



Cumulative Report on Debates in the “Management” Section on the MediaForum Platform

Period: March 25 2015 – 1 March 2016

Overview

During March 25, 2015 – March 1, 2016, 8 debates were held in the “Management” section. The project director, Content Manager, and facilitators have selected topics reflecting the concerns of the media managers. The goal was to address subjects related to various aspects of the managerial work, from staff hiring, for instance, to major issues, such as distribution of print media or funding and economic survival of media outlets. Taking into account that the target of this section a very narrow public - the media managers – the number of comments within the debate was smaller. Similarly to other sections, we have selected the topics and the facilitators in order to ensure representativeness of different forms of journalism – print media, online, and broadcasting.

Topics and debate process

1. “Distribution of newspapers and magazines – impossible mission”?

Since this was the first topic discussed within the Management section of the MediaForum, we wanted to have as a facilitator a person with a good name in journalism and a well-known media manager. In her supporting text, Alina Radu, the director of Ziarul de Garda newspaper explained the need for discussing the main problems, some of which are chronic, which arise every year in terms of the subscriptions to print media and distribution of newspapers by Posta Moldovei (PM) enterprise, which holds the monopoly on the market. She has also addressed the issue of the fees that publications have to pay to MP. We hoped that representatives of Posta Moldovei would also take part in the discussion since the facilitator had

”In some localities,
subscriptions to
newspapers is done
through
manipulation by the
post officers, who
impose citizens to
subscribe to certain
publications in order
to benefit from
services such as
payment of
pensions, etc.”

- Alina Radu

invited them; however, it was only journalists who participated. The editor-in-chief of a local newspaper from Ungeni, for instance, has reported the corruption of post officers when making subscriptions and distributing periodicals as being a big issue. ”Which print outlets have big or even exaggerated print run? Those who give bribes post officers”, Lucia Bacalu wrote. She also reported that publishers are often penalized/imposed fines on by Posta Moldovei, without any explanation, and in order to raise awareness about this issue, she suggested organizing meetings of the print media publishers and editors with Posta Moldovei representatives.

In her final report, the facilitator mentioned that Posta Moldovei had not responded to the call for dialogue; that the stands designed to distribute publications actually sell mostly cigarettes and alcohol; that publications from Russian Federation are displayed in more visible places on the stands than those printed in Moldova; as well as the fact that, in her opinion, PM is politically controlled and therefore not interested in distributing publications that criticize the government. She supported the idea of Lucia Bacalu to initiate a constructive of editors and publishers on the one side with PM and other print media distributors on the other side; depoliticizing Posta Moldovei and ensuring access of publishers to information about subscribers.

2. “Funding of the media during election campaigns”

This topic was suggested due to the political situation of Moldova at that time – local elections were upcoming in June 2015. Therefore, the dilemma about the income sources for the media vs. the ethical principles was readdressed. The facilitator highlighted the almost paradoxical situations of some media outlets during the election campaigns – on the one hand they are known for their anti-corruption stories

in which they criticize some political actors, and on the other hand they place electoral advertising for the same people. In other cases, journalists of an institution write and opt for EU integration, while the management decides to place electoral advertising for politicians who call for integration in the Customs Union, perhaps in order to help the institution survive. Witnessing such contradictions, the public gets confused.

Media managers or ordinary journalists who took part in the discussion, tried to provide explanations and recommendations. In their opinion, the media should not forego these sources of revenue and publications could be honest with the readers by making clearly and visibly the respective advertising messages with the phrase “Paid electoral advertising”. Others have tackled the topic of hidden electoral advertising, paid with unofficially. The facilitator made reference, through an active link, to the classic journalism handbooks and the financial reports of the Moldovan parties. In the end, Alina Radu concluded that the Moldovan media is not sufficiently independent in order to be sufficiently critical towards the electoral candidates that place advertisements. At the same time, she pointed out that for self-respecting media outlets, it is mandatory to indicate the funds from which electoral advertising was paid, as well as the fact that, particularly during the election campaign, journalists should investigate and publish stories about the transparency of electoral funds of each party.

As a solution, the facilitator recommended to monitor whether electoral advertisements are placed correctly in the media, empowering and training journalists in investigating the source of electoral money and ensuring the transparency of the media ownership.

3. “The chairperson of NPBI Teleradio-Moldova: how should he/she be elected”?

The debate on this topic was dictated by another event, which happened at that time – the campaign for election of the chairperson of the National Public Broadcasting Institution (NPBI). Facilitator Ion Bunduchi explained what should be the main criteria for selecting the candidates and what are people’s expectations from the future chairperson. Activity programs have been attached to the text of the debate, which had been presented by each of the 6 candidates. However, the debate was not too successful and only one comment was posted.

3. “Does the quality of the product depend on the wage of the journalist”?

Through this topic, we intended to address an issue of concern to the media managers – those who set and provide the salaries, and the journalists, in order to see how they value their work. In most of the comments, users agreed that some

journalists may have high wages in Moldova not necessarily because they are good professional, but rather because they accept to write about or to broadcast what they are asked to, in other words, they accept to be biased and to not always observe the ethical rules. Another opinion suggested that actually “good” journalists are expensive; this is why in the Moldovan media there are few journalism investigations while the “copy-paste” news is flourishing.

The facilitator concluded that the subject proposed for discussion is “delicate and at the same time painful for some of our journalists who are forced to work in a media market, which is monopolized”, and this explains the small number of comments – 6. Ion Terguta recommended encouraging journalists to talk about the problems they face and to ensure more intense promotion of the MediaForum platform.

4. “Who finances 35 TV stations on an almost inexistent market and why”?

Taking into account the significant increase of the number of TV radio station licenses issued in the recent years, and the appearance of a bigger number of TV stations, facilitator Ion Terguta, the head of a TV company, planned to discuss with the platform users the rational and economic aspects of TV operation. He prepared a cost estimate close to the real costs, in order to show that financing of a TV station implies expenditures of millions, on which there is virtually no return.

The participants in the discussion tackled this subject as a continuation of the previous topic facilitated by Ion Terguta – in the light of the expenses for wages/motivation of journalists by publishers, in order to get a bigger influence over the public opinion. There have also been participants who said that, by financing some TV stations, “dirty money” of some individuals or groups are laundered.

Facilitator Ion Terguta concluded that the low interest of managers of Moldovan media institutions to participate in these online debates, means they are not willing to talk about their problems, for certain reasons. He suggested establishing an institutional framework where media managers would discuss the problems in this area and would look for solutions.

5. “Does the media stay independent if it criticises suppliers of advertising”?

This topic was proposed and agreed as a consequence of a number of signals launched by the journalists in the recent years, in articles relating to journalism issues. Facilitator Veaceslav Perunov, owner of a regional Russian language newspaper “SP”, confirmed the existence of this problem, when the Content Manager suggested this topic to him. In his text, the facilitator presented examples from the activity of the media institution he leads. Some bloggers also joined the discussion and brought examples showing that the freedom to criticize is directly proportional to the funds owned by the media institutions or the blogs. However, the

facilitator acknowledged that journalists often find themselves in a position where they might lose advertising contracts with the economic entities which they criticised. In the end, Veaceslav Perunov suggested that economic entities, which are interested in placing advertisements on news sites or in newspapers, should be involved in such debates, in order to convince them that “criticism is a good tool for the operation of their business and that they should get used to the fact that both their advertisement and critical articles against their activity or their products might appear in the same newspaper”. In addition, the facilitator proposed organising a series of roundtables and seminars in which positive and negative examples of other countries would be examined, and recommendations in terms of the relationship with “freakish advertisement suppliers” should be developed, etc.

6. «How can we protect and support local media consumers”?

Facilitator Veaceslav Perunov sought to address an issues that affects him directly as owner of a media business. Following discussions with the Content Manager, it was agreed to launch this debate on the MediaForum, taking into account that this problem also affects some other media managers, who are losing revenues because of the unfair competition with the imported newspapers and magazines, particularly those from the Russian Federation. Veaceslav Perunov brought concrete figures as arguments that the Moldovan media market is not protected by any means from foreign publications, where advertisements are published with no taxes paid to the budget of Moldova. This creates unfair competition for the local media and causes losses or foregone revenues for the state. The facilitator suggested a series of amendments to the legal acts, which could change the situation. Two media managers got involved into the discussion.

In his final report, the facilitator noted that this subject should be a concern not only for the media owners and organisations, but also for the Government and the Parliament, which have decision-making powers and can amend the legislation. In his opinion, media managers should be more assertive in their representations to the Government and the Parliament, so that their proposals are listened and given a reaction to.

7. “How do media managers select their staff”?

This topic had been on the agenda of the MediaForum coordinators for a long time and it was decided to propose it for discussion when a specific media outlet would be looking to hire journalists. We have identified such an outlet - sanatate.info – and agreed with its manager, Elena Ciona, to facilitate such a discussion, based on her own example. The issues to be tackled have been agreed.

Both media managers and journalists took part in the discussion, sharing their own employment experiences. Most of the participants expressed the opinion that media managers are looking first of all for journalists who are open for self-tuition and "willing to learn the job", partly because journalists with bigger experience are "more expensive". Some said that young journalists ask for exaggerated salaries as soon as they graduate, while others providing their own examples and admitted that after graduation, most of the young journalists are unaware of at least the names or the functions of some government institutions.

In the end, the facilitator recommended to media managers to be "lenient" with the newcomers and to the young journalists – to be willing to work as part of a team and to learn the job quickly. In addition, Elena Ciona underscored that the Journalism Departments at universities should bring their curricula in line with the existing needs and to include a bigger number of practical lessons, including explanations about the functions of the state institutions.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The main recommendations made by the facilitators in the Management section are:

- Start a dialogue of the newspaper and magazine editors and publishers on the one side with Posta Moldovei administration other side, in order to discuss and solve the problems related the print media distribution;
- Secure access of the heads of media outlets to information about the subscribers;
- Monitor whether electoral advertisements are placed correctly in the media;
- Empower and train journalists to investigate the source of the electoral money;
- Secure real transparency of media ownership;
- Set up an institutional framework where media managers would discuss the existing problems and seek solutions;
- Organise a series of roundtables and seminars to examine the positive and negative examples of advertisement placement on various media platforms concurrently with critical articles against economic entities;
- Point out to the Government and the Parliament, from time to time, the issue of unfair competition and the revenues foregone by the state because of its failure to protect the local media market from publications printed abroad, particularly in the Russian Federation;
- Publishers should put pressure on decision makers to amend the legislation in order to secure protection of local media producers.

- Include in the curriculum of the Journalism Departments at universities a bigger number of practical lessons, which would ensure better training of the young journalists and would implicitly facilitate their employment.