The role of media monitoring in promoting proactive social communication. Case study: Media monitoring and analysis in the Ministry of Internal Affairs

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Abstract

The ability to speak has led to the development of society and changes in social evolution. Later, writing and portable devices exerted a significant influence, especially in the context of the expansion and diversification of social structures and the evolution of culture. New communication technology facilitated the invention of the printing press by Gutenberg and thus a communication evolution. And now, "we are already seeing the first steps towards immersive journalism, with journalists working in large global media organizations already using virtual and augmented reality to explain better certain stories and to attract a wider readership" (Stănescu, G. C., 2022).

In terms of the role of communication in society, the sociology of communication has been continuously developed and evolved since the 1960s. Emilian M. Dobrescu argues in Sociology of Communication (1998, p. 20) that while the sociology of communication focuses on investigating the social consequences of the act of communication, the sociology of communication is devoted to the study of communication channels and their impact on human society.

Institutional communication is the defining feature of any organisation, public or private. The effectiveness of institutional communication has a significant impact on the relationship with its audience and how it is perceived. In this context, media monitoring becomes an essential tool in institutional communication efforts. This paper aims to explore the importance of media monitoring in the context of institutional communication, highlighting its role in assessing impact and adapting communication strategies.

Media monitoring and analysis is an approach of the Ministry of Internal Affairs to provide decision support and expertise for both the leaders of the Ministry of Interior and the specialists responsible for public communication. These activities involve dealing with general concepts of media monitoring and analysis, with an emphasis on the specifics of these activities within the Ministry of Internal Affairs, starting from the idea of media review in organisations.

Keywords: media monitoring, communication, articles, news, media.

Introduction

Cristina, Coman in Public and Media Relations (2004, p.191) argues that, for many organisations and institutions, the press review process involves research and analysis of written media content. Audiovisual media monitoring requires in some cases a complex infrastructure involving technological resources, which can be expensive, such as radio equipment, televisions, video or audio recording systems, specialised workstations and dedicated software. This is mandatory during periods when working procedures have been different. For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic many journalists in Romania had to work from home, and in this context some authorities, including Ministry of Internal Affairs have adapted and started to content for news or broadcasts (Stănescu, G, 2020).

Media monitoring involves collecting and analysing media content to identify mentions of the subject organisation or relevant topics. This process provides an objective view of how it is being exposed in the media. By monitoring articles, news stories, debates on television sets, the organisation can identify trends and concerns of journalists and the public and react to them in a timely and appropriate manner. And this is extremely important with "the development of new means of communication such as the metaverse or the new web 3.0". (Vlăduțescu, Ș.& Stănescu G.C, 2023)

Press review or media monitoring can have different configurations and operate at a range of different paces. The determining factors are the importance and size of the organisation concerned, the objectives it has set itself or the resources it has at its disposal: financial, material and, not least, human resources.

In Public Relations and Media, Cristina, Coman (2004, p. 192-194) mentions several ways of carrying out media monitoring among which we mention the most known and used, namely through data synthesis or mixed press review.

The Media Monitoring and Analysis Centre, set up within the Information and Public Relations Directorate, has the necessary infrastructure to carry out its core activities efficiently. This department is equipped with well-equipped workstations, high-performance monitors, tuners for capturing audio and video signals, and connections to cable and internet services.

Through these facilities, the Centre can carry out real-time monitoring and analysis of news broadcasts on TV channels, including news and main news bulletins broadcast by generalist TV channels in Romania.

Modern infrastructure enables the collection and recording of media content, providing the ability to create accurate video captures and perform thorough content analysis. This advanced technical equipment ensures a high level of efficiency in the monitoring process, providing the possibility to quickly identify and assess media content in real time or at a later stage, in order to properly evaluate and interpret the impact and importance of media information in the context of the institutional communication of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

The Media Monitoring and Analysis Centre is a unique and specialized entity within the Ministry of Internal Affairs and is distinguished by its endowment, qualified staff and vast experience, which allows the production of high quality documents, essential to support the decision-making process and to provide expertise to decision-makers in Romania's largest government ministry.

From my point of view, this paper aims to highlight undervalued activities in the field of communication and insufficiently understood in the public information and public relations structures of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, namely media monitoring and analysis. The institutional communication process starts and ends with monitoring and analysis, whether these activities are aimed at identifying potential media crises or observing the evolution/trend of institutional public communications.

According to the operational procedure on how to prepare monitoring reports on print and broadcast media within the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the press review process materializes through a dual and systematic approach with two distinct components: the central print media review and the central broadcast media review.

Central print media review: This phase of the process involves a thorough investigation of the websites of major print publications of national importance. The main focus is to identify and collect articles published in the last 24 hours containing references or mentions about the management team of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry itself and its subordinate structures, such as the Romanian Police, the Romanian Gendarmerie, etc. This analysis is based on keywords and materializes in a review that groups this information into separate chapters. The results of this investigation are sent to the beneficiaries every morning before 08:00, except Sundays. Articles of interest on Saturdays and Sundays are integrated into the central print magazine on Monday.

Central audiovisual press review: This component has a similar structure to the print press review, but focuses on content broadcast the previous day by both general and news channels. Also included in the analysis is material published on the websites of these TV and radio stations. The material collected in this process is then passed on to decision-makers and other beneficiaries, including the management of institutions within the Ministry of the Interior and spokespersons/press officers. This is especially important in the context of the emergence of false information. (Stănescu, G. C.,)

The monitoring reports are organised in separate chapters, each dedicated to the main image vectors of our institution, including the Minister, Secretaries of State, component entities of the Ministry of Interior Affairs and the main subordinate structures such as the Police, Border Police, Gendarmerie and others. This structuring allows for a detailed and systematic analysis of media reactions to each of these institutional vectors.

It is obvious and it goes without saying that the author of the press review must possess advanced analytical and synthesis skills, accompanied by the ability to objectively examine the reactions and information provided by the media. It is also essential that he/she is able to accurately identify the finer nuances and details in the articles monitored. In addition, the author of the press review must have the confidence of the management team, as some decisions, assessments and possible public reactions are based on the selection and analysis presented by the author of the press review. It is a function of significant importance in the context of institutional decision-making and communication and requires competence, accuracy and trust.

This is an initial conclusion, thus underlining the vital significance of this role, which, unfortunately, is often neglected by Romanian communication specialists and undervalued.

Cristina, Coman (Idem, p. 195-196) supports the ideas outlined above and states that the press review is an information tool of utmost importance, and for this reason, it should not be approached superficially. The person responsible for its preparation must avoid any form of self-censorship, because in the end, the truth will come out. Manipulation or distortion of the attitudes expressed by journalists will always damage the organisation and its management. Regardless of the nature of the news, whether positive or negative, it is imperative that the information is brought to the attention of management. It is the job of the editor, like a journalist, to present

reality as it is, without distorting it or adapting it to what he or she would like it to be. It is essential to maintain objectivity and accuracy in the process of monitoring and summarising media information.

In addition to these two reports, the Centre's staff also produce daily news feeds, between 08.00-20.00, of the main news agencies and the online environment. The main objective of this activity is to identify mentions related to the activity of the Ministry of Interior, its subordinate structures and their staff in these media, followed by the notification of the beneficiary institutions about the appearance of these references.

Members constantly monitor the news flow generated by one or more national news agencies as well as the news flow generated by the online environment monitoring application. When relevant and potentially media crisis generating mentions are identified, these mentions have already been brought to the attention of the beneficiaries in the form of a news-alert notification.

The analysis of the media coverage of the Ministry, its subordinate structures and staff is usually carried out at regular intervals, both monthly and annually. This practice aims to provide decision-making and expert support to the management of the Ministry of Interior and to specialists in the field of public communication. Analyses can also be punctual and are initiated when topics or themes relevant to the institution's activity appear in the public space and require an analytical approach for the configuration of future communication strategies or for taking appropriate operational decisions.

These practices of analysing media coverage are essential for understanding how the work of the Ministry and its subordinate structures is perceived in the public sphere and for the correct targeting of communication actions.

The monthly analysis process starts on the first working day of each calendar month with the completion of the imaging databases. Using these databases and the IT applications developed within the specialised structure of the Media Monitoring and Analysis Centre, officers produce a graphical presentation of the main imaging indicators of the previous month.

The conclusions drawn by media analysts focus on a number of key issues that characterise the evolution of the main imagery component. They also provide a comprehensive understanding of how the organisation is reflected and perceived in the media space, providing quantitative and qualitative data essential for the effective evaluation and management of institutional communication.

Professor Raluca Moisă, PhD, in Crisis Communication: theory and practice (2010, p.19), argues that a crisis is an exceptional situation, characterized by an unexpected onset, involving threats to the life and/or physical, economic or image integrity of an organization. As most studies on the subject emphasise, it is important to prepare for such scenarios in advance, and the use of a crisis communication plan is recommended. This plan must be well structured and tailored to the specifics of each organisation to ensure effective management of critical situations.

According to Professor Dr. Ionela Balţătescu, Communication and Crisis Management, (2011, p.43) communication is a crucially important tool in managing media crises, with the ability to help prevent and reduce their negative consequences. The author recommends that institutions adopt a transparent approach to communication and avoid reticence in providing information or manipulating public opinion.

These principles were reiterated in 2015 by Professor Mihaela Alexandra Tudor in Communication in Crisis Situations (2015, p. 85), who stressed the need to adapt the communication strategy to the specifics of each crisis. She pointed out that a well-developed communication plan can prevent the emergence of image problems and minimize the negative impact of the crisis on the organization.

Thus, according to the literature and practice, in the context of crises that may affect the image of the institution, a Crisis Communication Plan is developed, which includes, among other things, aspects related to communication and media analysis. This approach plays a key role for the communication team during a crisis, as it involves monitoring and evaluating the reaction of the public and the media.

The plan is intended to guide the institution in the effective management and communication of critical events. It includes clear procedures for collecting, analysing and interpreting information from the media. During a crisis, the communications team must constantly monitor the news flow and assess how the institution is presented and perceived in the media. Media analysis thus becomes a vital component in the process of managing crises and maintaining public confidence.

Analysis of the media development of the case of the policeman killed on the platform of a railway station in Suceava county - July 2017

In his study, Adrian Cuțurescu analyses how the media monitored and contributed to the development of a case in which a policeman was killed in the course of his duty. Through this analysis, the author identifies the

actors involved in the dissemination of information and explores how they influenced the development of the subject in question.

The case starts on 20 July 2017, when Romania TV broadcast a report on the news at 23:00 about an incident in which a policeman was stabbed on the platform of Burdujeni railway station by an unknown man. This news was brought to the public's attention following a phone call by the local correspondent of Romania TV.

Later in the midnight news, the news station returned with additional details, confirming both the stabbing of the police officer and the apprehension of the assailant. Information was provided on how the assault took place, the assailant's motivation and details about the personal life of the slain 38-year-old police officer and father of two minor children. In this context, the Minister of the Interior posted a message on Facebook expressing his condolences to the bereaved family.

The next morning, the subject was picked up by Antena 3 and Antena 1, which discussed the incident in their 6am and 7am news programmes. It was mentioned that the policeman was working alone and this was linked to the tragedy. The trade union leader at the time, now PSD MP Dumitru Coarnă, highlighted the risks associated with being a policeman and called for legislative changes to better protect those in the field.

The union leader became vocal in his speech, insisting on the shortage of staff in the police. He proposed legislative changes and solutions to increase the safety of police officers in the performance of their duties. Later, the speech evolved towards questioning the hierarchical responsibility of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the General Inspectorate of the Romanian Police in the tragedy. Other trade union figures and political analysts supported this perspective (Marian Godină, Emil Păscuț, Bogdan Bănică).

Subsequently, the Realitatea TV station discussed the incident in the 7:00 am news, and the spokesperson of the Suceava IPJ provided information about the investigation and stressed the tragic nature of the event. The message of the Minister of Internal Affairs on Facebook, which was also picked up online, remains in the public eye.

The Prime Minister at the time, Mihai Tudose, announced that measures would be taken to avoid single police patrols in the future, which generated public discussion and controversy. In this context, the leaders of the police unions discussed with the Prime Minister and the Minister of Interior Affairs, and the results of these discussions have sparked mixed reactions among the unionists.

The data provided was juxtaposed with subjective experience, taking into account that, at the time of the incident, the author of the article was directly following the evolution and influence of news presentation in the media on public opinion.

This tragic situation was a moment when the effectiveness of media monitoring was highlighted. The management of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MAI) was able to identify influential actors, ways of disseminating information, and media platforms such as TV, newspapers and news agencies that covered the subject. Throughout the real-time development of this case in each media outlet, messages tailored to the specifics of each media source were developed and individuals were trained to communicate relevant information and action related to the incident.

Furthermore, the real-time development of these media types was monitored and in response, messages tailored to the specifics of each media source were developed. In addition, different people were trained to communicate relevant information and actions related to the incident.

Adrian Cuțurescu, in his research, presented a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the event (2019, p.24-26) concluding that "in the absence of official communications, i.e. a set of sustained communications from the institutions involved, the trade union representatives remain the most reliable and accessible sources of information for the media and, consequently, the main shapers of public perception."

In just four days, two of which included weekend days, the topic in question generated a total of 1,179 mentions of the Ministry of the Interior and its representatives in the media. Of this total, 156 mentions had a favourable connotation (13.2% positivity), 160 were critical (13.6% negativity), and the majority, 863 mentions, were factual and objective (73.2% neutrality).

Of these mentions, those recorded in the audiovisual media clearly predominate, with a total of 788 references (representing 67% of the total media visibility of the subject). Within this category, 96 favourable mentions were identified (12.18% positive), 115 critical (14.59% negative), and the remaining 577 were neutral mentions (73.23% neutral).

In the case of the central print media, 391 mentions were quantified (33% of the overall media visibility of the topic), of which 60 were favourable (15.35% positive), 45 critical (11.5% negative) and 286 were neutral (73.15% neutral).

A relatively similar configuration of the media institutions' discourse is evident between the two central media channels, with a balanced distribution of positive and negative weights between 12% and 15%, and a predominantly objective and factual character in the media environment (over 73% neutral mentions).

In terms of reference to the central actors of the subject, the mentions were mainly directed to the Romanian Police, with a total of 517 mentions (representing 44% of the entire media coverage), followed by the Ministry of Interior with 346 mentions (29.45% share in the media visibility of the subject) and the Ministry of Interior with 209 mentions (17.79% of the media coverage of the case).

Collateral referrals were also identified to the Romanian Gendarmerie (71 mentions, 6%), the General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations (19 mentions, 1.62%) and the "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" Police Academy (10 mentions, 0.85%).

Regarding the mentions about the Romanian Police, out of the total, 78 had a favourable connotation (15% positivity), 58 were critical (11% negativity) and the remaining 381 were factual and objective (74% neutrality). Similarly, in the case of the Minister of the Interior, who was also the main institutional communicator in this case, there were 346 mentions, of which 63 were favourable (18.2% positive), 51 critical (14.7% negative) and 232 neutral (67.1%).

A significant number of mentions, 209, were quantified regarding the Ministry of Internal Affairs, of which 6 had a favourable connotation (2.87% positivity), 50 were critical (23.92% negativity) and 153 were neutral mentions (73.21% neutrality).

It is worth mentioning that the quantified favourable mentions of the Romanian Police contributed 50% to the overall positivity of the topic, while the Minister of Internal Affairs also made a significant contribution, generating more than 40% of the media positivity associated with the analysed topic.

In terms of negativity, the three main actors had almost equal contributions, with a slight lead from the Romanian Police (36.25% of the total contribution to negativity), followed by the Ministry of the Interior (31.88%) and the Ministry of Internal Affairs (31.25%).

The present analysis focuses both on the ways in which media discourse was aggregated and subsequently radicalized, and on the main factors that contributed to the generation of feelings of positivity and negativity. It is important to point out that elements with negative connotations were amplified as the central media picked up the statements of trade union leaders, whose discourse evolved in a negatively radicalized direction during the development of the media story, culminating in a general sense of discontent.

It is essential to note that the positions expressed by some of the opinion formers were characterised by notable diversity. They ranged from factual and objective assessments to deeply critical positions, directed towards the hierarchical and decision-making levels of the Minister of Internal Affairs, as well as the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the General Inspectorate of the Romanian Police.

Conclusion

In order to understand more deeply the media impact of this case and how reactions and discourses have evolved, it is important to look in detail at each of these elements and the interactions between them. In this way, we can gain a comprehensive perspective on how the event was perceived and developed in the media sphere and civil society, as well as its influence on public decisions and policies in the field of safety and policing.

In addition, it was of interest to study in more detail the evolution of the reactions of the general public, decision-makers and public opinion in the context of this tragic case, with a focus on the changes in tone and intensity of the discourses, and how they influenced or did not influence the subsequent actions of the responsible authorities. This can help to understand how the media and public opinion can have a significant impact on government policy and decisions in the area of safety and policing.

All these issues would not have been fully understood without a rigorous process of media monitoring and careful analysis by media specialists. Through media monitoring and evaluation it was possible to gain a comprehensive insight into the development and evolution of the case in the public space, as well as the way public opinion and decision-makers reacted to the tragic event and the discourse surrounding it.

This meticulous analysis of the media has allowed the identification of key actors and messages, highlighting how they have contributed to shaping public discourse and influencing individual and collective attitudes and perceptions. It also facilitated observation of how the subject was covered by different types of media, how information was handled and how discourses developed as the event evolved in real time.

The specialists involved in this process were instrumental in interpreting and synthesising the information obtained from the media monitoring, thus providing a deeper understanding of the social dynamics and the impact the event had on public opinion. These analyses were essential for formulating appropriate messages and

developing appropriate communication strategies in response to the tragic event, thus helping to manage the situation and guide further action.

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