

Barbovschi, Monica

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Romanian political blogs - new loci of expression and participation?

An analytical framework for the investigation of the political blogging space as a new form of public sphere

Monica Barbovschi

Doctoral student

Faculty of Sociology and Social Work

Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj

Abstract

This study proposes several theoretical tools of investigating the rich spectrum of the Romanian political blogging space. Based on perspectives such as the model of public sphere transformation, the social actor theory and an applied model of media elite continuity (Sparks, 2007), it looks at the patterns of interaction between different actors - politicians with blogs, mainstream media journalists that have crossed into the digital domain, “informed bloggers”, i.e. bloggers that post items on political issues, and popular bloggers who address sporadically political issues or engage in various forms of interaction with the other actors – and it creates an analytical framework for the investigation of the Romanian political blogging space, a space that should translate into a new forum of democratic dialogue. However, the new medium that was generously credited with the attributes of an egalitarian locus of expression and participation appears to be just mimicry of the public sphere concept, shredded by blog-wars and ego disputes between different actors.

Introduction

Current theoretical and empirical interests in media transformations in Central and Eastern Europe and the connections with the political realm have started to explore several trends which include identifying technological mediating structures between different political actors, between the individual and governmental authority, with a focus on the replacement of traditional mass media with new information technologies (and its social consequences).

One of the major goals in this research field should be the exploration of the dialectics between the institutional and alternative discourses, the fragmentation of public space, the construction of cognitive and pertinence structures of individuals and social groups. The

Romanian blogging space presents a rich area of investigation in the context of public sphere fragmentation and proliferation of alternative discourses – a trend that should be explored in comparison with other countries in the Central and Eastern European region.

There has been a considerable amount of criticism related to the role of traditional media in creating a coherent public sphere, in fostering democratic dialogue, in shaping individual or group (in a larger sense) identities, in constructing and promoting communal goals. More and more, new media and blogs, in particular, offer significant opportunities for restructuring practices and institutions, for reshaping the discourses about relevant general problems, one metaphor for describing this process might be Foucault's (1977) vision of power fragmentation/distribution inside society. In many aspects, blogging has restored the power of individuals and small groups to affect public debates. Due to the lack of almost any entry costs (besides access to Internet on a regular basis and some basic Internet skills – handling a blog template and adding new blog posts), producing the news and participating in public debates has exit the exclusive domain of traditional/conventional journalists/ opinion leaders and has made possible for non-professionals (i.e. individuals with no journalistic training) to exert their influence (different types of capital) and exercise their voice (including political).

Similarly, the same enthusiastic welcoming had been received by radio and television, but they both failed at offering a space for free, democratic opinion formation. Marc Raboy and Bernard Dagenais (1992/1995) have underlined the negative features of the traditional medium: the spectacular, one-way flow of communication, centralized decisions. Besides access to information and multiple-directed interaction, the new media also offer the possibility of almost unlimited combination of various technologies. Contrary to traditional media, the new medium - the „new influencers”, as Trammell and Keshelashvili (2005) put it - has the advantage of raising awareness more rapidly, the advantage of a reciprocal action catalyst. In addition to this, the capacity of blogs to encompass the characteristics and burdens of citizen journalism (Rutigliano, 2007) or, for the purpose of this paper, of political journalism could foster a more vivid public debate and participation.

An approach to Romanian political blogs and bloggers

A working definition of the weblog might simply include the unedited voice of a person (Winer, 2003), even when important technical features are missing (e.g. permalinks, syndication, the possibility of comments, a calendar, the blogroll etc.). For the purpose of this article, I included in the definition of political blogs individual online content produced by

specialized/conventional journalists (i.e. individuals with journalistic credentials and affiliation with a traditional media outlet), opinion leaders, politicians, politically informed non-journalists (i.e. non-journalist individuals that blog extensively on various political topics) and popular bloggers (A-list bloggers, i.e. very high authority bloggers with 500 or more blogs linking in the last 6 months, Technorati widget developed by Kineda.com¹, or elite bloggers) that cover sporadically political issues. The later category was included due mainly to the popular bloggers influence over any issues (including political) and second, due to specific social relations with the political arena (e.g. the use of popular bloggers for election campaign purposes) or with the other significant actors.

In their analysis of weblog genres and bloggers' expectations, scholars (Miller & Shepherd, 2004; Viégas, 2005) have walked into the antagonism of private and public propensions inside the blogging practice. We see the blog, then, as a genre that addresses a timeless rhetorical exigence in ways that are specific to its time. In the blog, the potentialities of technology, a set of cultural patterns, rhetorical conventions available in antecedent genres, and the history of the subject have combined to produce a recurrent rhetorical motive that has found a conventional mode of expression. Bloggers acknowledge that motive in each other and continue enacting it for themselves. The blog-as-genre is a contemporary contribution to the art of the self. (Miller & Shepherd, 2004) As the role of bloggers in the shaping of public discourse becomes more important, it seems necessary to consider applying a functional definition of "Press" in the blogosphere (Hendrickson, 2007), due to the frequent failures of Romanian MSM to rise up to its traditional role of political watchdog.

When it comes to issues of legitimization and credibility, Johnson and collaborators (2007) indicate that politically-interested Internet users find blogs to be moderately credible sources for news and information (in terms of depth of information), while judging them as weaker on credibility for fairness of information. Overall, it seems that politically-interested blog users judged blogs as more credible than traditional media or other online sources. Therefore, the ability of the blogs in creating and consolidating a more viable public space of informed debates should be taken into consideration. There has been little research on the extent and nature of Romanian blog credibility (versus traditional media). However, recent data (Holotescu & Manafu, 2007) provide evidence for the increasing importance of blogs in comparison to traditional media sources: 80.63% report the same and more credibility than traditional media, compared to only 77.21% in 2006 (Sample: 702 Romanian bloggers, data collection September-October 2008), while other sources confirm the rise of trust in online news sources at the expense of the print press (Fotiade & Popa, 2008).

Moreover, recent analyses (Comănescu, 2008a; 2008b) for 2007 and first trimester of 2008 suggest a clear decline in the consumption of traditional media (more visible for printed press, less visible for television).

Among many others, Andrews (2003) argues that blogs transform the way journalism is practiced today, if not through accuracy or balance, at least through acting as a correcting mechanism for bad (both erroneous or manipulative) conventional journalism or through better engendering of dialogue on issues of public concern. As Drezner and Farrell (2004) put it, the ties between MSM (journalists) and bloggers are crucial for establishing credibility for the new medium. They predict that rich sites are only likely to get richer, while some of the poor sites might stand a chance, if they learn to bask in the glory of those already rich sites (i.e. linking to high-rank sites). On the other hand, poor sites in terms of visibility, but rich in information, might catch the attention of a larger audience if linked back by high authority sites/blogs.

However, the new medium functions also (or it should function) as a tool of unmasking political affiliations and hidden agendas. Even BBC has reconsidered its position about blogs (Potter, 2008; Hermida, 2008) while trying to maintain the new media outlet within the normative frameworks of traditional journalism. But maybe the most important gain the new type of journalism brings (to the public sphere) is a renewed sense of community, something that news organizations simply do not (Kennedy, 2008). The interdependence of rules (adequacy rules and procedural rules– Höflich, apud. Schmidt, 2007), relations (hypertextual and social) and code seem to be appropriate for defining a "community of practice" marked by multiple tensions and competing actors with different agendas (political, journalistic, or mixed) and influence.

Efimova, Hendrick and Anjewierden (2005) are preoccupied with finding "the life between buildings", that is delineating the social space formed in-between personal weblogs. As opposed to other types of online communities, the nuclei of a weblog community cannot be found in a single web page, but rather in the interaction between bloggers and their blogs. Unlike the above authors, who chose to focus on the analysis of thematic, specialized blogs, the analysis of a Romanian "community" of political blogs must include different types of actors/ members.

Theoretical tools and tentative research questions

What is still open for analysis, especially in the Eastern European region, that undergoes significant media transformation, is the potential for alternative discourses, for

different public agendas besides the political agendas of various governments/political actors, the potential for the reshaping of the public sphere, in both the social and political dimensions. The presence of blogs on the new media scene becomes more and more ubiquitous, on the grounds of generalized discourse about the crisis of political representation and legitimization, further fueled by discourses about the devitalizing of public space, about the disengagement and alienation of citizens and of civil society and last, about the dissolution of “civic engagement” in terms of active participation to common problem solving.

This article is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: Does the new Romanian media foster and expand public knowledge through a process of pluralistic dialogue and democratization?

RQ2: Could the new media forms (political blogs in particular) produce a new form of political citizenship (more engaged, more critical)?

RQ3: What is the role of the new journalism (mixture of traditional and unconventional forms) in the mediation process between state/or political arena and the new type of “public/s”? and finally,

RQ4: Are blogs alternative media?

Some of the concepts that one could use in order to describe a new Romanian media spectrum are the revised concept of public sphere (in Habermas’s initial conceptualization) and the concept of civil society - a key prerequisite for democracy and democratization (Gross, 2002), in direct connection with the new identified, specific forms of social capital, the concept of “community media”. For example, one of the nominal definitions of “public sphere” that I would like to use as a starting point is David Berry’s (2004), who investigated the media potential for enlightenment and empowerment of the citizens: “A public sphere is perceived [...] as a public space, an area for free and unfettered communication, but also an area where ideas can be mediated by and through the media and then exchanged between citizens in civil society”. Another useful approach to public sphere is given by Crawley and Giorgi (2006): “A public sphere delineates that space in which citizens come together to discuss and debate issues of common or public concern”. So the key terms might be: communality, freedom of communication, mediation, public concern. All of these need separate analytical scrutiny.

Finally, one approach to public sphere that I would like to consider is Negt and Kluge’s (1972/1993) four characteristics definition, which includes the unstable mixture of different types of publicity, discursive contestation from diverse participants, potentially unpredictable process and the grounding in material structures (rather than abstract

universalism). Despite the criticism regarding the democratic nature of the public sphere in Habermas's terms (Fraser, 1993) the new medium's capacity to avoid the pitfalls of mainstream media (concentration, unequal access, unequal resources) might translate into a more participatory public sphere.

One of the theories that one should take into consideration when analyzing the Romanian media spectrum is the theory of media elite continuity developed by Colin Sparks (2007), which might explain better the reproduction of political and journalist elites (old media outlets strongly influenced by the political elites) within the new space. The major paradigm guiding my theoretical enquiries can be described in terms of modernization cleavage between different social structures, between institutions and social norms, between the "enabling environment" or the facilitating structure/infrastructure, on one hand, and praxis, on the other hand. Other theoretical lenses that guide the direction and scope of this study are the theory of mediation, a revised social action theory, i.e. a reconciliation of action and collectivities (Cohen, 1987) in the context of new media and the perspective of political legitimization crisis (usually correlated with discourses of plurality, decentralization, empowerment, alternative voices etc.).

Media spectrum and new media

The Romanian media structure (type of property, theory of media elite continuity, further development directions) and its connection with democracy principles marks the difference between theory and applicability in Eastern European region and especially in Romania. In order to answer questions about reshaping the Romania media spectrum, some considerations related to post-communist mass-media structure, ownership, distribution, correlated with recent tendencies coming from the new information and communication technologies (forums, electronic versions of newspapers, political blogs, of politicians, traditional journalists and public figures, but also blogs of "simple" users, or to use a recent construction, of simple consumer-producers, or even „prosumers”, that become more and more engaged in forms of social and political e-activism) are necessary. In addition to this, the new forms of social capital (Putnam, 2000) and community norms should be key concepts of an incipient exploratory model.

What one must take into consideration when talking about public sphere rejuvenation and media transformation in Romania is the generalized lack of a project for "enlightenment journalism" (Spichal et al., 2004), or the lack of mass-media tradition as a democracy "watch-dog", completed by the absence of a viable public broadcasting system, clearly delimited from

commercial media. The Romanian media spectrum might be accurately described in terms of a combination of state/private ownership, presence of media moguls with political and economic power (Dan Voiculescu, ex-president of the Conservatory Party; Dinu Patriciu, president of Rompetrol and *friend* of the PM), international companies as major players, lack of transparency (Sorin Ovidiu Vantu, another media mogul, was proved to be behind a company based in Cyprus). Besides the persistent tension between commercial and community interest media (Jankowski & Prehn, 2002), there is also a severe lack of grass-root media organized around the “communities of interest” in Romania. One can safely state there is no “community media” in Romania, organized around specific, regionally located issues, at least not in a fully articulated sense.

One danger in the recent transformation process might be what Spassov and Todorov (2003) call the mere “cosmetic” of the public sphere, the “quasi public sphere” less than a desirable situation they have observed in Bulgaria, situation that might be also true for the Romanian public sphere. Adamic and Glance (2005) found out that political blogging tends to divide itself along ideological lines (conservatory blogs linking more to conservatory, liberal-more to liberal blogs) however, the case of the Romanian political blogosphere appears to be a little more mixed.

The political blogging arena – a comprehensive investigation

A few patterns of interaction inside the Romanian blogging space appear to be more salient than others – I prefer “blogging space” to “blogosphere” due to the normative tone the latter entails, suggesting a global unity that it simply does not pose (Kimball, 2008), as one-on-one interactions constitute the general communication pattern (a blogger comments on other blogger’s post, a blogger links to another blogger), therefore several dyads might provide a useful analytical approach, each of the following categories – politicians, conventional/accredited journalists (both from print and TV) and political analysts, informed bloggers (politically-oriented), other types of content producers/consumers – representing (political) actors in dynamic dyads. Since the categories are not mutually exclusive (former conventional journalists that have turned into “informed” bloggers, or former journalists that currently work as political advisors), I will present only a couple of dyads in the attempt to map the political blogging space.

Moreover, in the investigation of the divided political blogging space, the difficulty of selecting and applying traditional investigation techniques and methods has become more and more pervasive. The flow of information inside the Romanian (political) blogging networks is

currently understood only to a limited extent. The methodology of web crawling analysis (Bruns, 2007) is suited to exploring specific issues for which relevant blog posts can be easily indentified (per-page crawl setting), while the „per-site” analysis will generate more generic patterns of interlinkage between sites as characterized by static components (e.g. blogrolls). In the description of both generic relations (inter-site networking) and specific issues, the method is suitable only for determining the importance of certain nodes/ communicators/ actors, without providing us with an indication of the nature/intensity of the relationships inside the networks. Therefore, while its value for mapping relevant actors and inter-linkages is evident, the capacity of web crawling tools for describing in full the dynamics of the political blogosphere is limited.

Other scholars (Trammell et al., 2006) have built their analysis of non-English blogs on a perspective of uses and gratifications theory. However, in the context of a Romanian media spectrum (and blogosphere) mined by non-transparent (political and economical) agendas, a uses and gratifications theory would prove to be of little help in the analysis of the relations between the new media elites. Therefore, instead of going with the classic scenario of representative sample-quantitative method, I preferred a selection of relevant observations/ cases within the blogging space. Some of the relations described above, namely conventional journalists – bloggers, are not necessarily related to the dynamics of political relations, but they become noteworthy through their ramifications and reverberations within the entire “ecosystem”.

Dyad 1: Bloggers versus politicians

The politicians (in both local and central structures) tend to refrain from engaging into direct confrontations/discussions with the politically informed blogosphere. A large majority use Web 2.0 tools as an mere appendix of traditional media outlets for PR/image campaign purposes, they moderate/filter critical comments – a practice labeled as “virtual quasi-Nazism”² – or use popular bloggers to help their election campaign (the example of Romania’s “first blogger”, Zoso³, who allegedly was used in the recent – June 2008 – local elections campaign to collect popularity for one of the candidates).

Another notable example is the case of ex-president Ion Iliescu (now honorific president of the Social Democratic Party – PSD), who set up a meeting with the Romanian bloggers, shortly after he started his own personal blog⁴. His initiative was labeled as a PR movement, his speech was considered highly hypocritical, false, elusive⁵, obsolete⁶, or a game the bloggers lost⁷. Another important observation is the ambiguous way the guest list was put

together, an open invitation mixed with personal invitations on traffic criteria, instead of political interest/competence⁸. On the other hand, the organizers, Media Consumers Association (AscMedia), characterized the meeting as a gain in legitimacy and authority for the bloggers⁹.

While I still can't decide on the nature of the PSD politician Mihnea Georgescu's presence¹⁰ in the Romanian blogging space, the posting on his personal blog where he arrogantly asks for donations for his forthcoming election campaign (and for his personal welfare, setting also a minimum contribution limit) and the excessive public appraisal of ex-president Ion Iliescu – have become the ridicule of the entire political blogosphere¹¹.

Finally, the ex PM Adrian Năstase (also from PSD) appears to be the most visible and competent communicator among the politicians with blogs. In "real" life, Adrian Năstase is currently facing corruption charges and awaiting the decision of the Constitutional Court regarding the institution of criminal proceedings (postponed for September 2008). Earlier in the month of August, the Romanian parliament voted against the investigation of the former PM due to the lack of quorum. The bloggers' reaction was prompt: a new blog appeared on August 15 with the purpose of creating a negative campaign against Adrian Năstase¹² (the author's motivation being the evolution of Năstase's corruption files, combined with his announced running for a seat in the Romanian Parliament in the autumn elections, which would guarantee him 5 years immunity from prosecution). When they don't use blogs as primitive and limited PR tools in order to boost or correct their image or to attack their political opponents, politicians fight bloggers. On June 17, the Municipal Electoral Bureau Iasi, following the complaint of the Social Democratic Party, has decided that two bloggers¹³ that posted on their personal weblogs the partial results of an exit-poll from the local elections on Sunday have broken the law – however no legal sanctions followed.

Dyad 2: Bloggers versus conventional journalists

The resistance of Romanian mainstream media (MSM) to new media (following the trend visible at international levels) has delayed segments of journalism from exploring viable alternatives that could be part of the solution to economic problems associated with an aging, dwindling or even plummeting readership, problems that threaten the vitality and survival of printed press (Carroll, 2004; Kirtz, 2008; Shafer, 2008). To a significant degree, the characteristics of conventional journalisms have migrated to the new field.

More and more, conventional journalists enter the Web 2.0 zone, some of them with a significant headstart provided by electronic versions of mainstream media (electronic

newspapers that run ads of their editors' personal blogs). In spite of the clear advantages these converted journalists enjoy in terms of visibility, some of them engage in blog-wars with the so called "informed bloggers" (regular people that are not affiliated with mainstream media), with the clear intention to denigrate the content and its authors. The most famous (and partially amusing) example involves Marius Tucă, chief editor of a central newspaper and popular TV host, attacking the entire Romanian blogging community (Quote: "*Romanian bloggers are nothing but earthworms that have come to the surface without having anything to say*"¹⁴). Another conflict (although carried on in milder terms) between informed bloggers and conventional journalists was Cristian Şuţu¹⁵, journalist for "Cotidianul" versus Dan Andronic¹⁶, political consultant for the Liberal Party.

Faced with the rapid development in the recent crisis in Georgia, politicians and conventional journalists have produced only timid and incoherent reactions; on the other hand, the bloggers managed to cover the subject extensively and objectively, through live-feeds, analyses, pictures and on-site reports. One of the most active Romanian blogs, Dateline Bucharest¹⁷, was mentioned on the CNN website (as captured by another Romanian blogger¹⁸). Although not political, some illustrations about reciprocal claims of copyright infringement and theft draw the last line of a picture of conflictual and competitive relation between conventional and new media (e.g. conventional media –Intact- accusing new media of copyright infringement¹⁹ and elite bloggers accusing media trusts of theft²⁰). To conclude, there is obviously an increasing interaction between bloggers and journalists affiliated with mainstream media. The nature of this interaction needs further exploration through different theoretical lenses, one of them being the theory of media elite continuity.

Dyad 3: Blogger versus blogger

The blog-roll, the new type of rolodex, is an important cross-reference system (along with deep linking) that enables and maintains status and centrality inside a network of bloggers. The „Zoso effect” is a local denomination for traffic spikes in one's blog generated by the references received from a popular blogger.

While "trackbacks" are more or less useful in the creation and maintainance of cohesion and social capital, fights between bloggers are not unusual – like the ones between A-list bloggers and informed bloggers (Valentin Petcu a.k.a Zoso versus Mihnea Dumitru²¹).

With the new opportunity for making money by posting on your blog (BaniPePost²², similar with PayPerPost) about products, services, events, even politicians, one can only presume the rivalries will increase and the gap will deepen. The competing discourses about the nature and ethos of blogging can be described using Foucault's model of micro-distribution of power (competition of discourses) combined with a perspective of social agency.

The power to capacitate political action

One step beyond the access to alternative sources of information, the blogging space has the potential to raise awareness about important social and political issues, to ignite and capacitate collective action. However, the Romanian blogging space seems to have limited power in making the translation from information to action for the time being. One anecdotal example, "The Velvet Mineriad" illustrates this statement. In June 1991, ex-president Ion Iliescu called for the help of the miners in the Jiu Valley against the students' demonstrations in the University Square, a violent intervention that resulted in deaths, injuries and massive illegal arrests. 18 years later, June 13th 2008, the bloggers' "Velvet Mineriad"²³ fails to raise major awareness on the unresolved issues of Iliescu's moral responsibility (approx. 70 people, half of them were taking pictures, some of them had no idea what the pillow fight was about, according to one of the informed bloggers²⁴). However, another political action – the flash-mob for peace in Georgia ("handshaking marathon for peace") organized by the Romanian Young Green Association²⁵ in Bucharest and disseminated on several blogs – managed to gather 16 NGOs, approximately 50 people and several MSM reporters²⁶.

While I realize it is commonplace to state that the Romanian blogging space has the capacity to mobilize social and political action, I remain skeptical about the interests, motivations and sometimes competencies of its users (actors) to transform these enabling capacities.

Conclusions and further directions

This article has outlined some of the theories that might be useful for the investigation of the complex Romanian political blogging space. Bearing in mind the framework of a more democratic public sphere in Habermas's terms, the article presented some of the interactions that take place inside this new medium as a part of the larger Romanian media spectrum.

With the use of the rich theoretical tools described in the first part, the current Romanian (possibly) fragmented public sphere, the multiple “constellations of people’s perceptions” (Dahlgren & Sparks, 2004) reshaped by the new means of communication, need further investigation. From a methodological point of view, this endeavor requires a mixture of quantitative and qualitative investigation techniques, that would further look at the imbrications of different media forms and form of journalism, investigate people’s relationship with various expression and information media and observe the reshaping of the traditional statuses and roles in various environments - electronic versions of newspapers, political blogs and forums (citizen, activism, journalist, public, dialogue, discourse, audience, feedback etc.).

At this time, generalizations about the Romanian political blogosphere are difficult to make (due to its current evolution towards a more –hopefully – stable and coherent medium). However, some remarks about the competing actors within the political blogosphere could encompass the following: politicians with different degrees of discursive power enhance the nature of blogs as „protected spaces” (Gumbrecht, 2004) - focusing more on controlling the content and regulating the feedback; different actors engage in blog-wars in their quest for status, legitimacy and influence (informed bloggers, conventional journalists, elite bloggers, politicians of political consultants); commercialization is a threat to blog credibility (again, future investigations need to follow); the perpetuation of lack of transparency of affiliations into the new medium is another pitfall that endangers the capacity of blogs to evolve into a more democratic public sphere.

For the time being, the new Romanian media is far from fostering and expanding public knowledge through a process of pluralistic dialogue and democratization. The question “Could the new media forms (political blogs in particular) produce a new form of political citizenship (more engaged, more critical)?” should be addressed bearing in mind the necessity for the development of community norms and a communal ethos (Carroll, 2004). In addition to this, the role of the new type of journalism (mixture of traditional and unconventional forms) in the mediation process between state/or political arena and the new type of “public/s” is also undergoing significant transformations. Some of the negative traits of the conventional media seem to migrate to the new medium: non-transparent affiliations and partisanship, excessive moderation and control, battles for audience and status.

In the light of the current conflicts and competing interests, a legitimate question can be raised: Is the “Blogo-public-sphere” a mere spectacle, mimicry/ parody of the public sphere concept or are blogs real alternative media?

The assumption that guides my interest in the potential of new media to reshape public sphere is the presumed dissociation of the dimensions of the public space and public dialogue (in terms of debate, deliberation and decision making in problems of shared interest), the fragmentation into competing “local public spaces”. In spite of the new tools of information, expression and participation, the praxis within the blogging space does not quite match the potential of this “enabling environment”. We do have the tools, but what various actors choose to do with these tools seems to be somehow different from the utopian view of Habermas’s democratic dialogue. Some of the characteristics of the new media that promote democratic dialogue have been underlined by Leslie David Simon (2002), among them is the promotion of people’s abilities to seek and share information, to associate freely, to escape government regulations of their activities, the ambiguity of government power and control, the empowerment of individuals and groups. One of them, the transformation of government power and control over citizens deserves further consideration, especially when describing the media spectrum in Eastern Europe in general and Romania in particular.

Finally, another step further will be to refine and expand the research questions, develop and adapt valid but also innovative methodological tools that have been proven useful in other social and political settings and draw fruitful theoretical and empirical comparisons about different new media landscapes in Central and Eastern Europe.

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