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Thematic Structures of EU News in “Adevarul”

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Abstract: This study assesses the thematic structure of the news about the European Union, in a Romanian quality newspaper. It is meant to make up for the scarcity of specialized literature and adequate theories on EU coverage in Romanian media. To this end, we monitored the “Adevarul” daily for one month (January – February, 2013). As apparent in previous research in European national media (focused on older EU member states), EU coverage has had a low share in the economy of the analyzed media outlets. The same is true about “Adevarul”. Relying on a corpus of articles published in “Adevarul”, our objective is to reveal and hierarchize the main thematic areas embedded in this paper editorial strategy, in terms of visibility and public impact, through a statistical analysis of salience indicators. This research was substantiated by the theories and typologies of news framing, which enabled us to explain the differences in visibility of the analyzed thematic structures. This study stands for a section of a cross-national project that attempts at organizing the previously used indicators and discovering new zones of interest in EU coverage, such as the interrelation between thematic structures and cultural differences in the news approach across national media outlets.

Keywords: EU coverage; print press; news framing

1. Introduction

Although there are some previous studies whose objectives are related to ours, the literature serving our research purposes is not vast. It mainly consists of qualitative analyses, specifically devoted to the ideological aspects of the Europeanization of the national media systems in the EU states, and to the need for public deliberation, demonstrated through theoretical arguments. It is only recently that quantitative studies on the EU news have also been published, although their corpuses were narrowed to television news and they focused on media representation of special events in the EU activities (EU parliamentary sessions, elections, etc.). It is worth mentioning that the authors’ analytical effort underlay either measuring news visibility or classifying the news themes.

Although we emphasize our research on a small corpus, the cross-national research project to which this study belongs concerns the whole landscape of national media outlets (Radio, TV, News sites, print press) that supply information about the European Union institutions, legislation, as well as the way this information is usually presented to Romanian audiences or to media consumers in other EU member states. The visibility indicators used in our research (news placement, length, frequency, etc.) make up a complex grid meant to systematically measure the types of EU news in national media. There is also a substantive component of our research project, enabling the project teams to compare the thematic structures and evaluative tendencies preferred in their national media. The research teams involved have synthesized previously used statistical analysis indicators and have made detailed

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interpretations of the cultural differences that dictate distinct news distributions, news quantities and thematic structures of EU coverage by various national media.

The present analysis refers to the print press section of the above mentioned project. More specifically, it focused on EU coverage in one Romanian newspaper, the “Adevarul” daily, for a month (the 21st of January – the 21st of February, 2013). The reasons for choosing “Adevarul” and not another Romanian newspaper was that this daily is a respected national, generalist paper. As a proof, during the monitored period, BRAT (National Audience Study) ranked “Adevarul” on the second place in terms of circulation (after “Jurnalul Național”), within the category of quality papers, with an average figure of 179,000 readers (as compared to the 196,000 readers of “Jurnalul Național”). In spite of the numerical decreasing of its readership, the selected paper has the reputation of a more independent approach (due to its editorial policy) than the winner of this category, as attested by the award of the most trusted quality daily that it had received from Trusted Brand for the last three years. Its most recent title was awarded at the Trusted Brand Gala, on the 10th of June, 2013.

Our first hypothesis was that the information about the EU covers relatively little space in terms of number of articles and printed surface. Almost all the EU information is published in the foreign news section (“Internațional”). The main objective of this research is to set up the hierarchy of the main thematic areas underlying the articles in our corpus. Our second hypothesis is that the thematic structures that are the most adequate for political interpretation at the domestic level are devoted more articles than the thematic areas that do not allow for attribution of responsibility to the decision making actors.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Previous Research on EU Coverage

Scarce as it may be, the literature consisting in previous research on EU coverage includes some famous studies, especially written after the year 2000. An important reference point for our research were the scientific articles written by Peter, Semetko and de Vreese (2003), concerning the inclusion of TV EU coverage in political contexts, and by Peter and de Vreese (2004) which presented the statistics resulted from a cross-national research project about EU coverage in five Western EU countries. Their statistics focused both on the quantity of the news stories and on their topics. It is worth mentioning that, in the 2004 article, the authors specified that, in the majority of the countries studied, EU policies were only marginally represented in the media (p.3).

In addition to that, the book written by Deird in 2003 compared “the way that national media systems in France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom approach the issue of European integration” (p. 11), while the article published by de Vreese, Banducci, Semetko and Boomgaarden in 2006 analyzes “the news coverage of the 2004 European parliamentary elections in all 25 member states of the European Union [at that time]. It provides a unique pan-European overview of the campaign coverage based on an analysis of three national newspapers and two television newscasts in the two weeks leading up to the elections” (p. 477).

As far as print press is concerned, Trenz (2003) studied “news coverage on European governance and policymaking of the year 2000. His sample included eleven daily newspapers in six EU - member states (p. 1).

In Romania, EU coverage has been understudied so far. Nevertheless, we consider that the scientific article by Corbu (2009) stands out due to its deep going analysis: a quantitative approach of three TV

channels. Her research relied on agenda setting theories and on the analytical methods of Peter, Semetko and de Vreese (2003).

After examining the previous studies and others of the same type, we may conclude that there has been little interest in EU coverage in the EU countries, in general, and in Romania, in particular. It is our goal to concentrate on Romanian print press, on the current issues it reflects, in order to balance the research interest in the media coverage of special events in the activity of the European Union.

2.2. Explanations of Scarcity in EU Coverage

In the previously mentioned Romanian study, as well as in de Vreese, Banducci, Semetko & Boomgaarden (2006, p. 477), the authors consider that the scarcity of EU coverage may have been triggered by the so-called communication deficit (taking over the terminology of Meyer, 1999) or, as explained in de Vreese (2001, p. 307), by the fact that EU coverage is “largely invisible” [...] because EU decision-making lacks transparency and is usually kept away from the public eye. Along with the EU’s communication deficit, journalists themselves often consider EU affairs to be non-issues”.

Peter, Semetko & de Vreese (2003) point out that there is a mutual relation between the scarce EU coverage and the unconsolidated European public sphere. At present, the Habermasian concept of public sphere is about to be shaped by the media, along with the sense of common European identity.

More optimistically, after doing research in the national media of 11 EU member states, in the year 2000, Trenz (2003, p.10) concluded that, actually, there was an emerging European public sphere according to his data.

2.3. Frames in the News

Dealing with the thematic structure of EU coverage in “Adevarul”, I will also tackle the news frames that prevail across the monitored paper issues. Mention should be made that there are various definitions of framing, in the literature devoted to the news coverage of EU affairs.

While de Vreese (2005) offers a synthesis of the theories and the typologies of news framing in the US and in Europe, he approaches the concept and the process of framing from different angles. He explains that “by virtue of emphasizing some elements of a topic above others, a frame provides a way to understand an event or issue” (p. 53); in this approach, framing is associated to perception, cognition and understanding. Following Entman (1993), the author reveals the functions of framing in the process of defining problems, diagnosing causes, making moral judgments and suggesting remedies.

What is relevant for this approach is that de Vreese (2005) considers that framing could be found both in specific textual and in visual elements, both in the news content and in their formal characteristics, such as headlines, subheads, photos, photo captions, leads, etc (p. 54).

Likewise, he distinguishes between issue-specific news frames and generic news frames, the latter category being certainly more applicable in various news analyses. de Vreese (2005, p. 56) mentions the frames studied by Neuman et al. (1992, p. 64), in relation to public perception, when discussing current affairs; they are the economics frame, the moral values frame and the conflict frame. The conflict frame is supposed to be associated with “media’s ‘game interpretation of the political world as an ongoing series of contests, each with a new set of winners and losers”’. Semetko and Valkenburg (2000, p. 56) identified two additional news frames: human interest and attribution of responsibility; moreover, they renamed Neuman’s economics frame, considering that “economic consequences”

characterizes people's perception better. Unfortunately, there has been little research interest in analyzing the frames of the EU news supplied by Romanian media. We will attempt at comparing and interpreting the visibility of thematic areas through the frames that they develop.

3. Methodological Approach and Corpus

3.1. Methodological Approach

Following van Dijk (1991), I corroborated "theme" and "scheme" (content and formal characteristics, in de Vreese's terms) of news, in order to apply the author's "theory of semantic macrostructures" on the EU coverage amount of news in "Adevarul". Accordingly, we grouped the articles into thematic areas and noticed that four topics stood out, which determined us to measure and compare these areas in terms of visibility. To this end, we devised two grids that include two categories of indicators:

- Primary indicators: the amount (number) and the surface of the paper articles belonging to each thematic structure (Table 1)
- Secondary indicators (emphasis indicators) such as number and surface of the photos and the number of teasers accompanying the articles (Table 2)

The former category is comparable to the criteria of length and distribution of paper articles in the theories of van Dijk's (1985) and Deacon et al. (1999, p. 174-183). These indicators signal the significance/ relevance of text information, depending on the editor's strategy (Lazar & Boicu, 2012, p. 131).

A relative hierarchy of the four thematic areas under discussion resulted in each table column, containing each above mentioned indicator. In order to cumulate the figures of all the 5 indicators, I assigned numeric values (points) to the obtained data, from 1 to 4, the smallest figures corresponding to the minimum number of points, that is to say 1. To make the estimation more precise, I added an extra point to the thematic areas whose figures according to one indicator represented the double of the minimum figure. Example: the CVM (see *infra*) reports are discussed in 7 articles, totalizing a surface of 8, 248.5 cm², more than the double of the minimum surface of 2,015.5, devoted to the horse meat scandal.

3.2. Corpus

The research sample included in the cross-national research project corresponds to the set of articles that supplied EU coverage in the "Adevarul" newspaper, during one month (January 21-February 21, 2013). We monitored 20 daily issues and 4 weekend editions, that is, 1,422 articles of general interest (daily issues have 24 pages each, while weekend editions have 64 pages each). Only 81 articles (4.9%) were devoted to the EU information.

The corpus of the following analysis is made up of the 31 articles that clustered into the most comprehensive thematic structures / areas. They represent 37% of all the EU coverage paper articles.

The thematic areas that were shaped by more than 6 articles are the following, in an arbitrary order:

- the horse meat scandal (HMS)
- the European funds for Romania (ERFR), within the context of the EP debates concerning the EU budget.
- the 12th CVM reports (CVM), concerning the results of the process of EU monitoring of Romanian and Bulgarian justice systems.

- Romanian immigration in the EU member states. Here, there were two thematic subgroups of articles: 3 of them dealt with the Romanians working in Italy and Spain, and 7 articles analyzed David Cameron's Speech in which he announced tough measures against the Romanian and Bulgarian immigrants in Great Britain.

4. Research Data

Table 1 presents the figures corresponding to each thematic area according to, what we called, primary indicators of visibility of EU coverage: number and surface of articles about each of the four thematic structures. Table 2 shows the figures corresponding to each thematic area according to secondary indicators of visibility: number and surface of photos and teasers marking each thematic group. Table 3 shows the final calculation of points after cumulating the results under all the five indicators of visibility.

Table 1. Thematic Areas in the EU Corpus

No.	Thematic areas	No. of articles	Total Surface in cm ²
1.	Horse meat scandal (HMS)	6	2015.5
2.	European funds for Romania (ERFR)	8	3544.5
3.	12 th CVM reports (CVM)	7	8248.5
4.	Romanian immigration in EU states (RIEU)	10	2901

Table 2. Thematic Areas (Photos and Teasers)

	Thematic areas	No. of photos	Total Surface of photos cm ²	No. of teasers
1.	Horse meat scandal	4	602	2
2.	European funds for Romania	5	922.5	1
3.	12 th CVM reports	2	633.5	1
4.	Romanian immigration in EU states	4	432.65	1

Table 3. Conventional Points

	Thematic areas	PointsArt. No.	PointsArt. cm ²	PointsPhotosNo.	PointsPhotoscm ²	PointsTeaserNo.	PointsTotal
1.	HMS	1	1	2+1	2	2+1	10
2.	ERFR	3	3	3+1	4+1	1	16
3.	CVM	2	4+1	1	3	1	12
4.	RIEU	4	2	2+1	1	1	11

5. Data Analysis

Both hypotheses of the research were confirmed by the data in the tables. Through the first hypothesis, we stated that the EU coverage in "Adevarul", during one month, would be as low as the research in

Romania and in other EU countries had already indicated. In effect, our calculations led to the figure of 4.9%.

As to the second hypothesis about the frames developed in “Adevarul”, in the most visible thematic structures, let us reach the conclusions gradually.

Examining the results in Table 1, we noticed that the most numerous articles dealt with the Romanians working in Western EU member states. Given the fact that the largest communities of Romanian immigrants are to be found in Italy and Spain, we could assume that there have been recurrent news stories about them, mainly since 2007, when Romania joined the EU and our citizens could really enjoy mobility across Europe (even if it is an economic migration). On the other hand, the British media’s attitude towards the Romanian and Bulgarian immigration (covered in 7 articles) stood for a specific event (in de Vreese’s words) that was marking the media during the monitored period.

In terms of the second indicator, namely, the total surface of the articles in cm², the largest space was devoted to the 12th CVM reports (this figure is 3.5 times bigger than the one associated to the horse meat scandal). This is understandable, since there was a series of political disputes between Romania’s Prime Minister, Victor Ponta and President, Traian Basescu, at that time, concerning the media campaign against the prestige of justice.

Speaking about the frames developed by these topics, we could assert that Romanian immigration falls under Neuman’s economics frame and, respectively, under Semetko & Valdenburg’s both economic consequences and human interest frames. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that immigration produces different frames in host and home countries. In the Romanian case, the immigration frame may not only be associated to human interest, but also to empathy and solidarity with the fellow citizens working abroad. As to the 12th CVM reports, the subject produced the conflict frame, largely speculated by the media, across outlets and countries.

According to Table 2, each thematic area has only 1 or 2 teasers accompanying the respective articles, which implies that it is not EU coverage that sells the newspaper. Nevertheless, comparing the shares of the thematic areas, the articles about the European funds were the most visible from the point of view of the photos illustrating the text. There were 5 large photos whose total surface meant more than the double of the figure recorded by the articles on immigration. Actually, the cumulated results in Table 3 show that the most visible thematic area was the same: the European funds for Romania. The decisions made in the European Parliament concerning the distribution of the EU budget are perceived to be vital for Romania’s financial and economic development. Like the thematic group of articles situated on the second position (CVM reports), it provoked a controversy between Romania’s Prime Minister and President which triggered the conflict frame. Even if the conflict frame was less present than in the articles about the 12th CVM reports, in the case of the European funds, there was the suitable combination between the conflict frame and the economic consequences frame. Mention should be made of a third component of the frame network characterizing the topic of the European funds, that is to say, Semetko & Valkenburg’s frame of attribution of responsibility. In fact, in our corpus of EU coverage news, the economic consequences frame seems to be the most vehicled in the editorial strategy of “Adevarul”. This frame makes the EU coverage even more visible, whenever it is combined with other strong frames, such as the conflict one. Consequently, our second hypothesis is also confirmed.

In addition to this specificity of our corpus, there is one more characteristic in the framing of the analyzed news. Unlike the news researched in Peter, Semetko & de Vreese in the media of 5 Western EU member states, where EU coverage was not found to be domestic (2003, p. 322), in EU coverage

in “Adevarul”, there is a high degree of domesticity in the treatment of EU information. One more aspect that we noticed in our project is the tendency of neutral or positive evaluation of the EU news, in Romanian media.

Given the fact that EU coverage is a resourceful and complex field, it is worth extending this research over the cultural differences separating the media frames in the older EU member states from the frames in the more recent members. The classic theories of framing were rooted in the past experiences and realities of the West. We should contribute to the updating and enriching of extant concepts.

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