idealized influence and organizational commitment generated by various educational environments. Gumusluoglu and Ilsev (2009) believe that a leader who practices idealized influence becomes a charismatic role model for employees through the confidence, energy, and enthusiasm that the leader conveys. He shares a vision of the desired future through his values, beliefs, and authentic living of mission, by demonstrating empathy and offering personal support through mentoring or coaching. Along with idealized influence, intellectual stimulation has been identified as an essential leadership practice in CSR implementation (Angus-Leppan *et al*., 2010; Surroca *et al*., 2010; Waldman *et al*., 2006).

*Intellectual stimulation* is based on critical thinking and innovative thinking, new, creative ways of solving tasks by challenging the status quo, thus generating innovation (Men & Bowen, 2017). Anjali and Anand (2015) analyze the concept of intellectual stimulation to motivation and engagement at work based on the hypothesis that intellectual capital is neglected in organizations. Their study demonstrated a strong association between intellectual stimulation and feeling of enjoying the job, showing that their commitment is much more powerful.

Nowadays, companies are much more flexible in organizational structures, and project management has replaced the traditional organizational chart, inciting the interest of researchers Sandvik *et al*. (2018). They investigated the relationship between intellectually stimulating leadership, an atmosphere that nurtures ingenuity, deep-seated encouragement, and employee self-determination in projects. They found this relationship to be strong and positive.

*Inspirational motivation* is the lever through which leaders communicate a desirable future and a vision that motivates employees to perform at higher levels to achieve common goals. From this point of view, Jiang and Luo (2018) highlight the importance of transparent communication for positive results in gaining employee trust. From this point of view, Rawlins (2008) argues that assurance and transparency are linked, resulting in employee cooperation, productive relationships, and knowledgeable resolutions.

*Inspirational communication* depends on the leader's aptness to communicate an overview of the ideal state that generates change and alignment on the same value system, instilling in followers the desire to develop personally and self-motivated to meet the company's targets. The fact that the ability to communicate is essential for the leader is highlighted, too, by Northouse (2016), who describes transformational leadership as that process by which the leader guides the group to accomplish a common objective. In addition, Gagne and Deci (2005) hypothesize that the inspirational communication dimension generates job performance through intrinsic motivation based on job satisfaction.

The effectiveness of communication is also illustrated by Thy Jensen *et al*. (2018), who argue that transformational leaders are productive and worthwhile when they use a person-to-person conversation. Neill (2018) discusses inspirational communication in the context of organizational change, giving it a dominant role in internal communication with employees. Organizational support provided through communication is an essential determinant that drives constructive, reciprocal behaviors from staff members, reflected through engagement, loyalty, and demonstration of organizational citizenship behavior (Men & Yue, 2019).

*Individual appreciation* is reflected in the act of leadership by the degree of genuine attention the line leader shows to the necessities and feelings of the subordinate. Furthermore, he assigns complex tasks and maintains a high level of communication by encouraging two-way communication and giving feedback, personal guidance, and mentoring. In this way, the intrinsic motivation to accomplish tasks, so necessary in achieving challenging goals, emerges.

According to studies by Ogola *et al*. (2017) and Jackson (2020), the leader who puts into practice the dimension of individualized consideration, considers the employee as a person, treats them according to their needs, accepts their differences, assigning tasks, and establishes priorities according to the individual particularities they present. The positive influence of individualized consideration is an essential parameter impacting employee contentment in the organization, as demonstrated by Khalil (2017). The results of his study suggest that if executive leaders demonstrate this dimension, it is very beneficial in achieving employee job satisfaction in their organizations.

### Measuring Transformational Leadership

Rafferty & Griffin's (2004) *Transformational Leadership Scale* proposes five focused dimensions of this concept: vision, inspirational communication, intellectual stimulation, supportive leadership, and personal recognition. Both Bass' (2003) leadership model (*MLQ – Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire*) with its four dimensions and Rafferty and Griffin's scale (2004) with its five sub-dimensions have common elements. Analyzing the two transformational leadership instruments, Kasemaa and Suviste (2020) validated the scale proposed by Rafferty and Griffin (2004), the outcomes indicate that it is an essential fact-finding instrument to explore transformational leadership.

### Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)

An important and valuable employee characteristic that enhances the overall effectiveness of an organization is OCB – *Organizational Citizenship Behavior* (Spector, 2012), manifested through prosocial behaviors, organizational citizenship, and contextual performance (Levine, 2010). It refers to voluntary employee actions, in addition to existing contractual duties, that are favorable to the organization's overall success (Muchinsky, 2006). From this point of view, organizational citizenship behaviors are manifested through voluntary activities (working overtime, helping new colleagues integrate, offering valuable suggestions, participating in corporate events) that go beyond formal, organizationally imposed obligations and significantly affect organizational effectiveness and performance (Grego-Planer, 2019).

The aspect of voluntary attitude is also highlighted by Organ (1988) who explains organizational citizenship behavior as independent "discretionary behavior that ... promotes the effective functioning of the organization" (1988, p. 33). Due to its multiple benefits on employee performance and productivity, studies identified in the literature focus both on the motivation for which individuals exhibit OCB and the positive outcomes that these behaviors generate: helping orientation, sportsmanship, individual growth, organizational commitment, individual innovation, civic virtue, and self-satisfaction (Podsakoff *et al*., 2000). Furthermore, through the interpersonal support provided, transformational leaders can create, preserve, and improve a desired organizational culture by giving rise to a new package of common established principles (Naqshbandi & Tabche, 2018). In this regard, Michel and Tews (2016) found that employees are open and proactive to the behavior of transformational leaders.

Furthermore, Podsakoff & al. (2009) found that dimensions of organizational citizenship behavior positively impact the effectiveness levels and benefits allotment. Depending on the goal, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) has two tiers (Finkelstein, 2008): an OCB that is manifested in the relationship with individuals (OCB-I), in which the focus is on emotional and social support, and an OCB that is displayed in the relationship with the organization (OCB-O), in which the emphasis falls on offering ideas for improving organizational performance. According to Organ's (1988) model, OCB comprises five factors: altruism, courtesy, conscientiousness, civic virtue, and sportsmanship.

The relationship between transformational leadership (TL) and corporate citizenship (CC) or corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices were analyzed by Alshihabat and Atan (2020) from the point of view of the mediating effect of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). The results showed that TL could foretell CSR practices by mediating OCB. The two authors also suggest that managers should advance OCB among staff, as this will be considered an actual business model in their CSR actions.

## Methodology

### *Objectives and research hypotheses*

This study aims to understand the influence of transformational leadership of hierarchical leaders (CEOs, managing directors) of high turnover companies and the organizational citizenship behaviors of CSR managers, as prosocial actions are considered fundamental to workplace behavior. The present investigation delineates to identify the relationships between transformational leadership, OCB subscales, organizational turnover, and demographics to see if statistically significant correlations exist.

The overall objective is supported by three research questions, each with related sub-questions. Data will result from the research questions and their analysis for analysis purposes.

**H1.** The CEO's transformational leadership style has a strong and significant relationship with the organizational OCB and the personal OCB of CSR managers.

**H2.** The CEO's transformational leadership style has a strongly significant relationship with variables containing age, gender, education, managerial experience, and seniority in the CEO's current position.

**H3.** The CEO's transformational leadership style has a highly significant relationship with turnover.

*H3.a.* Turnover has a strong and significant relationship with the CEO's vision.

*H3.b.* Turnover has a strong and significant relationship with inspirational communication, intellectual stimulation, encouraging leadership, and personal recognition practiced by the CEO.

*H3.c.* Overall transformational leadership has a strong and significant relationship to turnover fluctuation.

To quantify the data for the quantitative questionnaire research, we used SPSS software. Then, we correlated these results with variables such as managerial experience, length of time in current position, educational background, age and gender of leader, number of employees, and company's field of activity.

### *Participants*

The research group comprises 30 employees from large and multinational companies who are CSR managers or have CSR-related duties. The criterion for inclusion in the research group was seniority, i.e., at least five years in the CSR field and at least one year working in the company to provide an insightful opinion on leadership style. The male and female participants were selected from private business organizations operating in a wide range of industries. From an initial pool of 100 people, the final research group included 30 CSR managers.

### *Survey Period*

Questionnaire data collection took place between 14 March and 18 May 2020. Research methodology: the survey was the study method, and the questionnaire was the data collection instrument.

### *Scale*

The Transformational Leadership Questionnaire (TLQ), designed by Rafferty and Griffin (2004), has been applied as a research tool to assess dimensions of transformational leadership. The items used come from the version translated and adapted from English into Romanian by Coralia Șulea and Dragoș Iliescu and contain fifteen items structured in five dimensions: vision, inspirational communication, intellectual stimulation, encouraging leadership, and personal recognition. It can be accessed here: http://www.researchcentral.ro/index.php?action=listateste&ID=423.

The 20-item short version of the Organizational Citizenship Behavior Scale (OCB-C), designed by Spector (2012) as it is also called, was translated and adapted into Romanian by Cătalina Cicei. It measures the level of organizational citizenship behavior by the OCBO (organizational citizenship behavior) and OCBP (personal citizenship behavior) scores.

The questionnaire measures the regularity with which staff participates in prosocial actions in the workplace, both towards the organization and colleagues, thereby promoting a constructive corporate climate and productive work environment. The questionnaire questions cover relational-directed behaviors, such as helping or expressing appreciation, and organizationally directed manners, such as signing up for additional tasks.

IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 26.0 software was used for the statistical processing of the study data. Armonk, NY: IBM Corp.

### *Demographics*

The study collected relevant demographic information: gender, age, job title, length of service, the field of business, and the number of staff.

### *Research Batch*

The groundwork group explored in this analysis consists of CSR managers or managers who have a social responsibility in their duties (communication manager, brand manager, sustainability manager) from companies listed in the Top 100 companies in Romania, conducted by Ziarul Financiar (https://www.zf.ro/companii/zf-top-100-cele-mai-valoroase-companii-2021-20370505). Firstly, the study was limited to one hundred companies because it is more likely that these companies with high turnover figures have already adopted CSR strategies. They also have the financial possibility, and there is pressure from shareholders, investors, customers, authorities (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001).

The small number of the research group is because the CSR position is relatively new in the Romanian market, not very common in the companies' organizational chart, and to the fact that the respondents are part of the superior echelon of management. The research sample is diversified across eight sectors of activity.

Data were collected between 14 March and 12 May 2022. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research and were assured that the information supplied in the questionnaire would remain confidential and anonymous, being used for scientific purposes only.

### *Questionnaire*

Fifteen items were used to assess the impact of transformational leadership. The scale ranged from "5 =strongly agree" to "1 = strongly disagree".

The self-completion questionnaire has four sections, detailed below:

- five items to profile the CEO by age, gender, field of education, managerial experience, and seniority in the current position.
- fifteen items to assess the characteristics of the CEO,
- five items to present the profile of the respondents according to age, gender, position, managerial experience, and seniority in the company.
- three items to identify the field in which the company operates, besides the company's size regarding staff number and turnover.

Twenty items were used to assess the degree of organizational citizenship behavior. The scale ranged from "1 = Never" to "5 = Every day". In addition, Likert's scale was used for attitude estimation. It is a nominal scale where the measured values are structured based on an ordering relationship.

## Results and Discussions

The present research aimed to identify those dimensions of transformational leadership that are positively evaluated by CSR managers in relation to their hierarchical leaders. The main elements of the study included the assessment of vision, intellectual stimulation, supportive leadership, inspirational communication, and personal recognition and the correlation of the results with the score obtained from the application of the scale measuring organizational citizenship behavior. However, the analysis of the research results yielded only five significant relationships from the three major research hypotheses.

Our study joins this exploratory approach to expand research into understanding top managers as enablers of CSR by identifying those dimensions of transformational leadership that CSR managers consider most important in today's competitive economic context where sustainability and innovation will give a company legitimacy to operate.

In the exploratory research we conducted, according to research hypothesis *H1. The CEO's transformational leadership style has a strong and significant relationship with the organizational OCB and the personal OCB of CSR managers.* Furthermore, we can see statistically significant correlations between transformational leadership and organizational OCB and between transformational leadership and personal OCB.

A first strong statistically significant positive correlation between the variables "Did you offer suggestions on work environment" and "Did you offer suggestions on work mode" ($r = .621$, $p = .000$, $p < 0.01$). We can say, in this case, the higher the level of suggestions on the work environment, the higher the level of suggestions on work mode. The second strong statistically significant positive correlation between the variables "Have you offered suggestions work environment" and "Have you volunteered for additional tasks" ($r = .505$, $p = .004$, $p < 0.01$). In this case, the higher the level of suggestions offered regarding the work environment, the higher the level of volunteering for additional tasks.

The variables reveal another correlation of Table 1.1 "You mentioned positive things about the employer" and "You offered suggestions on how to work" ($r = .477$, $p = .008$, $p < 0.01$). The higher the positive things mentioned about the employer, the higher the level of suggestions on how to work. The last statistically significant strong positive correlation is between the variables "Gave up lunch breaks to complete tasks" and "Gave up suggestions on how to work" ($r = .522$, $p = .003$, $p < 0.01$). The higher the level of suggestions on how to work, the higher the level of giving up lunch breaks to complete tasks.

We can see that there is a high level of CSR managers giving suggestions on how and where to work and mentioning positive things about their employers. The last statistically significant positive correlation shown in Table 1.1. is between the variables "Gave up lunch breaks for task completion" and "Volunteered for extra tasks" ($r = .432$, $p = .017$,

$p < 0.05$). There is a high level of CSR managers to provide suggestions on how and environment of work, a high level of giving up lunch breaks to complete tasks, and a higher intention to volunteer for additional tasks.

Within Table 1.2. which measures the 5 subscales of transformational leadership and the OBC Personal subscale, we have both negative and positive correlations.

As we can see, there are two significant negative correlations in the variables "Have you changed your vacation schedule" and "Personal recognition" ($r = -.426$, $p = .019$, $p < 0.05$) and the variables "Have you stood up for a discredited colleague" and "Personal recognition" ($r = -.398$, $p = .029$, $p < 0.05$). We observe that both items belonging to the Personal OBC subscale correlate negatively with the Personal Recognition subscale of transformational leadership. This may imply the lower the personal recognition among CSR Managers, the more they will not tend to stand up for discredited colleagues. They will tend to make changes at the vacation/leave scheduling level. As long as there is no personal recognition of CSR Managers at the top management / hierarchical leaders' level, there will also be no willingness to get involved in various less pleasant situations among CSR Managers.

Another correlation, this time statistically significantly positive, between Professional Problem Compassion and Vision ($r = .367$, $p = .046$, $p < 0.05$). From this point of view, we can say that the more hierarchical leaders have a clearer vision of the organization and their ideas, the higher the level of professional problem compassion.

We also observe some statistically significant and strongly significant positive correlations between the OCB Personal scale items. For example, a statistically significant positive correlation was found between the variables "Have stood up for a discredited colleague" and "Personal compassion" ($r = .376$, $p = .040$, $p < 0.05$). This shows the higher the level of compassion and understanding, the higher the spirit of helpfulness toward doing justice professionally in this context. Another statistically significant positive correlation is observed between the variables "Have you given a colleague express encouragement" and "Personal compassion" ($r = .379$, $p = .039$, $p < 0.05$). Again, the higher the level of compassion, the higher the encouragement offered at work. This denotes, at the level of hierarchical leaders, that having a high level of compassion makes them more understanding, fair, and supportive of CSR managers.

Also, a positive correlation, but this time strongly statistically significant, can be observed between the variables Personal Compassion and Professional Problem Compassion ($r = .860$, $p = .000$, $p < 0.01$). The higher the level of compassion that hierarchical leaders tend to have, the more they will help and support CSR managers who encounter a problem or situation at work. The second strong statistically significant positive correlation is revealed between the variables "Have you offered a colleague express encouragement" and "Have you modified your vacation schedule" ($r = .724$, $p = .000$, $p < .01$). In this case, the more often hierarchical leaders tend to encourage their CSR managers, the more often they tend to modify their vacation plans, giving priority to their CSR managers,

**Table 1.1**

Correlations between the 5 subscales of TL and the organizational OBC subscale

| | | You've helped to accommodate | Have you offered any suggestions how to work | Have you offered work environment suggestions | Have you volunteered for additional tasks |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| You've helped to accommodate | Correlation Coefficient | 1 | | | |
| | p Value | | | | |
| Have you offered any suggestions how to work | Correlation Coefficient | .209 | 1 | | |
| | p Value | .267 | | | |
| Have you offered work environment suggestions | Correlation Coefficient | .137 | .621** | 1 | |
| | p Value | .469 | .000 | | |
| Have you offered for additional tasks | Correlation Coefficient | .303 | .310 | .505** | 1 |
| | p Value | .103 | .096 | .004 | |
| Have you mentioned positive things about your employer | Correlation Coefficient | .369* | .477** | .046 | .139 |
| | p Value | .045 | .008 | .809 | .465 |
| Have you given up lunch breaks to complete tasks | Correlation Coefficient | .159 | .522** | .314 | .432* |
| | p Value | .401 | .003 | .091 | .017 |
| Vision | Correlation Coefficient | .198 | .333 | .184 | -.388* |
| | p Value | .294 | .072 | .330 | .034 |
| Intellectual Stimulation | Correlation Coefficient | -.042 | .285 | -.031 | -.215 |
| | p Value | .824 | .127 | .873 | .253 |
| Inspirational Communication | Correlation Coefficient | .127 | .045 | .273 | .056 |
| | p Value | .503 | .814 | .144 | .769 |
| Supportive Leadership | Correlation Coefficient | .018 | .323 | .319 | .070 |
| | p Value | .926 | .082 | .086 | .713 |
| Personal Recognition | Correlation Coefficient | .141 | -.314 | -.030 | -.056 |
| | Correlation Coefficient | .456 | .091 | .877 | .771 |

* Correlation is significant if p<0.05
**correlation is highly significant if p<0.01

| Have you mentioned positive things about your employer | Have you given up lunch breaks to complete tasks | Vision | Intellectual stimulation | Inspirational Communication | Supportive leadership | Personal recognition |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
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| | | | | | | |
| 1 | | | | | | |
| .328 | 1 | | | | | |
| .077 | | | | | | |
| .250 | -.131 | 1 | | | | |
| .183 | .490 | | | | | |
| .148 | .003 | .541** | 1 | | | |
| .437 | .988 | .002 | | | | |
| -.088 | -.180 | .278 | .419* | 1 | | |
| .643 | .342 | .137 | .021 | | | |
| .145 | .247 | .332 | .623** | .585** | 1 | |
| .445 | .189 | .073 | .000 | .001 | | |
| -.313 | -.256 | .063 | .274 | .585** | .234 | 1 |
| .092 | .172 | .742 | .143 | .001 | .213 | |

**Table 1.2**

Parametric correlations between the 5 TL subscales and the OBC personal subscale

| | | Vision | Intellectual Stimulation | Inspirational Communication | Supportive Leadership | Personal Recognition |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Vision | Correlation Coefficient | 1 | | | | |
| | p Value | | | | | |
| Intellectual Stimulation | Correlation Coefficient | .541** | 1 | | | |
| | p Value | .002 | | | | |
| Inspirational Communication | Correlation Coefficient | .278 | .419* | 1 | | |
| | p Value | .137 | .021 | | | |
| Supportive Leadership | Correlation Coefficient | .332 | 623** | .585** | 1 | |
| | p Value | .073 | .000 | .001 | | |
| Personal recognition | Correlation Coefficient | .063 | .274 | .585** | .234 | 1 |
| | p Value | .742 | .143 | .001 | .213 | |
| Professional problem compassion | Correlation Coefficient | .367* | .125 | -.065 | .054 | .025 |
| | p Value | .046 | .512 | .733 | .778 | .894 |
| Personal Compassion | Correlation Coefficient | .283 | .098 | -.005 | .084 | -.145 |
| | p Value | .129 | .608 | .980 | .660 | .445 |
| Have you modified the holiday schedule | Correlation Coefficient | .274 | .132 | -.176 | -.016 | -.426* |
| | p Value | .143 | .486 | .353 | .932 | .019 |
| Have you helped a colleague to pick up a box | Correlation Coefficient | .041 | .049 | .228 | .116 | -.113 |
| | p Value | .829 | .799 | .225 | .540 | .551 |
| Have you offered a colleague express encouragements | Correlation Coefficient | .266 | .051 | -.010 | -.009 | -.341 |
| | p Value | .156 | .788 | .957 | .962 | .065 |
| Have you stood up for a discredited colleague | Correlation Coefficient | .208 | .121 | -.141 | -.092 | -.398* |
| | p Value | .271 | .524 | .456 | .627 | .029 |

* Correlation is significant if p<0.05

** Correlation is highly significant if p<0.01

| Professional problem compassion | Personal compassion | Have you modified holiday schedule | Have you helped a colleague to pick up a box | Have you offered a colleague express encouragement | Have you offered a colleague a hand when he was undermined |
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| 1 | | | | | |
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| .860** | 1 | | | | |
| .000 | | | | | |
| .302 | .359 | 1 | | | |
| .105 | .052 | | | | |
| .116 | .225 | .338 | 1 | | |
| .541 | .231 | .068 | | | |
| .231 | .379* | .724** | .150 | 1 | |
| .219 | .039 | .000 | .430 | | |
| .311 | .376* | .696** | .348 | .718** | 1 |
| .095 | .040 | .000 | .060 | .000 | |

both professionally and personally, based on considerations. The penultimate strongly statistically significant positive correlation of Table 1.5 is between the variables “Have you taken the side of a discredited colleague” and “Have you modified your vacation scheduling” ($r = .696$, $p = .000$, $p < 0.01$). In this context, we can say the higher the level of taking the side of a discredited colleague, hence the level of fairness, the higher the level of modifying vacation scheduling plans. The last strongly statistically significant positive correlation is between the variables “Have taken the side of a discredited colleague” and “Have offered a colleague express encouragement” ($r = .718$, $p = .000$, $p < 0.01$). The higher the degree of jumping to aid at work, the higher the degree of encouragement offered to employees.

**H2.** The CEO’s transformational leadership style has a strongly significant relationship with variables containing age, gender, education, managerial experience, and seniority in the CEO’s current position.

There are no positive or negative, significant, or strongly significant correlations between the 5 subscales of transformational leadership and items related to age, gender, education, managerial experience, and seniority in the current position. However, we observe the presence of three statistically significant positive correlations between the variables Managerial Experience and Senior Manager Age ($r = .820$, $p = .000$, $p < 0.01$), Seniority in Current Position of Senior Manager and Seniority of Senior Manager ($AS = .525$, $p = .003$, $p < 0.01$) and Managerial Experience and Seniority in Current Position of Senior Manager ($r = .641$, $p = .000$, $p < 0.01$). Given the first correlation between the variables Managerial Experience and Age Hierarchical Manager ($r = .820$, $p = .000$, $p < 0.01$), we can infer the older the age of hierarchical leaders, the higher their managerial experience. Age and leadership were the subjects of Larsson & Bjorklund (2021). Still, we cannot make a comparison as leadership behaviors were obtained by self-assessment and age categories (younger, middle-aged, and older leaders). The second correlation of the variables Seniority in Current Position of Hierarchical Manager and Age of Hierarchical Manager ($r = .525$, $p = .003$, $p < 0.01$), so the older the hierarchical leaders are, the more senior they will be in their current management position. The last strong statistically significant positive correlation is between the variables Managerial Experience and Seniority in the current status of the hierarchical manager ($r = .641$, $p = .000$, $p < 0.01$). Therefore, we can say that the more senior the hierarchical leaders are in their current position, the higher their managerial experience is. On the other hand, Mushtaq *et al*. (2019) reveal that age and experience do not have a significant influence on leadership. However, with increasing age and experience, managers manifest a transformational leadership style more.

From the three correlations presented above, we can conclude that hierarchical leaders with seniority in this position not only have higher experience in the field, but also their age is directly proportional to their experience.

**H3:** CEO transformational leadership style has a highly significant relationship with turnover

***H3.a.*** turnover has a strong and significant relationship with the CEO’s vision.

*H3.b.* Turnover has a strong and significant relationship with inspirational communication, intellectual stimulation, encouraging leadership, and personal recognition practiced by the CEO.
*H3.c.* Overall transformational leadership has a strong and significant relationship to turnover fluctuation.

We have no statistically significant positive or negative correlations between the turnover variable and the variables that make up the transformational leadership scale.

**Table 3**

Nonparametric correlations between transformational leadership subscales and turnover

| | | Vision | Intellectual Stimulation | Inspirational Communication | Supportive Leadership | Personal Recognition | Company turnover |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Vision | Correlation Coefficient | | | | | | |
| | p Value | 1 | | | | | |
| Intellectual Stimulation | Correlation Coefficient | .420* | 1 | | | | |
| | p Value | .021 | | | | | |
| Inspirational Communication | Correlation Coefficient | .451* | .371* | 1 | | | |
| | p Value | .012 | .043 | | | | |
| Supportive Leadership | Correlation Coefficient | .480** | .466** | .587** | 1 | | |
| | p Value | .007 | .009 | .001 | | | |
| Personal Recognition | Correlation Coefficient | .206 | .241 | .428* | .343 | 1 | |
| | p Value | .275 | .199 | .018 | .064 | | |
| Company Turnover | Correlation Coefficient | .111 | .090 | .072 | .118 | .162 | 1 |
| | p Value | .567 | .643 | .712 | .543 | .402 | |

* Correlation is significant if p<0.05
**correlation is highly significant if p<0.01

However, we can observe some statistically significant and highly significant positive correlations between the Transformational Leadership subscales. We can say: the higher the turnover of companies, the clearer the hierarchical leaders' understanding of where the organization is going. Conversely, the lower the hierarchical leaders' knowledge of where the organization is heading, the more they lack clarity of vision for the future of their organization. A first statistically significant positive correlation is revealed between the variables Vision and Intellectual stimulation (rho = .420, $p = .021$, $p < 0.05$). From this point of view, we observe the higher the hierarchical leaders/CEOs have a higher level of vision for the organization, the higher the intellectual stimulation of CSR managers. Also, another statistically significant positive correlation can be observed between the variables

Vision and Inspirational Communication (rho = .451, p = .012, $p < 0.05$). We can say that the higher the hierarchical leaders/CEOs have a higher vision, the higher the inspirational communication they practice. Given the two correlations described above, we can say that Hierarchical Leaders/CEOs with a well-defined vision intellectually stimulate CSR Managers and have a high level of inspirational communication.

A statistically significant positive correlation is described between the variables Intellectual Stimulation and Inspirational Communication (rho = .371, p = .043, $p < .05$). The higher the intellectual stimulation, the higher the inspirational communication. A second statistically significant positive correlation we have between the variables Personal Recognition and Inspirational Communication (rho = .428, p = .018, $p < .05$). From this point of view, the more hierarchical leaders/CEOs recognize the merits and appreciate CSR managers on a personal level, the higher their level of inspirational communication will be. It makes CSR managers more committed to their work generating results beyond expectations. We also find a strong statistically significant positive correlation between the Vision and Encouraging Leadership variables (rho = .480, p = .007, $p < 0.05$). The higher hierarchical leaders/CEOs have a higher vision of the organization and its development direction, the more they tend to encourage their CSR managers.

We can say: the higher the turnover of companies, the clearer the hierarchical leaders' understanding of where the organization is going. The lower the hierarchical leaders' knowledge of where the organization is heading, the more they lack clarity of vision for the future of their organization. The statistically significant positive correlations between the Inspirational Communication sub-scale items and turnover indicate that the more positive things hierarchical leaders say about the organization or department, the more it will make CSR managers proud of their professional affiliation. It encourages them to see change as a positive opportunity. While we did not find positive or negative correlations between intellectual stimulation and turnover, we did find a statistically significant positive correlation showing that the more CSR managers are challenged to find new ways to solve old problems, the higher their level of rethinking ideas. Also, as a peculiarity, we report statistically significant positive correlations between the items of the Encouraging Leadership sub-scale: the more hierarchical leaders pay attention to the feelings and emotions of CSR managers, the higher the level of consideration they show, and the more they feel they are treated with respect. At the level of personal recognition, statistically significant positive correlations reveal that as the level of positive remarks from hierarchical leaders about the quality of work increases, so does the level of praise they give to CSR managers. We also found statistically significant strong positive correlations between the transformational leadership sub-scales. Thus, the more hierarchical leaders have a level of vision for organizational development, the more they intellectually stimulate CSR managers, encourage them and practice inspirational communication in their professional relationship with them.

## Conclusion

The topic of the importance of executive leaders in terms of corporate social responsibility has been little treated in the literature. Godos-Díez *et al*. (2011) conducted an analytic survey on the interconnection between top leader profiles and CSR implementations, concluding that today's companies cannot exist without socially responsible corporate managers as they can inspire, stimulate, and shape attitudes and behaviors.

The present is a quantitative, exploratory research whose objective was to understand the impact of transformational leadership of hierarchical leaders (CEOs, managing directors) in high turnover companies and organizational citizenship behaviors of CSR managers, as prosocial actions are considered fundamental to workplace behavior. Failure to align with current economic trends to incorporate social and environmental actions into company operations and societal expectations can affect the financial and even operational prospects of organizations. The importance of executive leader (CEO) education has been reviewed in the literature by Ghardallou (2022), who found that it acts as a positive moderator. Specifically, his study's results indicate that CEOs with an engineering or science degree positively affect the relationship between CSR and business performance. Also, in the same study, he found that tenure and seniority also act as positive moderators. Specifically, CEOs with longer tenure play a positive moderating role in associating firm performance and CSR. In our study, we identified statistically significant positive correlations from which we can infer that as the age of hierarchical leaders increases, so does their managerial experience and seniority in their current management position.

This study shows managerial implications, such as the type of support the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) gives CSR managers to ensure the company's most effective social responsibility integration. The psychological barriers that prevent CSR managers from thinking and implementing CSR strategies can be improved by having a vision, personal recognition, and inspirational communication practiced by their line leaders. In addition, CSR managers will be inspired and motivated to put more mental and physical effort into making their organization perform well and socially.

This research can provide information for line leaders who want to understand better how they can best support their CSR managers to perform beyond expectations.

***Study Limitations.*** This study has two main limitations. Firstly, considering the limited number of participating companies, generalization of the findings of this study is not allowed, as they are only valid for the sample itself. The limitations of this study were also related to data collection, as there was no longitudinal approach for the results to be replicated over time. From this point of view, this research can be considered exploratory if we take into account that we have nothing to report on at the international level.

Secondly, the limitation is generated by focusing on the largest companies. The organizations included in the research do not operate in the business, which restricts the possible universality of the discoveries to a larger group, so the results need to be understood in context. From a statistical point of view, a limitation is that we could not perform the t-test as we did not have a balanced number of women and men.

Because of the confidentiality involved, participants in this study might have been hesitant to offer accurate information due to their defensive attitude.

***Future Research Directions.*** For a more robust analysis, we suggest that this research be replicated in the future when there is more variation in company sizes. For example, it is recommended that participants be selected from small and medium-sized companies, which could provide a more diverse reality regarding transformational leadership dimensions. Similarly, conducting dedicated research by industry may provide a richer and more realistic perspective on the LT dimensions that most impact CSR managers by industry. Finally, a longitudinal investigation can be conducted, comparing non-public firms and stock companies.

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# Story Between Society and Advertising: A Theoretical Perspective

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**Abstract:** Stories can make people take a stand and change their opinion or behavior. It is one of the reasons why advertising specialists persuade consumers to buy products and create certain impressions about them. In their attempt to change the attitude of consumers towards their products, they turn to stories to reach the audience. This study aims to highlight the relationship between the story, advertising, and the consumer and to show that the story not only became a marketing strategy, but the story became today the right hand of advertising. Starting from different definitions and points of view on the story, from elements that define a story and factors that influence it, the article emphasizes the role of the story in society over time in a general way and the part of the story in advertising in a particular way. In another vein, the article captures the connections between the story, the advertising message, the sympathy for brands, and how the story helps and simplifies developing and assimilating the advertising message. A brand's reputation is given by its image in the minds of consumers, and the image of a brand has a story behind it. A product that does not have and does not tell a story is ephemeral and shows no interest. Even more, the story feeds the consumer's sympathy for the brand.

The art of storytelling will have to overcome itself. From this perspective, the limitations of this study are the lack of articles studied in this sense and experiments that take into account the advertisement-story artificial intelligence relationship and the ethical and moral issues that the development of such a relationship will generate. The present investigation's novelty consists of the connections between the concepts, links that have not been made before. From a theoretical point of view, it complements the existing literature, especially in the Romanian context, and develops the advertising industry in particular and communication in general.

**Keywords:** storytelling, message, advertising, strategy, brand likeability.

## Introduction

Considering that today the market is very complex with countless product offers, whether we are talking about the food market, whether we are talking about the cosmetic market, or any other market, the need to simplify the purchase process is something natural. And to do this, you need a strategy and the perfect instruments (Trout, 2005). One of them is, for sure, the story. When it comes to the story, answering a set of questions can help us have an overview of it. When did the stories appear? From the beginning of the world (Smith *et al*., 2017). Where did the stories come from? All over the world (Bietti *et al*., 2018). What are stories? A vehicle to convey ideas, information, values, and principles (Barkhuizen, 2018; Brown *et al*., 2019). Why are there stories? To inform, to create emotions, to draw attention to something, to encourage someone, to educate, to motivate, and to inspire (Dunbar, 2014). What is the use of stories? It is essential for human interactions (Escalas, 2004; Simmons, 2002). These are only a part of why advertising specialists turn to the story to reach the consumer in their attempt to change the attitude and behavior of consumers towards the products they promote. So, an objective of this study is to highlight the multiple roles of the story in advertising, to present it in its new position: as the right hand of advertising.

To always be at the top and keep its position, a product must be continuously promoted, but mainly it must maintain its quality and image and satisfy people's needs. In today's market, being on top and occupying a place in the consumer's mind is a real adventure. It requires a strategy and a complex plan of action. Nevertheless, any company seeks to be successful. In Trout's (2005) view, success is about finding the right strategy because strategy sets competitive direction, dictates product planning, and tells you how to communicate internally and externally and what to focus on. The strategy gives a company a unique character that helps it establish itself as such in the mind of the client or potential consumer. Using an appropriate approach is the way to survive in a world of fierce competition and resist the so-called tyranny of choice (Trout, 2005).

Some companies tend to exaggerate with promotional actions, ending up suffocating the competition to maintain their leading position in the market (Ries & Ries, 2003) or have started using various expressions and magic words that influence and deceive the consumer. For example, formulas like the fastest, the most efficient, and the best are increasingly used (Trout, 2005). Regardless of the company and its products or services, it must have a promotional policy through which it conveys real information to consumers, information that is not misleading because otherwise it will affect the brand's credibility (Mossberg *et al*., 2010). It is not enough for a product to be continuously promoted. It must maintain its quality and image and satisfy people's needs (Trout, 2005). The most successful brands have a simple idea, and that's how they stand out. Differentiation can sometimes come through creativity in communication because behind a strong brand is a strong story. A brand's reputation is given by its image in the minds of consumers, and the image of a brand has a story behind it (Escalas, 2004). A product that does not have and does not tell a story is ephemeral and shows no interest. Even more, the story feeds the consumer's sympathy for the brand (Keller, 1993). In other words, another objective is to show that the story makes a difference in the success of a brand.

The present study brings a theme with openings in all areas of today's society, a theme for now and the future. It deals with the impact of a story and the possible changes in the recipients' perception, reaction, and attitude toward the advertising messages addressed to them through a story. More precisely, the theme of the paper concerns the connection between the story, advertising messages, sympathy for a brand, and the success of that brand. Nowadays, the aggregation of advertising messages has created a need for stories that attract attention and meet the consumer in the selection and acquisition process. So, the study also reinforces the hypothesis that a story helps and simplifies the process of developing and assimilating the message someone receives (Bietti *et al*., 2018). In another vein, the article captures the connections between the story, the advertising message, the sympathy for brands, and how the story helps and simplifies developing and assimilating the advertising message. A brand's reputation is given by its image in the minds of consumers, and the image of a brand has a story behind it. A product that does not have and does not tell a story is ephemeral and shows no interest. Even more, the story feeds the consumer's sympathy for the brand. The present investigation's novelty consists of the connections between the concepts, links that have not been made before. From an academic point of view, it complements the existing literature, especially in the Romanian context, develops the advertising industry in particular and communication in general.

## Literature Review

### The Story and Its Role in Society. History and Definition

Stories have a universal dispersion, they are part of cultures everywhere (Barkhuizen, 2018), and their roots must be sought deep in history, since the beginning of the world, because people "*produced and consumed stories*" since the time of their ancestors who spent the evenings around the fire (Smith *et al*., 2017). The act of storytelling is one of the most widespread actions in the world and occupies a central place in people's daily lives (Bietti *et al*., 2018). The meaning and purpose of stories begin with the beginning of time (Jenkins, 2013), and the ability to create and share stories is a quality specific to all of humanity, a quality that has helped humanity evolve and which, most it is probably as old as humanity itself (Boyd, 2009). Because there has always been openness and interest in the story, storytelling emerged independently and developed worldwide, even among isolated populations (Scalise Sugiyama, 2001). From fairy tales, myths, legends, fables, short stories, and novels to posts on blogs or social networks, films, videos, animations, advertisements, PowerPoint presentations, or comics, we are talking about a wide range of manifestations of stories. This expression leads to connection and improved human relationships (Barkhuizen, 2018).

Since people are, in the view of Boyd (2009) and Gottschall (2012), "*a species of storytellers*", the story is fundamental to the interaction between them (Clark, 2016). Storytelling is like fulfilling a basic need as a human form of communicating and communicating oneself. The story belongs to man naturally from birth and needs it for sound development. Stories are about people, their dreams, needs or emotions, actions, and goals (Barkhuizen, 2018). Stories carry with them the faith, culture, traditions, superstitions, legends, history, and soul characteristics of each nation (Jenkins, 2013). They are essential in emitting and transmitting information that creates and strengthens social bonds between people (Fludernik, 1996). From one generation to another, people have been involved and continue to be involved in the transmission of values, principles, rules, and norms. They do this by collaborating, relating, and opening to each other (Bowles & Gintis, 2011), which has become essential for humanity in many ways (Tomasello *et al*., 2012).

The story sets in motion and supports the building of social relationships through its power to unite people and gather them under the dome of a set of values and emotions in which people find themselves (Dunbar, 2014). As a result, the story can form a collective memory that lasts over time (Coman *et al*., 2009), succeeding in passing on historical events as well. The more talented storytellers are, the better they interact with everyone in that group. For this reason, storytelling is also referred to as "*beneficial group behavior*" (Smith *et al*., 2017). Stories coordinate group behavior and facilitate cooperation by providing people with social information about norms, rules, and societal expectations (Smith, 2017, Conradt *et al*., 2005). Still, storytelling is essential for people and in developing the concept of self, identity, and how people distinguish themselves from each other (Jenkins, 2013).

In other words, before the appearance of books and before they were accessible to everyone, the oral story played a unique role in transmitting knowledge from one generation to another. Still, an unspeakably important aspect is that the story had. It also has an essential role in developing communication skills and critical thinking and allows easy learning of foreign languages. Considered to be an ancient form of teaching, the man reveals his creative nature through the story (Alsumait & Al-Musawi, 2013). Storytelling enables the development of previously acquired skills and knowledge (Bietti *et al*., 2018). It is active and fundamental to human prosperity, counseling through the story being an ancient activity that finds its origin in old cultural traditions (Jenkins, 2013).

The primary sources and factors in creating a story are actual events from everyday life (Brown *et al*., 2019), needs, fears or various problems (Akgün *et al*., 2015), imagination (Boyd, 2009), culture and faith (Smith *et al*., 2017), traditions and customs (Fernández-Llamazares & Cabeza, 2018). Original, more or less loaded with novelty, full of emotions and memorable experiences, accurate or not, having in their content an appeal, an idea, or a teaching, stories can easily capture people's attention. They can translate experience into reality, promote a good and quick understanding of concepts, and easily retain the new knowledge transmitted through them. (Kendall & Kendall, 2017). Stories can change the reader, convince, or excite them about something, and even affect their attitude and lifestyle (Escalas, 2004; Simmons, 2002). Stories can lead people to take a stand on social issues (Borum Chattoo & Feldman, 2017) because they can encourage, motivate, inspire, and educate (Appel & Richter, 2010; Mazzocco *et al*., 2010). Stories are a universal good of great value and interest for everyone, and too little attention is paid to them (Smith *et al*., 2017).

### The Elements of A Story

In a broader sense, a story is a series of closely related events that occur over time (Sax, 2006). Martens and his colleagues consider that stories are accounts of the actions undertaken in a certain period by a group of characters (Martens *et al*., 2007), that is, accounts of events triggered by the actions and reactions of some characters. Both definitions are confirmed and supplemented by Mandelbaum, who reinforces that stories focus on producing narrative discourses (Mandelbaum, 2013). For Smith and his team of collaborators, storytelling presents as a multiple set of narratives. Ranging from complex stories with cosmological or religious overtones in their content and are most often found in larger communities and to stories with a simple or simplistic structure, such as everyday conversations between small groups of people (Smith *et al*., 2017). Biesele (1993) also endorses this idea and concludes that although most research focuses on fictional stories, "*inclusive definitions of storytelling*" encompass both "*ritualized or fictional stories*" as well as many aspects of everyday, ordinary conversation. Finally, a story necessarily also involves the presence of a narrator who talks about moments, either in the past or present, about someone's actions and the finality of those events if they ended (Labov & Waletzky, 1967).

Unlike a mathematical algorithm, stories are analytical and follow a set of steps. These steps were identified and named by Julie E. Kendall and Kenneth E. Kendall as story elements. They identified 18 items common to all stories, but, for more practical use, they shortened their list to 7 items, namely: the call to adventure (the context, the situation), the quest (the goal and alternative ways of achieving it), the struggle (obstacles to be overcome to achieve your intended goals), transformation (behavior change), resolution (the quest failed or succeeded), moral (lessons learned) and epilogue, i.e., what changed over time or how things must be done differently in the future (Kendall & Kendall, 2017).

The story promotes an idea starting from a sequence of events. Those events take place in a specific order, and this presents the message in stages (Polletta *et al*., 2011). It requires time, energy, and cognitive processing (Gailliot *et al*., 2007; Laughlin *et al*., 1998). For a better understanding, the reader can relate to the events of a story through the "*five situational dimensions*". According to Zwaan and Radvansky (1998), these are the following: time, space, the causes that determined the entire action, intent, and characters. But a story can also be defined by its components: character (character), setting, events, causal connections, and resolution (Scalise Sugiyama, 2005). The above definitions show that narratives are composed of meaningful sequences and reorganizing them in any other order makes the story complicated and challenging to access (Brown *et al*., 2019). It's not hard to see why, over the years, stories, and especially those in popular cultures everywhere, have retained a specific pattern.

Therefore, when we talk about a story, we must consider the elements that compose it: the storyteller and the characters (Zwaan & Radvansky, 1998), the context, time, space, and content (Sax, 2006), emotions (Brown *et al*., 2019), purpose, message (Jenkins, 2013; Simmons, 2002).

**RQ.** What is the relationship between the story, advertising, and the consumer?

## Story Research

The act of storytelling has taken various forms over time and has gradually dispersed in all areas of human activity, always in step with the trends in society (Dunbar, 2014). We meet stories everywhere, their role being important in society's evolution and proper functioning, as they help transmit values, principles, and social norms and stimulate cooperative behavior (Bietti *et al*., 2018; Smith *et al*., 2017; Wiessner, 2014). We meet the story in the cinema, music, book, performing arts or visual arts industry, in the field of advertising, in marketing, in business, in journalism, in the organizational framework of companies (as a method in a leader's strategy for example), in the educational environment (Jørgensen, 2018), in video games, in fashion, in design, in research (Walsh, 2016), in psychology as a form of therapy (Nurser *et al*., 2018), in training as a presentation technique or in entertainment and other ways of spending free time (Escape Room). Today, stories can be watched daily, unremitting, on television (Smith *et al*., 2017).

Educationally, the story is a "multi-purpose" tool that can provide children with opportunities to share their ideas and thoughts, has the power to encourage and simplify the learning process, and motivate children's communication skills, but also in creative thinking. As a result, children can enrich their vocabulary and develop their understanding, communicate and talk about themselves, create relationships, and interact and collaborate. For children with special needs, storytelling is an ideal support tool that meets them in all aspects of life (Bietti *et al*., 2018). The story can be defined as a transfer of experience between two parties (Boje, 1991) and can be used in the educational field in many ways (Kendall & Kendall, 2017). Moreover, telling children stories and helping them create stories themselves develops their creativity, communication skills, and, implicitly, their personality (Alsumait & Al-Musawi, 2013).

But the story impacts cooperative/collaborative behavior among adults as well, not just among children. In a 2017 study, Smith *et al*. investigated the impact of stories on a hunter-gatherer community in the Philippines. The study's most important conclusion shows that storytelling maintains good cooperation and relationship between hunters and thus helps the evolution and continuity of their community. It is the stories of this Filipino population that coordinate the social behavior of others (Smith *et al*., 2017). Stories are used to disseminate information about survival, feeding, and the environment or to capture and maintain public attention (Boyd, 2017). They are not mere conversations. Stories can affect social and couple relationships (Donahue & Green, 2016). Their evolution over the years could be essential in organizing and promoting human cooperation as we know and see today (Smith *et al*., 2017).

In the context of the current cultural diversity, native stories can help the development of integrated strategies and biocultural conservation. It helps create bridges between the autochthonous cultures specific to each area and the new cultural forms that are expanding in societies everywhere, as well as for good preservation of the traditions particular to each people. The stories are full of resonance, memory, and wisdom and represent an opportunity to understand the cultural dimensions of a group, respectively, of a nation, leading to the transmission of values from generation to generation (Fernández-Llamazares & Cabeza, 2018). Stories contain complex information and are infused with drama, elements that, as they address the heart and the mind, ensure the continuous transmission of stories (MacDonald, 1998).

In Bietti's view, emotion is understood as a sensitizing process that maintains good cooperation and relationships between people, being how people give meaning to their experiences. He and his colleagues also argue that emotion helps the story achieve its essential functions because feeling connects it to everyday human activities (Bietti *et al*., 2018). Duran and Kelly suggest a close relationship between communication styles and interpersonal attractions, and people tend to categorize an attractive person as a good storyteller. Their results showed that this is not quite the case and that good storytellers turned out to be, in fact, the most attractive people and not the other way around. It is not the fact that a man is attractive that makes him a good storyteller, but because he is a good storyteller, he becomes attractive (Duran & Kelly, 1988). Researchers like Donahue and Green wanted to expand on current studies by focusing on the social benefits that storytellers themselves might have, starting with the premise that the ability to tell a compelling story can make a person more attractive. They wanted to see if and to what extent a person's storytelling ability affects how a potential partner perceives them in terms of short and long-term attractiveness. Studies have shown that women are attracted, in the long run, to men who are good storytellers. Storytelling appears to help men attract long-term partners. The better a man's storytelling ability, the better he is perceived by women interested in long-term relationships. However, men's perception of women was not affected or influenced in any way by women's storytelling abilities. Neither in the short term nor the long term. (Donahue & Green, 2016).

Stories are also used in business (Brown *et al*., 2019). For example, the story has come to gain more and more attention in the area of tourism, where it is used as a marketing tool (Akgün *et al*., 2015). The story can make a particular destination appear unique and with cultural elements of great value that are rarely seen. Such an approach attracts tourists and maintains destination branding (Olsson *et al*., 2013). Impressions, mysteries, and legends of places are crucial in choosing a destination (Drew & Woodside, 2011) because people want unique experiences, and stories help create such experiences (Fog *et al*., 2005). Today, with the help of the Internet, almost all tourist destinations can be found on platforms and social networks, their stories being just a click away (Ye *et al*., 2011). People search blogs and professional websites, follow other people's comments, get inspiration, read stories, and make decisions. The story of the place and the brand motivates and influences people in their choices (Lin & Huang, 2006). Modern technology helps and encourages sharing experiences and impressions anytime and anywhere (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009), which is why people can quickly and easily find not only comments or articles on blogs but also posts that include photos and even videos (Chronis, 2012). But forum discussions, recommendations, feedback, and other people's impressions matter more and more for all products and services on the market, not just in tourism. Storytelling must be understood as a value, as a strategic point of specialists from different fields (Akgün *et al*., 2015).

The story has an adaptive character in the virtual space as well. Currently, digital stories are used in various fields and contexts, being an essential element in facilitating communication or making the content of a message more accessible (Ohler, 2013). The digital story is presented as a short film that combines images, text, video clips, and music. Such stories can be easily found as the vast majority are uploaded to the Internet. In Robin and McNeil's opinion (2019), these kinds of stories don't last very long and fall into three broad categories: personal, historical, and stories that have the role of informing. Digital stories can also help to understand past events better, bringing together elements and details that would have been difficult to explain or require extensive explanations. Instead, technology replaces them with an image or video that says more than any verbal detail (Robin & McNeil, 2019).

We encounter digital stories in education, business, organizations, and community centers or museums. For example, recent educational research has shown that students who create digital stories express themselves more easily (Ohler, 2013). However, some researchers who have expressed themselves on the aspects of the digital story believe there is no exact definition of it. There are different opinions regarding the expansion space and the form in which digital stories can be presented. Some authors do not agree that computer games or PowerPoint presentations should be called digital stories because they contain images or short films (Robin & McNeil, 2019).

Technological development and research into the human brain have enabled recent discoveries that show that when someone communicates a message or tells a story, the listener or listeners if they do so attentively, connect to the person of the narrator, and their brains begin to synchronize. Scientific results thus demonstrate the role and potential of storytelling in various fields (Stephens *et al*., 2010). Still, although the art of storytelling has developed on all levels, in all areas, in step with society and technology, there are too few studies to trace their influences in the relational space between people (Donahue & Green, 2016). Non-fictional narratives such as everyday dialogues, anecdotes, jokes, riddles, or details about recent experiences are often passed with sight (Smith *et al*., 2017).

### The Story and Its Role in Advertising

Advertising represents one of the most attractive phenomena of modern life (Leovaridis, 2007). It has the purpose, power, and resources to change behaviors and attitudes, driving consumerism at all levels (Chiran *et al*., 2003). With globalization, advertising has taken on new forms and, now more than ever is strongly involved in transmitting information about products and managing product image, influencing sales growth and product retention. Moreover, advertising stimulates competition, determining the improvement of products. Competition, in turn, leads to lower prices, so one of the essential roles of advertising is to differentiate similar products from competitors (Erickson, 2009). Advertising is expensive and non-personal because it is directed at a large and anonymous audience (Dominick, 1987).

The multitude of products, competition, and consumer saturation with too many advertising messages led to the development of the promotional process. Promotion is necessary for today's market because a product, even if it is of quality, if it is not known to potential consumers, is not purchased. Promotion attracts new customers, outlines the product's image, and highlights its features. The more creative and flexible the promotional activity is, the more impact the message will have (Trout, 2005). Most often, consumers critically analyze products or services on the market, but when a product is promoted through a story, it tends to be less critically analyzed by consumers. In this way, stories become "one of the most powerful approaches to marketing communication". In addition, a less critical positioning of consumers towards a product is an excellent advantage for any brand (Rose, 2011). Although consumers are skeptical and tend to distance themselves when advertisements at every step meet them: both in stores and on the street, and on television and the Internet (Gottschall, 2012), the story attracts consumers and determines positive attitudes in human behavior because it can give rise to positive feelings and less negative associations in people's minds (Escalas, 2004).

In 1986, Settle and Pamela began a large-scale study to determine why people buy certain products. Although the answers they received were inaccurate and considered useless for their research, they noted, as a result, worthy of consideration the tendency of people to buy what others also buy. It goes by the principle that if others have something, they must have it and that if so many people choose that product, indeed, it is a quality product (Settle & Alreck, 1986). Analyzing the results of their research, Jack Trout (2005) pointed out that people either do not know why they buy certain products or do not want to say. Looking at how consumers behave when they want to purchase a product, their attitude manifests itself according to the herd effect. Although researchers Robert Settle and Pamela Alreck (1986) did not consider the power of stories in their study, Trout concluded that the testimonial, this form of the story, impacts the purchase process. When a man can't make up his mind about something, doesn't know how to act, or is simply unsure, he looks to others. So, this is why testimonials are one of the oldest tools used in advertising (Trout, 2005).

Every story has a purpose, a reason for being told or written. In every story, there is a message, a central idea. Marketing theories argue that stories help people notice and remember the advantages a brand can convey (Kaufman, 2003) and that stories help persuade people and influence their consumption behavior (Denning, 2001). So, through the emotion it generates and the relationship it maintains, the story can make people stubborn about sticking with the purchase of a particular product. People have a hard time changing their perceptions because once they have become accustomed to a specific product and this product has met their personal needs, they no longer bother to look for a substitute just because it is presented differently on the market (Hammer, & Stanton, 1995). Richard Petty and John Cacioppo develop a series of observations that try to show why people have difficulty changing their perceptions. They believe that the nature and structure of personal belief systems are essential because these beliefs provide the cognitive basis of an attitude (Petty & Cacioppo, 1996). Over time, it was found that the power of persuasion is more significant when a consumer's involvement is low. It is because the emotion that triggers the change in attitude is involved in persuasion (Petty & Briñol, 2014). According to other researchers, there are three main factors on which an individual attitude change depends: personal motivation, the cognitive ability of the person, and the strength of the arguments contained in the message (Allison *et al*., 2017; Zhou, 2017).

The story creates and maintains good and unique connections between a brand and its consumers (Keller, 1993), brings more trust to brands, and helps to position them well in the minds of consumers, making people aware of the existence of that product or service (Kaufman, 2003). Another factor that is directly related to the story and which makes the product take shape in the public's mind is the image (Manole *et al*., 2004). So, in the purchasing process, the image and the story are the significant advantages of the products. A company with a good image in customers' eyes is a successful company.

A successful image also means a successful brand. Still, for a product to become a brand, it must meet several conditions: to have a name and logo that attract attention, to have a consistent and original form of presentation, to last on the market even if the price increases, to arouse favorable associations in the minds of consumers, to have a high degree of visibility and notoriety, and, of course, the product to be of high quality, a quality to maintain (Aaker, 2006). An advantage that the consumer has when he becomes loyal to a brand is that his purchase decision is simplified because the brand guarantees performance from one purchase to another. The role of brands is to give value to the product, service, or organization, to differentiate and position them concerning the competition (Arhip, 2008). When a brand achieves balance in terms of its ability to satisfy consumers' rational and emotional needs, it is successful (Olins, 2006).

An associate professor at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, Rosemary Thackeray and her team (Thackeray *et al*., 2007) believe that a strong brand is a well-known product, service, person, or place presented to the market in a way that the user or buyer finds relevant or unique. But before it can be promoted, it must be planned and positioned. Here, however, things must be seen from the consumer's point of view because he is the one who decides whether or not to buy a product. Therefore, the target groups' details must be known through questions like Who?, What?, Why?, When?, and Where? (Thackeray *et al*., 2007). Consumers are, therefore, the ones who, by the way, they perceive and emotionally approach a specific product, decide its fate. Customer loyalty is what gives strength to a brand.

For this reason, it is essential that the message transmitted, to be remembered, contains something new, comes with something extra, and differentiates itself from other products in the same category. Anything that is current or brings something new attracts attention. Man is interested in new things and is drawn to the sensational (Petrescu, 2002).

Brand likeability plays a vital role in firms and the market position of their brands (Albert *et al*., 2008). Starting from the fact that likeability can also be defined by evaluating the attractiveness that a consumer has towards a brand and that consumers' likeability towards a brand acts as a differentiating factor, the author Bang Nguyen (2015) and his colleagues proposed a new scale, innovative, to measure the degree of sympathy towards a brand. They focused on post-purchase sentiment rather than a pre-purchase condition. The study used systematic scale development procedures starting from scales suggested by authors such as Churchill (1979), DeVellis (2003), Lages (2005), Netemeyer (2003), and Parasuraman (2005), scales that they adapted, they tested and developed them (Nguyen *et al*., 2015). Thus, their brand likeability scale includes four dimensions: positivity (optimism, positive association, good feeling), interaction (dependency, attachment, information exchange, quality of communication), personified quality (friendliness, lovable, attractive, knowledge, integrity), and brand satisfaction (approval, cheerfulness, tranquility, gratification). Brand likeability is, in other words, the assessment of positivity, interaction, personification, and satisfaction with the brand in a multidimensional framework. It is a common, basic element between the four dimensions (Nguyen *et al*., 2015).

Companies have the chance and the freedom to manage likeability as a strength of their internal strategies. Other researchers, such as Akdeniz and his team (2013), discuss the relationship between likeability and the reputation of companies, the importance directly proportional to the likeability of the brand (Akdeniz *et al*., 2013). The research and the new scale are also justified because it deepens the understanding of the consequences of likeability in the purchase process, loyalty, and trust towards the brand. Consumer likeability has produced results even during periods when it has not been considered, as consumer behaviors and other marketing outcomes have also been impacted by it. The authors argue that brand likeability is associated with satisfaction and the power of a spoken word (Nguyen *et al*., 2015).

A story, if it is dynamic and has a novelty element, will capture attention. To positively impact people's behavior, it must be original and authentic. Only in this way can it play a decisive role. A questionable story or one with a takeaway message tends to generate skepticism among consumers, and people do not like to be or feel manipulated (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995). In marketing, one of the most common strategies is that through personification, the brand, employees, and even customers transform into characters, into heroes, making them all part of the brand story. Personification creates connections. People have a good perception of the product. Their perceptions are positively influenced by and through the story (Guber, 2007; Youssef *et al*., 2018). People like to interact with the characters. If they have this chance to relate to the characters, their attachment to the brand is strengthened. Psychologically, consumers who interact with a product or service that has been presented to them in the form of or with the help of a story are more likely to remember details about that product or service. In other words, the story helps people retain the information they receive differently. Memorization can be done not only factually but also visually or emotionally (Mossberg *et al*., 2010).

Conventional information sources have less information and emotional content than stories (Hsiao *et al*., 2013), which is why stories have an extra chance precisely because they stimulate the emotions of those who delve into their content (Gottschall, 2012). The more the sentiment that a story conveys to listeners is felt and appreciated by them, the more force and continuity the story has. The story gives this emotion through its heroes, myths, and extraordinary phenomena (Youssef *et al*., 2018). According to Ferres and Masanet (2017), stories that use a single style, i.e., either exclusively cognitive-informational or only appeal to the affective dimension, are ineffective in the informational transfer between sender and receiver. The emotional story generates a more significant attitudinal change than the cognitive story. Even if emotion makes people engage and react, strategists and advertisers must still aim not to become too sentimental but to maintain a balance. Otherwise, they risk losing credibility (Hamelin *et al*., 2020).

## Conclusions

The story is a means of conveying information, ideas, values , and principles. It is a timeless bridge between people, cultures, and traditions. The story helps to form a collective memory and preserve historical events. It determines and maintains connections between people, facilitating human relationships. The story motivates, encourages, inspires, and educates. Get people to act. The story can be a form of therapy, a strategy, a technique, a working tool, or an art form. The story helps us to understand things more quickly and remember them. It is a form of learning. The story can grab and hold people's attention. It has the power to change the way people think. The story creates emotions. It also addresses the heart and reason. Therefore, the story is an asset of great value to all humanity.

In the advertising space, the story is a messenger of the image and messages of a brand, it is a bridge between brands and consumers (Keller, 1993), and it also creates connections between consumers of the same brand. The story draws attention to brands and new products and helps the consumer discover their qualities. The story can encourage, motivate, inspire, and educate consumers. It can change the way consumers think and behave. It can influence their decisions in the process of purchasing goods. The story helps consumers retain and understand the message more efficiently. The story supports the product's position in the market and the consumer's mind (Kaufman, 2003) while encouraging competition between products. It is a particular marketing strategy, as it can excite and create attachments and feelings of brand loyalty.

In conclusion, the specialized literature shows that the story is an integral part of the success of a brand, that a good and well-told story makes a difference when it comes to a brand's reputation, that the story is a link between the consumer and the brand and that it also simplifies the process of memorizing the message and the product purchase process, helping the consumer to make the decision more quickly. With time, advertising became the biggest Storyland, and the story became the Trojan horse of marketing.

Stories will continue to develop regardless of social, political, economic, or natural events (Scalise Sugiyama, 2001). Still, due to the excessive development in the scientific field and the technological explosion, stories risk losing their legitimacy as instruments of communicating truths about everything all over the world. This process, if realized, will have severe consequences for all people and their ways of life (Jenkins, 2013). Also, we must take into consideration the AI evolution. As a result, the art of storytelling will have to overcome itself. From this perspective, the limits of this study concern the advertising-story artificial intelligence relationship and the ethical and moral issues that the development of such a relationship will generate. Nevertheless, it can be possible in future research perspectives.

Considering technological changes, the art of storytelling will have to overcome itself. From this perspective, the limitations of this study refer to the lack of articles studied in this sense and experiments that take into account the advertisement-story artificial intelligence relationship and the ethical and moral issues that the development of such a relationship will generate.

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# Alienation and Technology: A Research Methodology

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**Abstract:** Ever since the Industrial Revolution, many philosophers have pointed out modern society's dangers, linking technology's increasing intrusion into human life with the so-called phenomenon of alienation. This effect has been heightened considerably ever since the Covid-19 pandemic. It has seen most of the world switching to working and studying from home, going to virtual museums, online theater plays, and communicating through social media, thus relying more and more on technology for sometimes even basic things. The current research focuses on the higher education sector, and the impact technology has had on this field, especially since the switch to online and hybrid classes. The concern of this research is in measuring the alienating effect this sudden intrusion of technology has had on the higher education system and investigating whether the techniques and methods utilized within the practice of philosophical counseling could help alleviate it. The theme of this paper revolves around identifying a research methodology that would best suit this endeavor. The proposal revolves around the focus group, paired with a series of philo-cafés, set up on the theme of technology and its alienating effects on the individual and society.

**Keywords:** alienation, technology, philosophical counseling, higher education

## Introduction

One cannot dismiss the considerable role technology has had in the development of humankind and our current society, as well as the benefits brought on by technological advancements that have significantly impacted most domains of our lives. But there is also a downside to the extensive intrusion of technology. Ever since the Industrial Revolution, many philosophers have warned about the harmful effects technology can have, linking the increasing intrusion of technology into human life with the so-called phenomenon of alienation.

Technology's alienating effect on human life also represents the current research topic. The investigation is concerned with the impact technology has had on the higher education sector, especially since the switch to online and hybrid classes that came along with the restrictions imposed during the Covid-19 pandemic. The theme of this paper is related to the methodology that will be used in this endeavor, specifically in measuring the alienating effect this sudden intrusion of technology has had on the higher education system. It also investigates whether the techniques and methods utilized within philosophical counseling could help alleviate this effect.

## Literature Review

### Alienation and Technology

But first, let us begin by taking a closer look at what has been said about the connection between technology and the phenomenon termed "alienation". Etymologically speaking, "alienation" has deep ancient Latin roots. Still, its link with technology is of a more recent date, residing in the philosophy of Karl Marx who believed capitalist society was at fault for putting the worker in a state of "technological alienation" (Wendling, 2009). He has described it as a state where "human beings are not only dominated by the commodities they produce; the very tools with which human beings labor dominate them" (Wendling, 2009, p. 56). The Frankfurt School thinkers continued this line of thought, arguing that the Enlightenment's program might end up with crippling consequences for humanity, rendering it captive of the technology it has developed. Sociologist Max Weber agreed with the Frankfurt School's thinkers and blamed the program of the Enlightenment for the lack of meaningful activity the individual was experiencing (Wendling, 2009).

Martin Heidegger (1966) believed that the intrusion of technology has led to the dominance of a certain type of thinking in society. "The calculative, business-like" kind of thinking, a thinking which "races from one prospect to the next (...) never stops, never collects itself" and is not that type of thinking which contemplates the meaning which reigns in everything that is" (p. 46). Jacques Ellul (1980) thinks that technology is the one that is generating alienation within society, as "alienation, (in his view), is no longer capitalistic, it is now technological" (p. 73).

Several studies have pointed to a connection between the increased use of technology and adverse psychological effects. For example, a study developed by the University of Gothenburg in Sweden has shown that, in young adults, sleep disturbances, stress, and depression were associated with heavy technology use (Thomée *et al*., 2011). In addition, social isolation and poor sleep quality were also linked with prolonged use of technology and frequent social media use being connected with a higher chance of experiencing feelings of social isolation, as found in a study conducted in 2017 (Primack *et al*., 2017).

All these negative psychological effects are also closely connected with alienation. Several studies have associated this phenomenon with "anxiety, deviant behavior, substance abuse, poor social skills, low academic motivation, low self-esteem, psychological distress, and depression" (Safipour *et al*., 2011, p. 2). While in other studies, alienation has been shown to "affect emotional health, self-esteem, and the self-image of the person and lead to psychological symptoms" (Safipour *et al*., 2011, p. 2).

Studies conducted during the pandemic have shown an increase in this type of adverse phycological effects. A study from March 2020 done in China points to an increase in depressive and anxiety symptoms (Wang *et al*., 2020, Wenjun *et al*., 2020). A poll taken in the United States in the same period has found that "more than one-third of Americans (36%) say coronavirus is having a serious impact on their mental health" (American Psychiatric Association, 2020).

Research into the impact of the pandemic on higher field education has also been done, with a study from China indicating different anxiety levels in almost 25% of the students that were questioned (Cao *et al*., 2020). These results were backed up by research done at the University of Valladolid, Spain, with a roughly similar percentage of students experiencing anxiety, 34.19% going through depression and 28.14% dealing with stress (Odriozola-González *et al*., 2020).

## Research Methodology

Having better defined the theme of the current research, let us focus on the prospective methodology. It will be employed in determining the alienating effect technology has had upon higher education and in analyzing whether some of the methods used within the practice of philosophical counseling could positively alleviate this phenomenon's negative consequences.

Considering this theme and its implications, the best methodology for the current research would be the focus-group method, paired with a series of philo-cafés setup about technology and its alienating effects on it both the individual and society.

The focus group is a qualitative type of research, a "research method that brings together a small group of people to answer questions in a moderated setting" (Tegan, 2021). It is believed that the focus group can provide a more profound and better understanding of the phenomenon under study by bringing its members together and facilitating the interaction of ideas and connections. Regarding the topics that best fit the focus group, thoughts, beliefs, and feelings are considered the ones for whom this research method works best.

The above features make the focus group a perfect method to employ in the current research. The theme of alienation certainly falls within the topics that best fit this method. The interaction between its members that this methodology offers would unquestionably benefit the analysis of such a complex philosophical concept and its interaction with technology.

The philo-café is a group technique developed within the practice of philosophical counseling. The first philosophical cafés were held in December 1992 in Paris, France. They were organized by philosopher Marc Sautet and designed as places where anyone could participate and debate about the big questions in life. The intended scope of these philo-cafés was to make philosophy more accessible to the general public. These ideas are still reflected in the fundamental principles of the philo-café, namely that everyone can participate, that freedom of thought is encouraged and that the philo-café is a place where universal subjects are to be discussed among diverse participants. The discussion sessions are facilitated by a philosopher whose task is to guide the debate along the lines of a topic that is either chosen at the beginning of the discussion by the participants or by the facilitator prior to the debate.

As a tool developed within philosophical practice, the philo-café is undeniably well suited for analyzing a philosophical concept. Being built from text fragments, it allows the facilitator to provide a philosophical background and starting point for the discussion. And as in the case of the focus group, the philo-café, a group method, allows for thought interaction and connections between participants, which helps build a better and deeper understanding of the topic.

**Instruments**

The targeted population for the current study is represented by those involved in the teaching process within the higher education system. The size of the group that is aimed for is 7-12 participants. It is agreed upon as the most effective range of participants for a focus group of teachers and students to have a complete perspective of how technology has influenced both sides of the teaching process.

The opening focus-group interview is intended to introduce the participants to the topic. It captures their initial knowledge of alienation, its link with technology, the negative effects on the individual and society, and how to deal with them. The interview begins with a short introduction. Next, the facilitator relates to the participants' information about the rules of the discussion, followed by a gradual introduction of the discussion's topics and sub-topics. The issues unfold from a general, introductory one that tries to determine the participants' knowledge of the phenomenon of alienation and thus clarify the meaning of this concept to more in-depth ones that try to identify the causes of this phenomenon and its link with technology. The last part of the focus-group interview is concerned with identifying the harmful effects alienation caused by technology has had on the field of higher education, along with finding a way to deal with these negative effects.

This initial interview will be followed by four philo-cafés built on technology and its alienating effects. We have designed four philo-cafés starting from the texts of Erich Fromm (2001), Theodor Adorno (2005), Jacques Ellul (1980), and Stefan Lorenz Sorgner (2021). They are planned to follow closely after the first focus-group interview and are thought of as a weekly occurrence within a month's timeframe. The four philo-cafés are designed to be conducted in the order presented in the paper to generate a better understanding of what alienation stands for and its connection with technology.

> 1. "By alienation is meant a mode of experience in which the person experiences himself as an alien. He has become, one might say, estranged from himself. He does not experience himself as the center of his world, as the creator of his acts – but his acts and their consequences have become his masters, whom he obeys, or whom he may even worship" (Fromm, 2001, p. 117).

The first philo-café will start from the above fragment from Erich Fromm's work *The Sane Society* (2001) and will have an essential role, designed around the topic of defining alienation. In this process, the facilitator will request participants to give examples from their life when they experienced alienation, as Erich Fromm described in the fragment above. Further on, the philosophical counselor, as a facilitator, will ask the following general question related to the topic:

**RQ1.** What could be the cause that is leading humankind to alienation?

Participants must reply, giving arguments to sustain their answers. An open discussion will follow this process.

> 2. "What has become alien to men is the human component of culture, its closest part, which upholds them against the world. They make common cause with the world against themselves, and the most alienated condition of all, the omnipresence of commodities, their own conversion into appendages of machinery, is a mirage of closeness for them. The great works of art and philosophical constructions have remained uncomprehended not through their too great distance from the heart of the human experience, but the opposite" (Adorno, 2005, p. 96).

The second philo-café is built around the problem of determining the root cause of alienation, starting from the fragment mentioned above from Theodor Adorno's *Minima Moralia* (2005). In this endeavor, the facilitator will first solicit participants for life examples that illustrate a time when they felt a closer connection to technological devices than to their human counterparts. Then, continuing the debate, the facilitator will ask participants a general question that is related to the topic:

**RQ2.** Are commodities, machines, and technologies more important than humans?

Participants must reply to the question, arguing their answer. Then, the debate will continue with an open discussion.

> 3. "However, contrary to what is often asserted, work is far from having lost its "laboriousness" because of technology. Quite the opposite, it seems that even after the era of the machine (whose effects on man are common knowledge), work has become even more laborious and draining than before. The transition to fully automated work, to the push-button factory, is still rare and slow. And

this is not due to capitalism; the rate is no faster in socialist countries. It is not profit-seeking that blocks this development but the tremendous change demanded by automation, and it is not easy to put through in all areas. In reality, for most workers, technological growth brings harder and more exhausting work (speeds, for instance, demanded not by the capitalist but by technology and the service owed to the machine). We are intoxicated with the idea of leisure and universal automation. But we will be stuck with work, wasted, and alienated for a long time. Alienation, though, is no longer capitalistic, it is now technological" (Ellul, 1980, pp. 72–73).

The third philo-café will define technological alienation, starting from Ellul's fragment mentioned above and extracted from his work *The Technological System* (1980). After the participants read the text, the facilitator will invite them to share life examples of when they experienced technological alienation, as described by Ellul in the above fragment. The next step will require the philosophical counselor acting as a facilitator to come up with a general question that is relevant to the topic:

**RQ3.** What solution can you think of that could help the higher education domain better deal with the negative effects of technological alienation?

Participants answer the question, providing arguments for the possible solutions they might propose. The debate will end with an open discussion.

4. "To have always been posthuman requires that humans have always been part of gradual evolutionary processes that have allowed us to develop from our common ancestors, the great apes, to the people we are today. As posthumans, we have always depended on technology, and there is no clear categorical distinction between nature and culture, body and soul, or genetic and environmental influences" (Sorgner, 2021, p. 39).

The fourth and last philo-café is that of technology as part of human evolution, having as starting point Stefan Sorgner's view on technology reflected in the above fragment from *On Transhumanism* (2021). The facilitator will open the discussion by requesting participants to bring examples of positive contributions by technological developments in higher education. Then, the debate will continue, having the facilitator formulate a general question relevant to the topic at hand:

**RQ4.1.** If you could choose the course of the future evolution of technology, what would you change to eliminate its alienating effect?

**RQ4.2.** What impact would this change have on the field of higher education?

Participants must provide possible solutions to this question, bringing arguments for their proposals through an open discussion.

This fourth and last philo-café will be followed through with a retake of the initial interview, this time with a questionnaire to evaluate the participants' reaction to the research methodology.

This process is thought of in this specific order to have an initial overview through the first focus group interview of the participants' knowledge of alienation, technology's alienating effects, how they experience these effects, and how they deal with them. This first step is intended to be followed by the four philo-cafés to educate the participants in all these respects. Finally, the retake of the initial interview at the end of the process is destined to identify the understanding gained by the participants concerning the alienating effects of technology and how they can better deal with them.

## Conclusion

This paper is a prospective presentation of the methodology that will be employed for exploring the alienating effect of the intrusion of technology caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, it will review its impact on the higher education system and investigate whether some philosophical counseling methods might help alleviate the situation.

The methodology proposed in this paper for the current research combines a qualitative method, the focus group, and a group practice employed in philosophical counseling, the philo-café. The qualities of these two group approaches make them the best candidates to be utilized within the current research.

The sequence of focus groups and philo-cafés is thought of in a specific order to allow for initial measurement of the alienating effect of technology on the participants. Further, it assesses the level of knowledge on alienation and its connection with technology and retakes the measurements at the end. The use of this research methodology will determine whether the sudden intrusion of technology in the higher education system, caused by the restriction imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic, has led to an increased level of alienation among those involved in the teaching process and, also, whether the philo-café, as a technique employed in philosophical counseling, could help in alleviating the alienating effects of technology.

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# Young People Are Avoiding Traditional Media, But Are They Safe on the Internet? How Generation Z Reacts to Fake News and Information Disorder

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**Abstract:** The global pandemic, followed by the greatest humanitarian crisis since the Second World War, brought the highest level of mistrust in traditional media. This led to an exodus of people on the internet without realizing they can easily become victims of confirmation bias or of the addiction to self-validation. This exploratory study seeks to understand how Generation Z's news avoidance of traditional media is increasing social media usage and their exposure to disinformation disorder. Focusing on a convenience sample of 126 participants, data collection was performed with an adapted questionnaire during May 2022, applying the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scales to test the research questions and hypotheses. The research shows that Generation Z members are especially distrustful and less receptive to all information. In addition to the invariably nature of news and the enormous quantity of information they receive daily, this makes young people skeptical of news organizations' objectives and more prone to shun the media – or at least certain forms of news. The study's goal is to aid in the fight against the spread of false information and the erosion of public trust in government by providing insights from both the standpoint of media literacy training and media transformation.

**Keywords:** fake news, generation Z, information disorder, media trust, social media.

## Introduction

The modern obsession with proving oneself right at all costs has reverted society to its classical form, with members searching for like-minded individuals and being ferociously protective, to the point of aggression, of their worldviews despite knowing that they are not supported by facts or scientific evidence. After the avalanche of fake news and conspiracy theories during the global challenge the whole world has faced during the last two years, the war Russia started against Ukraine confirmed what communication specialists feared: every crisis will bring another major misinformation crisis (Wardle, 2017). While our generation and our parents' generation still gather the basic information from various sources and traditional mass media, obliged to respect audio-visual communication laws imposed by the authorities, the youth rely mostly on social media. The lack of trust in current society, in the political class, in all the decision-making factors can create monsters and lead to situations with consequences that are difficult to anticipate (Kirchick, 2017). The unconscious tendency of individuals to process information in such a way as to contradict their own beliefs, known in Anglo-Saxon psychology as *confirmation bias* (Kahan, 2015), might become dangerous for the young generation exposed to information disorder. A successful disinformation operation causes an irrational state that pushes the recipient of the message to see reality differently, to enrich it, to convince themselves that the truth is different than what seems obvious (Volkoff, 2009).

The primary purpose of this study is to shed light on the media and information consuming habits, social network use, and false news attitudes of Romania's youngest generation, all in the context of a sense of trust. The study is based on two important research questions:

**RQ1:** What is the effect of lack of trust in traditional media and journalists for young members of Gen Z?

**RQ2:** What is the effect of information disorder and fake news on young members from Gen Z using social media?

Since the internet is considered the Holy Grail of information by the young generation and only few feel the need to look for the truth in multiple places, this exploratory study seeks to understand the diffusion of disinformation by examining how young social media users respond to it and how many take into consideration fact-checking and proceed with it. By applying a quantitative research method, an adapted questionnaire based on two scales, on a sample of young people studying communication sciences, we can understand exactly how far the disinformation phenomenon goes and how important media literacy is today.

## Information Disorder and Fake News in the Post-truth Era

The practice of spreading false information is as old as human communication, though one that has improved with time. Different terminology and perspectives have been used to define this phenomenon: fake news, misinformation, information disorder, disinformation, and post-truth. If there is a strong emotional impact, disinformation has every chance of achieving its goal. It's the lesson already learned by disinformation agencies, trolls, and other decision makers who set the algorithms and how data is redistributed (Voicu, 2018).

Anything flavored with truth is far more persuasive and successful at attracting people's attention than something completely fake.

It is possible to interpret disinformation in either a broad or a restricted manner. Some go so far as to consider it dishonest or merely misleading information, but others restrict it even farther. One thing is unmistakable: misinformation is a big enterprise, a sophisticated process requiring precise coordination to manipulate the truth (Volkoff, 2009). Things are not as simple as black and white, and misinformation is not simply a collection of lies. Digital media have shattered reality in such cruel ways that there is no consensus on the truth, and as a result, societies are divided not only by differences in views but also by differences in fact (Leonard, 2021).

The proliferation of fake news has provided fertile ground for mistrust in social networks, as they facilitate the dissemination of misinformation (Masullo *et al*., 2020). In addition, the complexity of fake news dominance in today's media landscape stems from the fact that they are "neither always false nor always news" (Bârgăoanu, 2018), and the blurred lines between truth and falsehood classification confuse users to the point where nothing appears to be trustworthy. Rhetoricians must know the facts to mislead with lies, they must know the truth to deceive with falsehoods, they must understand reality to manipulate with doublespeak (McComisky, 2017). Disinformation – whether based on communication failures, inadvertent disinformation, or blatant propaganda – frequently takes the guise of believable truths, which contributes to its penetrating power (Bârgăoanu, 2018). However, Wardle (2017) provides a typology to provide a better definition of the term, which includes the potential to deceive the audience, misleading content for the deceptive use of information, imposter content that suggests the impersonation of legitimate sources, fabricated content that is entirely false and created for deceptive purposes, the false connection when visuals, captions, or headlines are not in line with the content, and purely false content. Tandoc *et al*. (2018) proposed a second taxonomy that encompasses many forms of defective content, including news satire, news parody, fabrication, manipulation, propaganda, and advertising.

Since the 2016 U.S. elections and during the Covid-19 outbreak, hyperbolic humor has also seen increased use. The term *news satire* is used to describe content that pokes fun at news shows as a means of entertaining and attracting an audience (Tandoc *et al*., 2018). However, parody can be regarded as a distinct type of fake news, while it has some characteristics with satire. The way in which humor is used is the sole criterion for distinguishing between the two. Tandoc *et al*. write that "rather than delivering direct commentary on current affairs through humor, parody plays on the ludicrousness of issues and accentuates them by making up wholly fabricated news items" (p. 142). Particularly, political parody outlets profit from the ambiguous credibility of the news article. But the outcome is the same: the reader is rendered incapable of distinguishing between true and false. However, research indicates that satire and parody websites can have a significant impact on a person's beliefs and may be more convincing than often believed (Tandoc *et al*., 2018). Diverse disinformation tactics exist to persuade the target audience of the alternative truth.

Politics-related conspiracy theories typically reflect and are fueled by the political leanings of the populace. However, they can also influence attitudes and relationships. What has emerged is a conspiracy theory worldview in which individuals can choose from several false beliefs (Morrish, 2020).

There are two significant opposing inclinations among online users in response to the proliferation of fake news: the tendency to question everything they read or see and the tendency to rely on their own ability to detect such falsehoods. At this point, people typically believe that they are resistant to such manipulation. In this regard, a recent survey of a nationally representative sample of adult Romanians indicates that there is a "significant third person effect regarding people's self-reported ability to detect fake news, and that this effect is stronger when people compare their fake news detection literacy to that of distant others than to that of close others" (Corbu *et al*., 2020, p. 1). In the context of the phenomena of disinformation, concerns regarding message reliability and media trust are common. Losing credibility is a big issue since the media relies on trust to maintain their communication dominance. In the social media world, people frequently rely on their interpersonal ties to examine the information they encounter, and when dealing with trustworthy and credible sources, they make fewer cognitive efforts to evaluate a message (Metzger *et al*., 2010).

### Traditional Media's Constant Decrease of Trust in the Past Five Years

There are overwhelming differences between generations when it comes to trust, defined as "information showing us how individuals perceive and evaluate news media" (Kohring & Matthes, 2007, p. 231). When it comes to media consumption, trust is crucial because it is "one reason why consumers consume news media" (Fisher, 2016, p. 451). European citizens mostly trust traditional media, stated the European Parliament in 2021, one year after the Covid-19 pandemic which changed the world (European Parliament, 2022). During a second wave of Coronavirus lockdowns, the study offered some encouraging indicators for the news industry, like growing consumption and trust. Many conventional news businesses appeared to profit not only from increased visibility, but also financially, as more individuals purchased online subscriptions and advertisers sought to link their brands with trustworthy content. A year later, the outlook is rather less positive. While a subset of mostly upscale news publishers across the globe report record digital subscription numbers and rising profits, we find that interest in news and general news consumption has decreased significantly in many countries, and faith in the news has deteriorated almost everywhere (Newman *et al*., 2022). On the other hand, Newman *et al*. (2022) state, based on data collected from 6 continents and 46 markets, that recent shocks have expedited structural transformations toward a more digital, mobile, and platform-dominated media environment, with repercussions for journalism's revenue models and formats. In over half of the countries surveyed, trust in the news has decreased drastically. While the majority remain very engaged, others are turning away from the news media and in some cases disconnecting from news altogether. Interest in news has fallen sharply across markets, from 63% to 51% in the past five years (Newman *et al*., 2022). Long-term declines in interest and trust in news across age groups and markets persist as more news providers and formats compete for consumers' time and attention (Coster, 2022).

An interesting phenomenon is the share of news consumers who claim they avoid the news frequently or occasionally which has risen dramatically worldwide with many respondents saying news has a negative effect on their mood. And last, but not least, significant numbers of younger and less educated individuals report avoiding the news because it might be difficult to follow or comprehend (Newman *et al*., 2022), indicating that the news media should do much more to simplify language and better explain or contextualize complex issues. The same report shows that Facebook remains the most-used social network for news, but users are more likely to say they see too much news in their feed compared with other networks. While older generations remain devoted to the platform, we demonstrate how the younger generation has shifted its focus to visual networks over the past three years (Newman *et al*., 2022).

Romania is not in a more fortunate position than the rest of the European countries. 2021 was a poor one for journalism in Romania. The precipitous decline in media credibility and news interest, much below pre-pandemic levels, further demonstrates that media legitimacy was compromised, according to the *Reuters Digital News Report 2022*. Data shows that overall trust in news fell 9 percentage points to 33%. Trust also declined for most brands, whether public or private media. Revelations about the use of public funds to purchase media goodwill and legal actions against journalists may have contributed to further reductions in the percentage of people who believe the media is independent of political or corporate concerns (Radu, 2022).

While a succession of crises highlights the need of independent professional journalism and the expansion of some media companies, a rising number of young people are becoming increasingly alienated from the news (Newman *et al*., 2022). Data shows that with declining interest in many countries, an increase in selective news avoidance, and low levels of trust (Newman *et al*., 2022), the most significant challenge news media face today is connecting with people who have access to an unprecedented amount of content online and convincing them that it is worthwhile to pay attention to news. Selective news avoiders provide a range of justifications for their conduct, shows the Reuters report (2022): 43% of respondents say they are turned off by the repetitiveness of the news agenda, particularly around politics and COVID-19, and 29% say they are frequently exhausted by the news. 29% of respondents say they avoid the news because they believe it cannot be trusted. Around one-third (36%) of individuals, particularly those under the age of 35, claim that news depresses their mood. Others claim that the news leads to avoidable fights (17%) or feelings of powerlessness (16%).

There are overwhelming differences between generations when it comes to trust. While the adult public's faith in traditional media such as broadcast and print media is improving, misinformation and disinformation (Newman *et al*., 2018) continue to erode trust in online media and social media.

### Generation Z and Trust in Social Media

Generation Z, also known by various other names (centennials, post-millenials, iGen, Gen Zers), has been the subject of considerable interest for some time, primarily because it is regarded as the first generation to be born in a technologically advanced environment (Gaidhani *et al*., 2018). This segment of the population consists of young people born between the mid-1990s and the turn of the century, however demographers, sociologists, and academics do not agree on the exact birth years of this generation. Having grown up in this modern era, the full extent of its effects is only now becoming apparent. New studies reveal significant changes in the attitudes, values, and practices of today's young people, some of which are cause for optimism and others for alarm (Dimock, 2019). There are many similarities between this generation and the so-called *millennials* (born between the early 1980s and the mid-1990s). Both generations are involved in globalization and the emergence of the digital age. People also share the widespread use of Internet-connected gadgets, which has changed the way they study and access information (Shatto & Erwin, 2016). However, there are differences between the two generations because of the socioeconomic environment and technological advancements in which they were born and socialized, changes that, according to published studies (Dimock, 2019), are influencing their perception of the environment, prevalence of certain values, and relationship to work.

The influence of Generation Z in popular culture and journalism is pervasive. Sources ranging from Merriam-Webster and Oxford to the Urban Dictionary currently use this term for the generation that follows the Millennials, and Google Trends data indicate that "Generation Z" is vastly surpassing other terms in searches. While there is no scientific method for determining when a moniker has stuck, it is evident that Generation Z is gaining ground (Dimock, 2019). The younger generations find their natural habitat in social media, so this context of rapid information dissemination on social networks, whether trustworthy or not, must be understood in the context of a generational dimension (Perez-Escoda, 2020). To communicate with others, learn new things, and have fun, social media platforms have become omnipresent.

This penetration data phenomena among the youngest population compounds the issues of growing misinformation and insufficient digital literacy (Perez-Escoda, 2020) among a demographic that spends the majority of its waking hours participating on social networks. Gen Z's primary motivation for engaging in online socialization is the desire to be informed and engaged with other individuals (Yadav & Rai, 2017). These 14–25-year-old Z'ers are more likely than other generations to prefer online social sites for communicating and interacting with people they know. Furthermore, they are willing and feel compelled to provide active feedback and comments about the brands/services/issues they use or are in some way involved with. This generation is a prolific creator, a voracious consumer of online material, and creative and mash-up masters; they have such a strong gravitational pull toward online communication that they choose to engage and stay connected with technology at their fingertips (Yadav & Rai, 2017).

This generation remains a dilemma for the traditional media and journalists who want to attract their attention, but they have the feeling they are constantly hitting a wall. This year's Reuters Digital Reports focuses on the shifting habits of younger people, particularly those under 25 who news organizations sometimes struggle to reach. Studies conducted in the past five years reveal high discrepancies between the media consumption of young adults and older generations. Young adults "have demonstrated a decline in news intake, but a rise in social media consumption" (Carr & Bard, 2017, p. 3). And the numbers have decreased regarding traditional media consumption and increased regarding social media in European countries, data collected for the yearly Eurobarometer shows (European Parliament, 2022).

The digital environment continues to change drastically, with new social networks such as TikTok joining the market and existing platforms such as Instagram and Telegram gaining significant appeal among youthful audiences (Eddy, 2022). As social natives divert their focus from Facebook, TikTok is the fastest-growing network according to this year's Reuters research, with 40% of 18-to-24-year-olds utilizing the platform for news. In Romania, the main news resources for Generation Z are YouTube (36%), Instagram (34%), WhatsApp (20%), and TikTok (15%), according to the same research (Newman *et al.*, 2022). Use of TikTok for news, for example, has expanded fivefold among 18–24-year-olds across all markets in just three years, while YouTube's popularity among youths in Eastern Europe has soared (Eddy, 2022). Despite overwhelming agreement that more questionable content circulates on social media, the content from these platforms is typically not regarded as problematic. Journalists, as recognizable news sources, are generally irrelevant in guiding the information habits of this user category, with peers serving as more influential news providers. These findings demonstrate a lack of critical involvement and call into question the usefulness of present media literacy instruction (Newman *et al.*, 2018).

## Generation Z and News Consumption

The informational ecosystem was not intended to facilitate the dissemination of false information, but the design of social media platforms makes it possible to profit from the emotional response at the expense of the logical one (Wardle, 2017). Consumers are faced with a trade-off: to consume true, fair, non-partisan news, without any emotional reward, or to consume fake news, which nevertheless confirms their perceptions and values, thus bringing them psychological reward (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2016). The emotional response was more than obvious at the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war, when, faced with the worst humanitarian disaster since World War II (United Nations, 2022), social media users responded immediately and with genuine sympathy. During the initial months of the military conflict, fake news and conspiracy theories were present on social media in all forms, as classified by Stefureac (2020): by word of mouth (negative labels to discredit someone), by number (manipulating statistics to increase or decrease the magnitude of an event), by repetition, and by hearsay (delivery of unverifiable bits of information that are given credibility by inducing the feeling of privileged access to their source) (with the use of artificial intelligence). Conspiracy theories simmered on the periphery of society for years, but in 2020 they find new audiences and continue to attract new addicts (Morrish, 2020).

Social networks have regularly increased the level of background noise in the past two years, since the pandemic was declared by the World Health Organization, and some studies suggest that in critical situations such as the current one, conventional media give more trust and credibility (Tasnim *et al*., 2020), even though new digital media offer a quicker response to information requests. Allowing people to distribute disinformation without supervision has encouraged an information disorder that is harder to govern and regulate (Ireton & Posetti, 2018) in this new information environment that provides more freedom in a communicational manner. The repercussions of these alterations can be examined from two distinct perspectives: referring to democratic cultures in terms of faith in media and journalism in addition to politicians and institutions and in terms of digital literacy requirements that have arisen from media literacy (Perez-Escoda *et al*., 2021).

As the digital media landscape rapidly advances, major disparities continue to emerge among younger news viewers. It is not enough to say that certain young people's behaviors and preferences differ from those of older individuals. Even between social natives and digital natives, it appears that the distinctions are expanding (Eddy, 2022). Young people still consider news too dismal or too overwhelming. Younger audiences frequently differentiate between 'the news' as a narrow, traditional agenda of politics and current affairs and 'news' as a much broader umbrella encompassing topics such as sports, entertainment, celebrity gossip, culture, and science (Eddy, 2022). The annual Reuters study (Newman *et al*., 2022) shows that Young Romanians rely on the internet and social media for news and information but are skeptical about the latter. They have increased their consumption of political, comedic, and musical content since the outbreak of COVID-19. At the same time, there is a palpable lack of faith in the credibility of news outlets, mainstream political figures, and the political process (Radu, 2022).

## Methodology

The design of this research is based on a national survey on a sample of N = 126 Romanian students, aged between 19 and 23 years old, with the average age of 20.6. The research sample is made from both male (58) and female (68) respondents, mainly communication students located in Bucharest. The data were collected during a period of ten days, in May 2022, through a questionnaire distributed mainly on WhatsApp student groups.

The research theme is the perception of the young traditional and social media consumers, their trust in information sources, both journalists and digital networks, and the choices they make when it comes to selecting the right medium for getting vital information during different crises, such as the Russian-Ukrainian war. Also, the research topic derived from the theories analyzed is the effect of news avoidance (Newman *et al*., 2018) on young students and their reaction to fake news and information disorder in general. The novelty of this research is the correlation between traditional media's reputation and trust factor and the exposure to information dissemination on social media.

Starting from these objectives, the study is based on the following research questions and hypotheses:

**RQ1.** What is the effect of lack of trust in traditional media and journalists for young members of Gen Z?

**RQ2.** What is the effect of information disorder and fake news on young members of Gen Z using social media?

***H1.*** The low level of trust in traditional media is related to the increased level of social media usage among Generation Z members.

***H2.*** The low level of trust in traditional media and journalists is related to the high exposure to information dissemination on social media.

To identify the personal attitudes and scaling of the value judgements regarding traditional media's reputation and Generation Z's trust I created a Likert scale where a respondent is presented with one or more graded, polarizing statement (item) response for a clearly defined question that can be answered with rejection or approval. On the other hand, to measure the addiction and intensity of social media usage, exposing young people to disinformation disorder, I applied the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS), a six-item self-report scale that is a brief and effective instrument for assessing social media addiction on the Internet.

## Results and Discussion

Although one out of two students (53%) declare that they are interested in daily news and spend an average amount of 1.5 hours to find information on the main events around the world, there is valuable data to sustain H1, regarding low level of trust in traditional media is related to the increased level of social media usage among Generation Z members. Only 10.6% inform themselves from the mainstream media – such as television, radio, and newspapers – while 57% of the respondents declare the digital media their primary source of news, including social networks and private messaging apps here. Still, when it comes to watching television, young students are interested more in entertainment shows (31.4%) and sports news (21%) and less in newscasts containing politics, social, and economic news

(10.1%). Again, the first hypothesis is confirmed by the firm answer of 39.7% of the respondents who declare they never watch TV, under no circumstances. The low level of trust is confirmed by the statements regarding journalists' standards and practices. When asked how correct they consider the information transmitted by news reporters in general, on a scale from one to seven, the average answer is 3.27, meaning less than 50%. The same low trust coefficient is recorded (3.46%) when abruptly being asked about their trust in television news correspondents and information broadcasted by them. In a media scenery where commercial televisions in Romania are owned by controversial businessmen, Gen Z members give credit to the following statements: "Journalists serve the interests of the media owner, not of the public" (27.5%), "Journalists broadcast more fake news than the internet" (13.7%), or "Journalists are willing to lie for the right amount of money" (13.3%). On the other hand, there are respondents who support mainstream media, but in a low percentage (17.2%).

Gen Z spends more time on social media than watching mainstream media. With an average time of 4–5 hours (42.9%), respondents admit having days when they spend more than 6 hours on social media, using their computer or other mobile devices. The most popular social platforms among the respondents are Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and Facebook. Social media platforms benefit from a higher trust from Generation Z members, the average answer being 3.93 on a scale from 1 to 7. On the other hand, 65.9% of the respondents are convinced they are not influenced by fake news and conspiracy theories while only 21.4% admit they might be victims of disinformation dissemination on social media, confirming H2. Even so, one out of two respondents (50%) declare they often proceed to fact-checking and their secondary options are the internet, official sites, and family members. The conflict between generations is more than obvious in these situations, when 66.7% of the respondents admit they often and very often have different opinions than the older family members, parents, and grandparents, when it comes to politics, economics, and social news. And this automatically leads to an attempt to change the others' opinion (48.4%) considering these persons "poorly informed". The term *fake news* is familiar to the respondents, being communication students, but they consider themselves immune to it. On a scale from 1 to 7, the average response is 5.25, meaning they think the others might fall into the disinformation trap rather than themselves, confirming once again the third person effect theory.

Given the difficulty many younger audiences have in comprehending journalism as it is currently conducted, Generation Z seems to rely more on information given by bloggers/vloggers (15.8%), actors (14.8%), and influencers (14.6%) than journalists working for the mainstream media even in crisis situations like the Covid-19 pandemic or the Russian invasion in Ukraine. The study thus confirms how the immediate nature of social media makes them more appealing to Generation Z. Also, indifference to news and its importance, as well as the common impression of political and other biases by the media, are two of the primary causes of low levels of trust. As a result of this distrust, it is clear that media literacy is more vital than ever.

## Conclusions

This research argues that young people spend most of their time online with social networking and entertainment services rather than news applications and websites. In this context, getting people interested in traditional news material, which is frequently perceived as a chore, or in news brands that sometimes feel irrelevant to their personal life, has been challenging. Digital and social media provide access to a much broader selection of narratives while mainstream media might be frequently overwhelming for the younger generation. The direct consequences of this high level of mistrust or simply considered outdated means of information is the increasing number of social media users and their exposure to information disorder without acknowledging they might be victims of confirmation bias, isolating themselves in echo chambers. Younger audiences are more skeptical and less open to all information. In addition to the unpredictability of news and the vast amount of information they get every day, this makes Generation Z suspicious of news organizations' goals and more likely to avoid the media – or at least certain types of news. Some individuals, especially the young and the difficult to reach, do not appear interested in reading about the kinds of things that journalists deem most significant, such political crises, international conflicts, global pandemics, or climate catastrophes. Considering these illustrative statistics, media actors may seek to promote certain material in various social networks to counteract misinformation and distrust. This study will be continued through the same quantitative research method but applied to a higher number of respondents to collect more relevant data regarding this topic. A qualitative approach would also be valuable.

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# Approaches to How Risk Communication Operates in Chile in the Context of Covid-19

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**Abstract:** Today, interest in the risk posed by the COVID-19 pandemic declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2020 has increased the population's perception of risk to their health condition, especially in Chile, and the focus of the paper is to theoretically analyze the risk communication, especially in the case of Chile regarding the vaccination campaign of the Ministry of Health started in the year 2021. Likewise, communication underlies the risk management process, which varies over time, depending on changes in stakeholders. All these processes experienced in the modification of behaviors, the incorporation of new concepts in the language of the population, the dynamics of media and forms of information dissemination, and the perception of risk that the population has today about their health and public health, in general, are fundamentally associated with the management of risk communication and health communication. Furthermore, these phenomena are linked to the emergence of new paradigms and forms of social configuration about health issues of care and self-care and their influence or impact on the daily lives of people in Chile and the world through language.

**Keywords:** risk communication, health communication, COVID-19.

## Introduction

Since risk communication (and even more so risk communication itself) plays a central role in explaining the interaction of actors in the process of health and environmental emergencies, for example, it can be defined in two ways or models (Wabba, 2014): one that emphasizes the way information is transmitted to the public, and another that considers information as an interactive exchange between the actors involved, where actors, the public experts play essential roles in the exchange of information and opinion, and where how information is provided to the public stands out. The latter is a central aspect for the generation of a negotiated dialogue that effectively contributes to the solution of the conflict and a consensual agreement between the parties. In addition, it is relevant for how information is provided is altered or intervened. The exchange of information and opinions between the various actors is sometimes restricted, which generates social instability and confrontation of ideas for the maintenance and concern for the community's social welfare (Gesser-Edelsburg, 2015; Goodwin & Sun, 2014; Jin *et al*., 2020). Likewise, it reaffirms the importance, as Gamero *et al*. (2011) point out, that the provision of truthful and timely information must be effective from organizations, whether public or private, as in the case of the COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) pandemic declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2020. In this way, provided on time allows risk communication to improve the understanding of the situation that is occurring or being experienced by the population since there is a greater flow of information between the actors involved, especially in this type of health emergency such as a pandemic (Li *et al*., 2016; Menon, 2008; Paton *et al*., 2008).

However, it is necessary to highlight the importance of risk communication based on the flow of transparent and clear information since otherwise, various subjectivities interfere directly with communication effectiveness. These subjectivities have oriented the perceptions, evaluations beliefs of the subjects in each of the health, social or environmental conflicts or problems. Such perceptions, as Tejeda and Pérez-Floriano (2007) point out, play an essential role in the decisions that must be taken based on a risky situation. Therefore, greater precision and clarity are required in the messages, the wording, and the language so that they can be understood by the target audience or recipient of the information regarding the risk communication to be sent. If the above situation does not occur, it can affect the belief and perception of subjects regarding warning and related, in this case, to COVID-19. The problem lies in the fact that, since the COVID-19 pandemic has been scarce and unclear in Chile since the beginning, the perception to date is one of mistrust, as has been pointed out recently, as well as a lack of knowledge of public health, since from the beginning it was not entirely effective. Therefore, despite efforts to disseminate information, there is still misinformation (Rivera, 2011) regarding issues or aspects related to the risks and impacts of infection with the new variants that will emerge in the last eight months of 2021.

## Methodological Aspects of the Theoretical Review

The design of the theoretical review proposal is exploratory (Hernández *et al*., 2015) since it attempts to investigate a field of which there is little knowledge because the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020. There is a process of academic discussion on the social and communicational phenomenon. Therefore, it was oriented to perform a content analysis of a diversity of articles in Spanish and English since this method allows analyzing the theoretical proposals about risk communication and using social networks as information tools for the population (Williams *et al*., 2015). Thus, for Berelson (1952), studying the theoretical content of previous works allows us to deepen and theorize in a better way the phenomena being worked on to generate an objective and systematic description of the content in this case of risk communication. To this end, and based on the criteria developed by Bardin (1996), the following was fulfilled:

- Objectivity: The database of scientific articles available at the Universidad de La Frontera Library Department was used.
- Systematization: From a total of 56 scientific journal subscriptions, 18 subscriptions were used for the theoretical review (Table 1), from which 177 articles were downloaded in the areas of 1) Reflective modernity, 2) Risk society, 3) Communication

**Table 1**

Universidad de La Frontera journal subscriptions about risk communication & Covid-19 pandemic

| Name | Area | Discipline | Language |
|---|---|---|---|
| Academic Search | All | Multidisciplinary | English |
| Communication and Mass Media | Education, Social Sciences & Humanities | Communication – Mass media – Journalism | English |
| Education Source | Education, Social Sciences & Humanities | Education | English |
| ERIC | Education, Social Sciences & Humanities | Education | English |
| Fuente Académica | All | Multidisciplinary | Spanish |
| Health Source | Medicine | Medicine | English |
| Humanities Source | Education, Social Sciences & Humanities | Humanities | English |
| JSTOR | All | Multidisciplinary | English |
| Masterfile | All | Multidisciplinary | English |
| MedicLatina | Medicine | Medicine | Spanish |
| Medline | Medicine | Medicine | English |
| Nursing Reference Center | Medicine | Evidence-based nursing | English |
| Political Science | Education, Social Sciences & Humanities | Political Science | English |
| Referencia Latina | All | Multidisciplinary | Spanish |
| Scopus | All | Bibliometrics (Analysis sources) | English |
| SocINDEX | Education, Social Sciences & Humanities | Social Sciences – Humanities | English |
| UpToDate | Medicine | Evidence-based medicine | English |
| Web of Science (WOS) | All | Bibliometrics (Analysis sources) | English |

***Source:*** Compilation of the primary journal subscriptions of the Universidad de La Frontera theory, 4) Risk communication, 5) Health communication, 6) Political communication in pandemics, 7) Covid-19, 8) e-Heath, and 9) Vaccination. The most relevant journals for this paper were selected from the total number of journals (Table 2). Finally, 52 articles were used for this theoretical article.

- Analysis: This theoretical review and literature review work was carried out between May 13, 2022, and June 14, 2022, which followed the following selection criteria:
  - Communication, social science, or education journals related to risk society and risk communication issues.
  - Be public health and health communication journals related to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Table 2
Main topics analyzed in the theoretical systematization

| Name | Total articles | Contents analyzed |
|---|---|---|
| Reflective modernity | 8 | The link of historical time through an analytical reconstruction of the different existing models of society. |
| Risk society | 9 | The new social paradigm is the fruit of the modernization of industrial society. |
| Communication theory | 5 | The exploration of the four great paradigms: functionalism, structuralism, critical theory, and cultural studies. |
| Risk communication | 7 | The real-time exchange of information, recommendations, and opinions between experts and/or officials and people facing a threat (risk) to their survival, health, economic or social well-being. |
| Health communication | 5 | The modality is to inform, influence, and motivate the public on relevant health issues from individual, community, and institutional perspectives. |
| Political communication in pandemics | 4 | The current media context is characterized as a hybrid system in which old and new actors coexist and, at the same time, compete for hegemony in the media sphere. |
| Covid-19 – Covid-19 in Chile | 6 | Disease caused by the new coronavirus known as SARS-CoV-2. |
| e-Heath | 5 | The set of digital tools used in health management. |
| Vaccination – Vaccination in Chile | 7 | The mechanism of protection against disease, infection, and transmission. |

***Source:*** Compilation based on the review of articles in the databases

## Literature Review

Such health and social risks were also spread due to the new (communicative) technologies the Chilean population has access to today. It brought the events closer to the general population, making it easier for the Chilean population to experience situations of social instability: e.g., the economy has had a strong recession due to the change in purchasing habits, the impossibility for almost six months of working in public spaces, the nearly total closure of shops selling goods and services throughout the country, the transformation of face-to-face work into virtual work.). It has meant that the economy has naturally suffered due to the quarantines and the opening and closing phases of cities implemented by the Health Ministry (HM) (Beck, 2002; Bechmann, 2001).

These communicative technologies allowed the approach to detect the practices that could affect the maintenance of the social stability with which they lived (Lozano, 2012). It leads directly to the reaffirmation that the news about normal and exceptional risks (foreseeable and unprecedented, respectively) is based on the scenic reconstructions of public events. The reconstruction applies directly in the localities since understanding is happening in other localities or what is happening in their locality is characterized by segmented and sporadic information that does not meet Chileans' expectations or information needs (Reynolds & Quinn, 2008).

Espluga *et al*. (2010) indicate the impact of the media in risk communication processes as strategies that influence the construction of the population's perception of risk. Therefore, the active and symbolic role of the media in its attention to risks in modern societies not only acquires value and relevance for its task of informing but also for its capacity to influence the perceptions and reflections of subjects as a consequence of the interaction between social media and other social systems. In short, the proposal is framed within the theoretical perspective of the risk society as a framework of modernity. In this context, risk communication acquires as a mechanism for interaction in the face of dangerous situations for the safety and health of the population, as in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, where spaces have been generated with a greater need for information on the part of the population and their perception of risks to their health and self-care (Brug *et al*., 2004; Gaglia *et al*., 2008; Lee, 2009).

It has generated a new construction of these risks for people, leading to a new configuration of public health issues and everyday life in Chile and throughout the world. Talking about risks is directly linked to the difference between "risk and danger" concepts. The latter is understood as a harmful situation of external origin and risk as the possible damages and consequences of the decisions taken consciously of the dangers the population is exposed to, be it for health, political, social, or environmental reasons. Furthermore, it makes the concept of risk a multidimensional problem since, in practice, the risk is observed and perceived differently (Liu & Horsley, 2007; Nelson & Namtira, 2017; Paek *et al*., 2008).

Ultimately, it will be how the population receives or amplifies the information received from the public or private organizations to which it is being affected. Due to the proximity of risk, a new scenario has been configured. Health risk management must focus on communication as a tool for integrating the different communities involved as a substantive and transversal element of the process. It ranges from instrumental practices to others based on involvement and dialogue with the public (Coombs, 2007; Covello, 2003; Reynolds, 2007). Communication will underlie the risk management process, which varies over time depending on the changes in the stakeholders. It is reciprocal between all interested parties, as the dissemination of information is essential for effective risk management and decision-making by public and private organizations in the care and self-care of the population and their health. It has been especially noticed in the context of a pandemic, and risk communication studies over the years (Saliou, 1994; Shuaib *et al*., 2014; Tinker *et al*., 2001).

### Hazard Communication Background

Studies on risk communication date back to the 1980s, initiated by chemical disasters in industrial plants. It had a significant impact on global society in terms of communication since the communication managers of the companies could not transmit expectations and messages (information) efficiently about the danger that the emission of toxic and harmful elements to the environment meant for the affected localities. Therefore, research on social responses to risks appears as an increasingly urgent need to understand through the identification of the perceptions that individuals experience in situations of danger and risk amplification, especially in aspects of the health of the population, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic was declared in the year 2020 (Beck, 2002; Espluga, 2004; Espluga, 2006).

In this context, risk management approaches communication as a tool for integration between the different communities involved, as a substantive and transversal element of the process ranging from instrumental practices to others based on engagement and dialogue with audiences. Communication will then underlie the risk management process, which varies over time depending on changes in stakeholders. This is reciprocal between all stakeholders, as the dissemination of information is essential for effective risk management in public and private organizations. At present, concern about potential health risks is not always accompanied by an understanding of the characteristics of the risk and ways to prevent or minimize it, so communication plays a fundamental role in the transmission of information to the population, as it is necessary to distinguish between informing and communicating (Zinn, 2010; Zinn, 2017). In particular, they are concepts that are frequently considered synonyms but have differences. For example, informing will refer to the act of issuing data through some medium in which the information flows in one direction only (from the issuer to the receiver), and the information will assume the existence of a receiver, which makes the reception of the data uncertain (Cantú, 2009; Cortinas, 2000; Espluga *et al*., 2010; MARSH, 2012; Zinn, 2006).

In synthesis, risk communication is conceived as the construction of meaning through mediatization between diverse communication communities, as a narrative reconstruction elaborated first by the subjects and then by the media. It is done by knowing how to perceive, interpret and put in common the main issues that happen in the environment and directly affect the stability of their social domain. Furthermore, since risk communication is a procedure of interaction and reciprocity of information, trust will generate learning and the ability to act in the face of dangerous situations by the Chilean population in terms of their physical and mental health in the last pandemic period from 2020 to date (Figueroa, 2012; Lang *et al*., 2001; Zinn, 2020).

**RQ.** What has happened in Chile concerning risk communication in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Today, interest in the risk posed by the COVID-19 pandemic (SARS-CoV 2) declared by the WHO in 2020 has increased the perception of risk in the population, especially in Chile. It is due to a more participatory society with greater access to information through social networks and other alternative communication channels that digitalization has allowed in this aspect in comparison with other countries in the region. It has led to demand and requirement for clear and precise answers for decision-making by health entities and those directly affected by such measures, not only in Chile but throughout the continent and the world. Similarly, the semantics of risk moved into a scenario that is understood as a "malaise in the culture of our time" (García, 2008; p. 34). It embodies the fundamental symbolisms and identities of many cultures and societies, from social theory and sociology – where what is perceived is the social construction of risks and how these are managed in terms of risk – the production and new realities in modernity through risk communication generates in subjects clarity and certainty of what is happening in their environment (Li *et al*., 2020; Li Yang *et al*., 2020; Lohiniva *et al*., 2020).

In this sense, during the last two years of the pandemic – from the perspective of risk not only in the country but also globally – risk communication has become a transversal factor in the transformation of governmental (public bodies), media, and even public opinion logics; understanding risk as the calculation and choice within a context of possible adverse effects and foreseeable opportunities in this type of situation of phenomena affecting the public health of the population (Abrams & Greenhawt, 2020). And it is in this context that risk communication becomes of great interest as a relatively new communication model that allows what is to be communicated to be fluid and contextualized to the target audience – especially in matters of public health and safety for the population. It is fundamental through the incorporation of local reality and context elements – the information on aspects of care and self-care is issued by the same public organizations that are in charge of the responsibility of the population, such as HM or the WHO at a global level (Fellenor *et al*., 2018). In turn, it is essential to consider that citizens' attitudes towards risks, especially in public health, are highly influenced by two central elements: (i) trust towards those institutions that manage and regulate public health protection regulations, such as HM, and (ii) the information that these same institutions provide to the mass media.

The relationship between risk perception and acceptability is neither directly proportional nor strictly causal in the eyes of the population. It contains a subjective dimension – which will always be perceived differently and differently by the people, as the language and terminology are not known or easily acquired by them on a mass scale (Abrams & Greenhawt, 2020; Fellenor *et al*., 2018).

As previously stated, social perceptions have new dimensions regarding risk communication. The academic discussion defines the effectiveness of the understanding by the efficient and truthful manner of information concerning risks – and how risk is understood as a dynamic phenomenon that acquires a sense of danger in the daily life of individuals and their social development. In this idea of vulnerability and the dangerousness of environments, disciplines such as philosophy and sociology propose that social perceptions are elements driving the application of communicational mechanisms of risks for the population. However, the growing need for subjects to distort or amplify information about situations that directly affect their lives means that today there are anti-vaccine or anti-pandemic movements in Chile and almost everywhere else. In the first instance, these movements generally aim to misinform public opinion in a non-focused and non-systematic manner. But these are only activated when real situations of danger occur, as in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, since the approaches described above in other contexts have no basis or argumentative credibility.

In the Chilean case, from the beginning, the information that emanated from HM on the COVID-19 pandemic was reactive until 2020 and 2021. The communication was ineffective, contradictory, and outdated. Communicating means generating quality messages that allow the acceptance of political and governmental decisions on actions and behaviors that the population must modify: such as the use of masks, the capacity in public and private spaces, quarantines, restrictions on movement, the ban on the operation of recreational and social entertainment businesses. The daily reports of infected and dead people and the implementation of the plan step by step are in itself already a new reality which was not an option or decision, but a legal mandate for the protection and safeguarding of the public health of the population (De Graaff *et al*., 2021; Do Kyun & Kreps, 2020; Zinn, 2020).

Another relevant factor associated with this phenomenon is the problem that we only talk about risk communication and not other types of communication. This is because the classical communication theory (sender-receiver) in pandemic situations does not work efficiently in this type of situation. It is due to the classical communication model does not generate conditions of trust in the population efficiently and effectively, as the applied and adequate risk communication model would. However, the latter does not ensure success in achieving its objectives by itself, as in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic phenomenon in Chile. Currently, movements do not accept the restrictions imposed by governments for the control and management of the pandemic. It is because there has been a perception of inadequate preparedness on the part of the state (public bodies) since this public health problem began. HM has worked under the logic of a traditional approach to community outreach since the beginning of the pandemic. Risk communication models were not visualized, which meant that public organizations (State), not having studies on the subject, applied obsolete and ineffective communication models to manage risk information. It did not allow the generation of spaces of trust with the communities in the implementation of care and self-care measures in case of disease that has affected 1,812,348 people (almost 1,812,348 people). 812,348 people (nearly 10% of the population) and 39,174 Chileans have died from the disease. There was never a genuine acceptance of the danger by the population, which only generated uncertainty and doubts about the integrity of what was happening. For example, in the case of the vaccination campaign and the low adherence from the beginning to date and the product that most of the population is to this day, misinformation and doubts about the effectiveness of these in a situation of contagion of the virus (Abrams & Greenhawt, 2020; Cantú, 2009; Farré & Cavia, 2007; Höppner & Buchecker, 2010; Lozano, 2012; Terán-Hernández *et al*., 2016; Zinn, 2006, 2017, 2020).

In this way, communication models will always be critical to the search for effectiveness in delivering the message to the community and for those involved to have the relevant knowledge and certainty of what happens in emergencies, especially in health. Therefore, transmitting relevant and precise information is necessary, especially regarding perceptions and the social construction of risks. However, in the large number of disciplines and approaches to risk, communication as such does not appear to be central, since risk was and is understood as a simple process of transmission of available knowledge on specific risk issues by those who know (the scientists) to those who do not know (the public), since the mass media should be understood as the critical elements in the transfer of information to the community, for understanding and reflection, thus building trust to develop and foster dialogue between the different actors involved in these processes in a practical way, such as, for example: HM daily or weekly reports and expert guests on various television, radio and digital mass media programs to educate the population on health issues that were not clear to the Chilean population because health education or public health is not part of the basic curricula in primary and secondary education in Chile, which has meant that there is no social awareness of the risks, let alone how to inform the Chilean population (Ungureanu & Bertolotti, 2020; Wieland *et al*., 2021).

## Conclusions, Limits, and Future Perspectives

When a kind of risk communication model is applied systematically, more connections are generated between the actors involved so that people's perceptions of risks in everyday life are broadened or changed by having more information. It creates more practical, reliable, and credible spaces for communication with the population.

In future perspectives, the communication spaces should be based on a sincere and direct approach that aims to present the community to generate discussion and public debate fully. Furthermore, it implies a communication model that contemplates the articulation (and effective communication) between the different organisms, highlighting the importance of an evaluation and control of the projects that does not fall only in the exclusive hands of some public entities such as the case of HM alone, This is because projects such as the ones studied here have not only economic and environmental implications, but also social, cultural and political ones, which citizens identify due to the increase and development of a greater awareness of risk in everyday life.

Finally, the most relevant limitation should be noted Chile does not have an effective and operative risk communication model at the governmental level. If a model existed, it would improve the exchange of information in an applied, functional, interactive sustained manner over time, which would favor the management of information in future pandemic contexts or other situations that directly affect people's health. But unfortunately, this has meant that there is no real communication between the parties involved. Hence, the importance and relevance of identifying risk perceptions and how communication models generate the necessary symbiosis so that the information (message) and reception understanding are efficient and effective for the population and better public health for the country.

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# Online Communication in Alternative Justice. A Theoretical Perspective on the Practice of Mediation during the Covid-19 Pandemic

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**Abstract:** This article started from the idea that any conflict, of any nature, cannot be quarantined. For this reason, through the article, we set out to answer the question: Is it possible that the usual mediation process can take place outside the traditional spaces? Thus, during this paper I highlighted the options offered by the online environment, more precisely, the opportunity generated by the Covid-19 pandemic in using online communication to resolve conflicts through the remote mediation process, given all restrictive measures in force during the pandemic (2020-2021). The paper aims to present the way in which the communication process is modified in the online mediation procedure, the challenges posed by the development of this alternative way of resolving conflicts, and the role of the mediator in resolving the conflict so that both parties are satisfied. The current study also presents a brief introduction to the concept of mediation from the first known conflict of humanity to the first forms of mediation in Romania, and it also addresses the need for registration to the European Online Dispute Resolution (O. D. R.) of the Romanian Mediation Council.

**Keywords:** Covid-19 pandemic, digitization, mediation, online communication in mediation.

## Introduction to Alternative Justice and Mediation

What is mediation? The Romanian legislator defines this alternative way of resolving conflicts in Article 1 of the Law on mediation and the organization of the mediator profession as follows: "*Mediation is a way of resolving conflicts amicably, with the help of a third person specialized as a mediator, under conditions of neutrality, impartiality and confiden-*

*tiality and with the free consent of the parties*". An addition to the definition is found in second paragraph of the same article: "*Mediation is based on the trust that the parties place in the mediator as a person able to facilitate negotiations between them and to assist them in resolving the conflict by reaching a mutually convenient, effective and lasting solution*" (Law 192/2006).

We can say that with the emergence of the first human settlements, the first inter-human conflicts also arose. With the emergence of the first conflicts, often due to various elements related to the survival of individuals, came the first people who – usually being the elders of the group and seen by others as *the wise ones* – brought the conflicting parties together, and guided them towards a compromise solution satisfactory to all parties (Boskey, 1994).

We can see how, from the very beginning, mankind understood that mediation was a good alternative for resolving conflicts in a peaceful way that did not involve human and economic losses compared to the classical alternative, at that time, of settling the dispute *by the sword*.

The following is a brief history of mediation. From its beginnings, i.e., the first religious conflict that we know of, how the Greeks and Romans saw the concept of mediation, and after this short presentation the emergence and beginnings of mediations in Romania will be discussed.

From a historical point of view, mediation has an ancient origin, deeply rooted in the history of inter-human relations, being used as a way of solving conflicts in a lot of European cultures by hundreds if not thousands of years. The first religious conflict known to humanity was between the first two humans, Adam and Eve, and their creator, God. The conflict between the two sides arose when Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command not to eat from the *tree of knowledge*, resulting in the world we know today.

The practice of mediation developed in Ancient Greece and after, the Romans took over the practice of mediation, and introduced it as a separate article in the Civil Law Collection between 529-534. Thus, in the Digests of Emperor Justinian (also known as the Codes of Justinian, which established a series of rules aimed at halting the decline of Roman civilization) the first account of mediation appeared. Etymologically, the word *mediation* originates from the Latin word *mediare,* which means *to divide in two*. The Romans used several names for those who practiced mediation: internucius, intermediary, conciliator, interlocutor, and finally, the current name, mediator (Roșu, 2018).

In Romania, mediation has been around since ancient times. The first form of mediation we know of was called *The Elder's Council*. This council was made up of people considered by the other members of the community to be the wisest. Among other things, they had the power to mediate between members of the community in conflict. Another form of mediation that arose in the Romanian area, which related to family law was when the spouses turned to the godparents to mediate various conflicts that arose during the marriage, as it is known in the Romanian tradition, the godparents are seen as the *spiritual parents* of the spouses.

It is also worth mentioning the activity of priests in mediation, who, in their parishes, practiced this way of resolving conflicts not only by trying to reconcile believers in conflict with each other, but also by involving the in resolving larger, even more extensive conflicts between larger groups of the community or between members of the community and the state authority. Such a mediating role in society was also played by the village schoolteacher and the mayor. It is worth noting that people in conflict felt the need to appeal to people of *social prestige* within the community to which they belonged, which guaranteed that the person mediating the dispute would show wisdom, neutrality, and impartiality in finding a mutually satisfactory solution to the conflict.

**Online Mediation and Online Communication in Mediation**

The emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic had a devastating effect on life as we knew until that moment. Most countries in the world were forced to take firm measures to protect the health of their citizens and national health systems, measures that manifested themselves in the imposition of general quarantine on the population, which we also felt during the two months – March and April 2020 – and then, after some relaxation, in the obligation of people to comply with measures that required both a physical and social distance from others.

All professional activities that until recently involved close interaction between several people have come to be suspended by the authorities, because they increased the chance of uncontrolled spread of the virus and were considered a high risk. As all the work involved a direct, face-to-face meeting of the people involved in the process inside the mediator's office, mediation was listed among those professional activities with suspended activity. Due to the fact that the traditional face-to-face mediation sessions could no longer take place because of the risks involved, including the possibility of infection with the recently mentioned virus on the way to the mediator's office or even during mediation sessions – which are usually held in small offices, which do not comply with the authorities new guidelines on physical distance – and the far too high costs of adapting mediation offices to the new rigors of the law on combating the pandemic, in order to maintain interest in this conflict resolution technique, on-line mediation has appeared in practice.

However, the entire professional activity in the mediation process can be adapted to current needs and can be carried out outside the mediator's office with the help of online communication, with each party involved in the conflict being at distance, in the safety of their own home (Hațegan, 2020onl). In our view, the mediator can conduct the entire mediation process within his or her own office or home, using technology such as a computer/ laptop equipped with a video system to communicate online with the parties to the conflict, who in turn are in the safety of their own homes and using their own communication devices. There is also a legal basis for this, as the Law on mediation and the organization of the mediator profession states in Article 51 (Law 192/2006) that "*Mediation* *usually takes place at the mediator's premises. If necessary, the mediation may also take place in other places agreed between the mediator and the parties in conflict.*" We can see that the legislator establishes the rule that mediation is executed at the mediator's premises, but at the same time it also proposes the exception that this procedure can also be conducted – in our online case – in other places with the agreement of the mediator and the parties.

The main reason why people go to mediation in the first instance is because there is no effective communication bridge between them. Conflict is the result of the fact that poor communication developed between the parties, with neither party understanding exactly what the other party wants. Communication in mediation occurs firstly between the mediator and the parties involved and secondly between the parties only. The transmission of messages, and therefore the communication, is done through verbal messages, paraverbal messages and non-verbal messages (physical presence, facial expressions, eye contact, etc.) (Filimowicz & Tzankova, 2020).

In the following section, the author argues that mediation is not only an alternative way of settling a dispute but also a way of helping to re-establish a way of communicating between the two parties. We will also show how a mediation session could be conducted remotely, online (Wang, 2009; Zheng, 2009). In the mediation process, an important role is played by the discussions between the parties and the mediator. These discussions lead to the meaning of the communication and when the communication makes sense, it produces an amicable and satisfactory settlement for both parties in conflict. When we talk about mediation, we are talking about a wide-ranging communication process, which requires the mediator to be highly specialized in communication sciences. We believe that to be able to guide the parties towards effective and meaningful communication, the mediator must be familiar with all forms of communication, personal communication backgrounds, theories of argumentation, communication methods, etc. (Ilie, 2013).

The amicable solution therefore depends solely on *the will* of the parties. The settlement of the case mainly requires a compromise from all parties which is therefore the result of a dialogue facilitated by the mediator (Ilie, 2013). Being a broad communication process, the parties discuss with the mediator both during joint and separate sessions about the sources of the conflict and how they perceive it. These discussions are part of a very deep and complex dialogue that touches on both the subjective and objective framework of each person in conflict. It should be made clear from the outset that the mediator is not simply a passive assistant to heated discussions between two conflicting parties. The mediator's role in a mediation process is much more complex (Roberts, 1992; Ilie, 2016).

The main function of mediators is to manage the mediation process to provide sufficient structure so that opportunities for conflict resolution can be explored as well as developed. Managing the process includes encouraging the parties to tell their stories and talk at length about the issues that brought them to mediation. Talking broadly encompasses any information or emotion that is useful to resolving the conflict. One of the differences between mediation and other more formal dispute resolution processes is that there are no limiting concepts of relevance. Only by talking constructively about the dispute can the origins and complexities of the conflict be exposed. When the parties express their needs, these are understood and recognized, this understanding are recognition can lead to a satisfactory resolution (Bennett & Hughes, 2005).

The essential role of the mediator throughout the conflict resolution process is t*o restore effective communication* between the parties with the aim of reaching a satisfactory compromise. During the procedure, the mediator, during both the joint and separate sessions, must "*actively listen*, *take information and messages from one party and redirect them to the other party*, *with the aim of reopening the communication channel between the two parties and reaching a satisfactory compromise*" (Narița, 2019, p. 257).

As mentioned above, in order to achieve a fair and satisfactory settlement, the parties must, in their dialogue with the mediator, provide as many details as possible about the objective and subjective causes that lead to the conflict, the situation and current state of the people involved in the conflict, possible third parties affected by the conflict, and propose ideas or solutions that could lead to a satisfactory solution. Discussions with the parties during the mediation are intended to make the mediator understand and at the same time, deepen their grievances, understand their concerns and needs, and understand their views on the root cause of the conflict. Prioritizing certain personal requirements helps the person concerned and, often, what is important to them is defined and shaped in the mediation, sometimes also forming the basis for negotiating the final solution (Ilie, 2013).

Building a relationship between client and mediator is a necessary part of any mediation process. The mediator's client is not only the one who first requests it, but also the opposing party. Both, to the same extent and at the same time, are clients of the mediator, and the relationship must be built with both. Both parties to the conflict must have the necessary degree of trust in the mediator to agree the proceedings. Without a relationship, without the trust of the parties, however small, mediation does not take root; it does not start, and if it starts, it often does not achieve the desired results (Ilie, 2013). Once a relationship of trust is built between the mediator and the parties, the mediation process becomes viable and fruitful discussions begin to occur.

Throughout the mediation, the mediator must use language that is tailored to the person with whom they are communicating. The messages conveyed by the mediator must be easy to understand, clear, and with no room for interpretation. It remains the mediator's duty to advise the parties to express their views freely and to reveal their feelings clearly to give the mediator the opportunity to see the whole picture of the dispute. The author recommends that the mediator does not charge additional fees to conduct the mediation online. This recommendation is based on the argument that the popularity of mediation in this new format is increasing.

The mediator should also make every effort to protect all personal data of the parties. The author recommends that before starting the online mediation, the mediator sends to the e-mail addresses of the persons involved in the procedure, an agreement concerning the processing and protection of personal data in accordance with the GDPR law, to be signed by them in the form of an electronic signature.

Before the hearing begins, another recommendation would be that the parties together with the mediator clarify the following issues by mutual agreement: whether all parties have sufficiently powerful devices to facilitate the proceedings, whether all parties have sufficiently stable internet connection to facilitate the proceeding, which video conferencing platform is to be used for the duration of the online mediation, at what time the proceedings would start, how the evidence would be used and presented, how the video evidence would be used, how many virtual rooms would be needed, any other issues raised by the parties prior to the start of the online mediation procedure.

With regards to the online communication platform, the author recommends the Zoom platform for the mediation procedure, because it is the most secure in terms of privacy and protection of personal data as well as because of its simple and user-friendly interface even for the least experienced user. It should also be noted that the digital applications used for the mediation procedure allow for simple and easy archiving and retrieval of the files after some time, without taking up any physical space. A considerable advantage of online mediation is the speed of the procedure. For many disputes that are ongoing in the traditional way, the physical work of managing and organizing meetings, hearings, bringing the parties to a place at a certain point in time, is costly and time-consuming. The online system is instantaneous, the parties can talk to each other in an easy way, being mediated by a mediator, and thus the cases where it is necessary to physically meet the parties disappear. Confidentiality is another advantage. The online space provides the parties with the guarantee that there is no risk that a dispute that is intended to be „discreet" or an issue discussed in a mediation session will become public. In terms of costs, they are much lower than in a traditional mediation procedure. By avoiding travel and the organization of hearings, which involve renting premises, the costs of an online mediation procedure are drastically reduced.

## The Necessity of Registration of the Mediations Council to the ODR Platform

In order to decongest the legal system at the European level, in relation to the implementation of European Union laws, as well as at the national level of the Member States, the European Commission – the European Union institution responsible for legislative proposals and for the implementation of decisions – has come to the conclusion that it is absolutely necessary to implement the *ADR – Alternative Dispute Resolution* methods at the level of the two branches mentioned above. As stated at the beginning of this paper, the term ADR refers to all alternative dispute resolution techniques. This may include mediation, arbitration, and conciliation. Within the European Union, the aims are frequently to encourage people to use alternative dispute resolution methods to protect their rights and interests and, at the same time, to facilitate their access to justice and relieve the pressure on the traditional courts. Hence, the need to implement an online dispute resolution platform. This platform has been operating within the European Union since 2016 and is regulated in accordance with the provisions of Regulation 524/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council, on online dispute resolution for consumer dispute and amending Regulation 2006/2004 and Directive 2009/22/EC. Compared to the national level, the implementation of mediation as an alternative means of online dispute resolution has been and still is proceeding in a slow way.

According to the provisions of the regulation, all EU Member States were obliged to submit in January of 2016 a list of entities qualified for alternative dispute resolution (Regulation 524/2013). In the open letter addressed to the Prime Minister at the time, Dacian Cioloș, the Romanian Mediation Council stressed the need to register this procedure on the ODR platform provided by the European Union. Among the arguments put forward in the open letter, the following will be listed: 17 Member States of the Union had registered (among those member States we mention the following: Austria, France, Greece, Bulgaria, Portugal, United Kingdom, Hungary, Italy, etc.), at the time of sending the open letter, mediation as an alternative means of conflict resolution on the Union's online platform.

Another argument relates to the fact that the lack of registration of an alternative dispute resolution entity makes it impossible for Romanian consumers and traders to use this platform.

The purpose of the open letter was to highlight the need to adapt to the modern needs of Romanian society and to bring to a European standard the way in which disputes between consumers and traders can be resolved in a modern, low-cost way, and to the benefit of both parties in the dispute.

At the time of writing this article, the only institutions registered by Romania on the ODR platform are the *National Authority of Consumers Protection* and the *Entity for Alternative Dispute Resolution in the Non-Banking Financial Sector – SAL FIN* and on the website of the first mentioned institution, in a section dedicated to general information, we can find a list of advisors, some information about how to carry out this procedure, etc. In our view, the fact that Romania has so far registered only two alternative dispute resolution institutions with the online dispute resolution platform is a mistake. We argue that it would also be a good idea to register the Mediation Council with this platform, we could also add the benefit of mediation in terms of the wide range of disputes that can be resolved through it, because now, only commercial disputes between consumers and traders and disputes in the non-banking financial sector can be solved through the ODR platform.

## Conclusions

Thus, due to the pandemic context, many activities had to adapt their way of functioning to a new, online regime, and this phenomenon has not bypassed the usual communication process in the mediation session. Because the traditional face-to-face mediation session could no longer take place due to the risks involved, including the possibility of infection with the Coronavirus on the way to the mediator's office or even during mediation sessions – which are usually held in small offices, which do not comply with the authorities new guidelines on physical distance – and the far too high cost of adapting mediation offices to the new rigors of the law on combating the pandemic, in order to maintain interest in this conflict resolution technique, online mediation has appeared in practice.

This article aimed to argue that the whole professional activity within the mediation process can be adapted to current needs and be carried out outside the mediator's office with the help of online communication. Moreover, we wanted to point out that the Covid-19 pandemic, in addition to all its negative aspects, was also a worthy opportunity to improve the way mediation sessions are conducted in the online format. This method of conducting mediation sessions will become increasingly popular in the coming period, particularly because of the advantages (reduced costs, elimination of distance, convenience, increased confidentiality, etc.) that this form of conflict resolution has over the traditional court system.

The study also presented how the usual communication process has changed in the mediation procedure in the online format, the new challenges raised by this new form of communication, and how they were addressed. Also, in this article, the fundamental role of the mediator in this communication process was discussed, and how the mediator can, by applying good communication skills, lead the parties involved in the conflict towards finding an amicable solution.

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