

**(C)OVERT CONTROLS:
EVALUATING MEDIA SYSTEMS
IN POST-AUTHORITARIAN DEMOCRACIES**

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Urban Affairs and Public Policy

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*“(The press) is a precious pest, and a necessary mischief,
and there would be no liberty without it.”*

Fisher Ames

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ABSTRACT

The past quarter century has brought about significant waves of change for the nations of Central and Eastern Europe as Communism waned as the region's dominant political ideology. Paramount to these transitions - as well as the success of the democratic governments that have come to replace their authoritarian predecessors - has been the role of press systems in informing citizens and holding government, and governmental officials, accountable to the respective publics they serve. The case of Romania is no exception, though the nation's sudden and violent revolution in 1989 and indecision and uncertainty that came in the years following it makes the nation an interesting case study for oft-dramatic post-authoritarian development. Through a series of semi-structured interviews, this thesis considers the Romanian news media as an example of press systems in Central and Eastern Europe in the context of traditional journalism theory, with the goal of addressing whether these primarily western-rooted bodies of theory account for the complexities of the press and its development in post-authoritarian democracies.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

For most Romanians, December 21, 1989 began as most other days that had preceded it. Toiling in pointless professions, most carried about their routines, struggling to adapt to scarcities in even the most basic necessities of adequate living (Carothers, 1996). Closed off from the outside world, even the slightest glimpse of a better life – a better society – was out of reach for most (Carothers, 1996).

December 22, in contrast, began in a vastly different way.

The events that transpired nearly twenty-five years ago would radically transform Romania from a communist nation at the beck and call of a ruthless dictator to a fledgling post-communist nation striving, in many ways, to be anything but what it was in the past (Carothers, 1996). The months and years that followed would be characterized by vulnerability, political maneuvering and transition, as the Eastern European nation would inch towards democracy (Carothers, 1996).

In the days leading up to the blood-stained revolution, the idea of a free and independent press – and more so, a press that would help develop and support Romania's infant democracy – was likely considered nothing more than a Western pipe dream for most of the population (Carothers, 1996; Gross, 1996). The events of December 1989 would bring such an achievement into the realm of possibility for the people of Romania, though the years that followed would introduce new threats to the newfound freedoms – and the emerging press – brought about by the revolution (Gross, 1996). The freedoms and liberties of the media and other institutions in the

country's new society would soon be inhibited – not by the all-too-familiar formal controls of the former communist regime of the nation's past, but rather by covert influences and restraints that would prove to be even more insidious than the oppressive conditions they replaced.

Post-Communist Society in Europe

As the Soviet Union dissolved and communism began to wane as the dominant political ideology in much of Central and Eastern Europe, the individual nations were left in a state of dramatic, sometimes drastic transition (Gross, 2002). From economic restraint to social and political restrictions, many of the societies had faced decades of repression and isolation (Gross, 2002; Carothers, 1996). From patronage to nepotism, subtle cronyism to clear corruption, the communist governments varied in some ways, but carried many of the same common threads across national borders (Gross, 2002). So, even as the Soviet empire crumbled and the figurative chains of communism were removed from the different nations, what remained was in many ways less clear than what had been removed (Gross, 2002). While the countries were at once no longer under authoritarian and totalitarian control, they were also not necessarily democratic (Gross, 2002; Carothers, 1996). Some were outright opposed to, or at least wary of, the idea of a democratic state – suspicions that could very well have been derived from the “learned helplessness” or passivity that was ingrained in the cultures of authoritarian regimes (Gross, 2002, p. 3). As one scholar argues, “it could take generations for the political, social, economic and professional cultures of Eastern Europe to be transformed” (Gross, 2002, p. 3).

Romania as a Laboratory

The tale is much the same in the case of Romania – a nation that experienced a sudden and rather violent revolution in late December 1989 (Carothers, 1996). After decades of suffering under the increasingly oppressive rule of the nation's communist party leader, Nicolae Ceausescu, the Romanian population had become rather complicit – hesitant to step out of line and wary of the uncertain road that was ahead of them in the post-revolution nation (Carothers, 1996; Gross, 2002). In many ways, the country was closed off from its surrounding regional, European context, as economic conditions worsened and Ceausescu's heavy-handed approach to leading the country became more riddled with fear and, consequentially, distrust among citizens both of government and of one another (Carothers, 2002). Romania, in essence, exemplifies many of the challenges faced by Central and Eastern European nations on the whole, though it also encountered its own set of obstacles that have been relatively unique to its borders (Carothers, 1996; Gross, 1996). Because of the unexpected and violent nature of the coup that ultimately removed Ceausescu from power shortly before his prompt execution, the nation was left in a sudden and dramatic state of flux as it grappled with how to push forward (Carothers, 1996; Gross, 1996). Romania found itself at a crossroads, confronted at once with the prospect of freedom – in some sense, a clean slate to begin with in terms of its governmental structure – and with the political forces that would immediately attempt to fill the vacuum in Bucharest, the nation's capital, by preying on the society's vulnerabilities (Carothers 1996; Gross, 1996; Gross, 2002).

The Role of the Media in Transition Democracies

While the transitions of individual nations from their respective authoritarian pasts differed along international boundaries, a commonality was the recognition that a strong, free and independent press has the potential to play a strong role in supporting an emerging democracy (Gross, 2002). In fact, the freedom to launch new media outlets based on any premise other than spreading the views and wishes of a totalitarian state was a much-welcomed phenomenon in societies in Central and Eastern Europe, and most nations saw strong increases in the number of press organizations in the years following the dissolution of communism as the region's dominant ideology (Gross, 2002). The almost sudden split between media and the state was embraced by the public, as the press began to be seen as a vehicle through which the development of a more democratic style of government could be supported in such nations (Gross, 2002).

Romania was no exception to this regional trend – with the nation's press industry exploding with unbridled growth in the months and years following the country's revolution (Gross, 1996). Even before the corpses of Ceausescu and his wife, Elena, were interred following their execution by a firing squad in the streets of Bucharest, media firms had shown signs of liberation – with more information-based news, primarily surrounding the revolution, making its way to audiences across the country (Gross, 1996; Gross, 2002). The media became recognized as a tool for focusing civil dialogue and action, and as such, it became heavily involved in the political developments the nation experienced in the wake of its revolution (Cirtita-Buzoianu, 2012).

The Role of Journalism in Free Societies

It is useful here to include a discussion of the theoretical and practical roots of the recognition of journalism's role in free societies across the globe – a model that was quickly adopted, at least in theory, in post-authoritarian regimes following the fall of communism. Democracy without citizens, and in turn, journalism without a public to serve, undermines three critical theories set out by Campbell (2004) in a review of issues related to public information and citizenship. The first, rational choice theory, holds that individual choices are made after a consideration of what is best for one's own interests (Campbell, 2004). The second supports the idea that politics involves an aggregation of ideas and wishes derived from those who are served by leaders of the political systems (Campbell, 2004). And finally, a third theory makes the argument that some citizens are not able to determine their own best interests without support (Campbell, 2004). Through presenting these theories, the author makes the case for the important role journalism plays in democratic societies – in this example, informing citizens so that they might make their own decisions, and helping to represent those interests to ensure they are included in political systems in America's structure of representative government (Campbell, 2004). In essence, media is an important conduit between government and the governed, providing citizens with information about power structures and civil leaders, and by the nature of this information structure, ensuring that the citizenry has a voice in the democratic process.

Evaluating Press Systems

Over time, and stemming from the importance of media systems in societies across the globe, press scholars and practitioners have devised means by which such systems are evaluated, and have identified factors that should be taken into

consideration in such assessments. Ward (2005), through a study of public perceptions of newsroom ethics, emphasizes the importance of the perceptions members of the public hold about journalism ethics. While understanding the opinions held by the public is important, Ward argues that this is not enough – media outlets, he argues, must craft reform measures when necessary to help recapture the trust of the public (Ward, 2005). It is along these lines that he offers a “public participation” model of ethics, involving, among other things, the development of ethical principles and the evaluation of media practice and performance (Ward, 2005, p. 325). The importance of ethical perceptions of media outlets discussed by Ward has been brought to the surface in the wake of the 2011 phone hacking scandal in the United Kingdom, in which it was discovered some mainstream media reporters hacked the phones of war widows and family members of crime victims (Thomas, 2012, p. 524). The incident, in an account by Thomas (2012), has been attributed to a wider trend that he argues has taken place in journalism across the globe over time, one that has led to the migration of some media outlets from reporting in the public interest to catering to the entertainment desires of audiences. The negative shadow cast upon journalism by the phone hacking scandal and the subsequent hearings and legal battles, he asserts, could bring a renewed sense of importance to realigning those media organizations to again serve the public trust (Thomas, 2012).

Common Criticisms of Free Press Systems

When reflecting upon his observations and evaluations of the American press, Alexis de Tocqueville shared his mixed feelings on the concept of press freedom: “I admit that to freedom of the press I do not bring that complete and instantaneous love that is given to things supremely good by their nature. I love it much more from

consideration of the evils it prevents than for the good things that it does” (de Tocqueville, 2010, pp. 289-290). De Tocqueville was not the first to offer criticism of the news media, nor was he the last – criticism of the media continues to the present day, in part surrounding challenges faced by modern journalists and news organizations that sometimes serve to erode their effectiveness (Schudson, 2005). Chief among the challenges critics offer of the press today is the reliance on official sources in published reports (Schudson, 2005). Official sources fill news stories or broadcasts and dominate discussions within the news, allowing powerful or vociferous interests to, in a sense, control messages being disseminated to consumers of news (Schudson, 2005). Mermin (2004) furthers this criticism in claiming that the news media does not report on much that the government is not already talking about – in this sense, public agencies and officials control the conversation between media outlets and their respective audiences. This, Mermin argues, falls out of step with the very theoretical basis that journalism was founded upon: “a fundamental tenet of our First Amendment tradition is that journalists do not simply recount what governmental officials say, but function instead as the people’s ‘watchdog’ over their government, subjecting its words and deeds to independent critical scrutiny” (Mermin, 2004, p. 67). When media outlets become mere “transcribers of official utterances,” the true freedom and independence of the press can and should be called into question, he argues (Mermin, 2004, p. 69). Mermin offers the virtually unchallenged claims that formed the basis of the War in Iraq as an example of this failure on the part of journalists to go beyond the information fed to them by government sources (2004).

An extension of the reliance on official sources comes to light through the permeation of public relations materials into news coverage (Parker, 2006). The

information disseminated by public relations operatives or spokespeople is meant to serve particular interests, and is commonly characterized by inherent biases and opinionated content (Parker, 2006). This propaganda, however, can sometimes make it into published news stories when journalists fail to filter it out – namely, when sections of press releases are taken in whole or part to be used in such reports (Parker, 2006). What results is news content that includes the political biases of those seeking to influence news for their own benefit, a factor that can serve to diminish trust in the media and even interest in consuming political news altogether (Bennett, 2012).

Some of these practices could be attributed to industry-wide struggles for media organizations – with shrinking staffing levels and decreased readership in non-virtual publications topping the list of complaints among newsroom managers and media owners (Fenton, 2011). Research has revealed that many reporters are being “thrust into news production more akin to creative cannibalization than the craft of journalism,” as fewer reporters are filling newsroom slots and those left with jobs have to increase their efficiency and productivity to unprecedented levels (Fenton, 2011, p. 64). This can lead to some of the “desk-bound, copy-and-paste administrative journalism” that is often passed off as news to consumers, offered at the expense of the ideal public-interest serving content that the industry was founded with the goal of providing (Fenton, 2011, p. 64). A related effect is the marketization of news, which is increasingly seen by many as a commodity rather than a service – a far cry from the tenants that characterized the early days of the American news business, and a factor that complicates present assessments of media effectiveness (Fenton, 2011).

There also exist patterns related to the professional culture of the journalism industry that tend, Schudson (2005) argues, to favor sources with experience and

influence in the respective field or topic of relevance to a given story. Part of this institutional culture comes in the reliance on particular paradigms, or models, that frequently appear as the framework of news stories (Schudson, 2005). One of the most common of these factors is conflict – a paradigm that guides the sharing of facts and the furthering of a discussion in many published works (Schudson, 2005). While this is an element that seems to, time and again, capture the attention of media critics as a negative quality of today’s journalists, it can sometimes serve as an effective tool in allowing the press to serve as a watchdog of government, albeit in only some capacities (Schudson, 2005). After all, discovering conflict among government officials or within public agencies can often reveal issues of public interest and importance. In fact, Schudson describes several “unlovable” characteristics of the American news media as simultaneous opportunities for press effectiveness (Schudson, 2005, pp. 28-31). The author asserts, “some of the greatest service the media provide for democracy lies in characteristics that few people regard as very nice or ennobling about the press,” later echoing de Toqueville’s sentiments in adding that “we are saddled with a necessary institution we are not likely ever to love” (Schudson, 2005, pp. 31-32).

Evaluating the Press in Post-Authoritarian Democracies

While the preceding discussion included research related to press systems and the role of journalism in societies across the globe, it is important to make the distinction between western nations and countries in Central and Eastern Europe. The latter batch of societies has, over time, faced a number of barriers to press freedom and performance that have not been shared by their western counterparts, raising questions about the applicability and transferability of such theories overseas (Carothers, 1996;

Gross, 1996). Romania provides various examples of these differences. As Gross (2008) writes, “media play dubious roles in the evolution of Romanian democracy...” (p. 54). Much of the press coverage that has emerged since the nation’s 1989 revolution has been characterized as politically charged and biased, with scholars expressing concerns related to the ties between politics and the media (Carothers, 1996; Gross, 1996; Gross, 2008). In essence, many of the same restrictions that were placed on the press by the state during Ceausescu’s reign remain today, albeit under different guises and in many ways less visible (Gross, 1996; Gross, 2008). The communist culture was far too ingrained in the psyche of Romanian citizens and would-be journalists, one researcher has argued, for a press system to at once emerge in the wake of the revolution, suddenly and completely free of such familiar characteristics (Gross, 1996). With this in mind, it is critical to better understand how media systems in post-authoritarian democracies, like Romania, can be effectively evaluated in a way that takes into account the various factors unique to the region and pervasive in shaping press culture and activity.

In the chapters that follow, a thorough review of previous scholarship on the topic will be complemented by a case study of the Romanian press in the present day. Both of these will be used to assess the three models of Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini – presented in the pair’s landmark publication, *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of the Press and Politics* – and the effectiveness of each model in evaluating such media systems. It is the intent of this work to contribute to the growing scholarly discourse on mass media systems in post-authoritarian regimes, through identifying factors that have an impact on the effectiveness of these all-too-important social institutions.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Journalism and Media Theory

As journalism has evolved across the globe, a number of theories have been developed to account for its tendencies, chronicle its functions and adapt to changing political, social and economic contexts. While some of these might be employed to guide the actions of journalists and news organizations, others have been established to record already-existing practices that have become common in press systems throughout the world.

‘Four Theories of the Press’

While various theories have been developed to explain or account for journalism activity in particular regions or nations, there also exists a more universal body of theory that in many senses describes the press system on a global level – including discussions of what the press should be, and what its working journalists should do (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1984). *Four Theories of the Press* has become a cornerstone publication for journalism junkies and media researchers alike, as it offers a collection of purportedly universal theories that explain as well as guide the activities of the modern and historic press industry (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1984). The book begins with the foundation that the characteristics of press systems depend largely upon their surrounding context: “the thesis of this volume is that the press always takes on the form and coloration of the social and political structures

within which it operates. Especially, it reflects the system of social control whereby the relations of individuals and institutions are adjusted” (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1984, pp. 1-2). While the theories presented in the book are said to characterize different systems, the authors note that context is critical in fully understanding individual press systems in different nations and regions of the world (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1984).

The first of the four archetypes presented in the book is the authoritarian theory of the press, the theory the authors claim was almost immediately adopted by most societies that had the means to publish newspapers as the press began to forge its own identity as an industry – notably, in England (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1984). Essentially, the theory describes the press industry in a context in which it is controlled and organized by another party – in this case, the government (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1984). In many ways, this philosophy centers around the power of the state, and communication systems – the press being a prime example – are made and maintained to function in a way that supports the state, the larger organization that organizes the given society (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1984). The authoritarian theory of the press recognizes the importance of not allowing the press to “degrade the culture of a nation,” preventing it from interfering with the goals of the same (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1984, pp. 28-30). Whether through physical limitations of supplies or processes, or through legal measures, the authoritarian theory has been upheld by some societies, even in the present day (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1984). This theory groups the press with other societal institutions that fall under the purview of governmental control, a practice that can be identified at various points throughout history in countries across the globe (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1984).

The second tenant of the book is the libertarian theory of the press, a line of thinking that closely follows the libertarian beliefs that human beings are rational and that the happiness of each is the goal of a given society (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1984). In relation to the press, the theory emphasizes the individual, as well as the concepts of reasoning and natural rights – with the latter encompassing freedom of the press (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1984). This freedom was developed, by political statesmen as well as some of the earliest newspaper editors and managers, to embrace the belief that the press should be subjected to minimal intrusion or interference from governmental agencies and officials (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1984). This approach began, in many places, to replace the authoritarian model of handling or controlling the press, by instead focusing on limiting actions on the part of government related to the media (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1984). Aside from the goals of informing and providing entertainment to audiences, as well as the duty to earn revenue through advertising to remain self-sufficient as business organizations, the press under this theory first took on the role of holding government accountable, and of being the proverbial eyes and ears of its audience (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1984). The role of the press in relation to helping a nation preserve and protect its democratic form of government was initially recognized under this theory (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1984). This theory traces its roots back to England after 1688, though it has since been detected in the United States and some other nations as well (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1984).

The social responsibility theory of the press bears some resemblance to its historical predecessor, notably in its recognition and embrace of “the public’s right to know” as a guiding philosophy behind the work of journalists and media organizations

(Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1984, p. 73). Under this theory, the authors argue, a critical premise came to be understood: “freedom carries concomitant obligations; and the press, which enjoys a privileged position under our government, is obliged to be responsible to society for carrying out certain essential functions of mass communication in contemporary society” (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1984, p. 74). It was said that, if not for the press, some other organization would have to fulfill the roles of informing and educating the public in this watchdog manner (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1984). The press was prescribed with the goals of providing information on public affairs and the political system (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1984, p. 74). It was also under this theory that press systems began to develop ethics codes and other standards of conduct for reporters, as this more serious and socially vital set of responsibilities became more widely understood and appreciated (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1984). This theory is most prevalent in its application in the United States, is perhaps the closest relative to the social contract theory of the press – one that calls upon journalists to, through their reporting activities, fulfill their end of the proverbial bargain struck with citizens (Sjovaag, 2010).

Finally, there is the soviet communist theory of the press, in which media systems are considered not in terms of a service to the public, but rather to a ruling party or organization (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1984). The press, under this model, exists to further party interests, and is regulated to ensure that it fulfills this mandate (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1984). And it is under this theory that the press becomes an instrument through which propaganda and other approved materials can be disseminated to a society in such a regime (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1984). The idea behind such an approach is that the press should be a tool for the

people – whose representative is the party that regulates society on their behalf (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1984). Quite simply, the social responsibility theory – or even to an extent, the libertarian theory – considers the press to be a service to the people, while the soviet communist model treats the press as an instrument to further party instruments and spread party messages (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1984).

‘Normative Theories of the Media’

A related work, *Normative Theories of the Media*, seeks to present another set of ideas and principles that can be used to describe the role of journalism specifically in democratic societies. Among other things, the volume presents a set of roles that can be fulfilled by the media in such contexts. The first, the monitorial role, relates to the functions of the media to scan developments and events, in a sense participating in a form of surveillance (Christians, et. al, 2009). Among the responsibilities associated with this role is the need for journalists to report on political developments and issues of public policy, as well as the expectation that reporters will deliver news of interest – ranging from sports results to major societal developments – on a routine basis (Christians, et. al, 2009). Another concept, the facilitative role, recognizes the activities of the press that encourage and promote dialogue among members of the public on matters of importance (Christians, et. al, 2009). This role connects most clearly with the principles of deliberative democracy, which require such dialogue and engagement and helps to facilitate civil society (Christians, et. al, 2009).

The radical role of journalism, as the authors describe, calls upon reporters and editors to take steps beyond just covering developments and informing societies (Christians, et. al, 2009). Rather, this role delegates to the news media the goal of promoting changes within the core of social institutions, with the ultimate goal of

ensuring complete freedom and equality for all of society (Christians, et. al, 2009). Historically, such a role has been seen in major cultural or even religious change that has taken place in various societies across the globe, though modern approaches to this model tend to emphasize support for excluded social identities – for example, feminism or ethnic and racial minorities (Christians, et. al, 2009). And finally, the collaborative role of the press looks not at promoting unbridled power of such institutions, but rather supports collaborative relationships with entities like governments (Christians, et. al, 2009). A common example of this role is the agreement of a journalist covering a military conflict not to reveal the classified locations of troops – a form of collaboration that is considered responsible, rather than required, of the media outlet in working with the government and military (Christians, et. al, 2009). As the authors claim, “understood normatively, a collaborative role for the media implies a partnership, a relationship between the media and the state built on mutual trust and a shared commitment to mutually agreeable means and ends” (Christians, et. al, 2009, p. 198). In the purest forms of this model, journalists forge such partnerships not under duress or coercion, but along ideological and practical means (Christians, et. al, 2009).

Another theory that fits within the normative spectrum is the concept of peace journalism, described as a socially responsible form of reporting that “contributes to the peaceful settlement of conflicts” (Hanitzsch, 2004, p. 483). The theory emerged quite recently, in the early 1990s, as the Gulf War took shape and developments in reporting technology and techniques made war correspondents a more visible presence (Hanitzsch, 2004). While traditional journalistic coverage would likely tend to focus on which side is winning and which is losing – essentially a zero-sum situation –

peace journalism in the same context and scenario would tend to focus on covering potential solutions to the conflict (Hanitzsch, 2004). Various media scholars, as well as others in fields like psychology, have advocated for peace journalism because of its responsibility, though the verdict may still be out on the technique (Hanitzsch, 2004). Significant concerns have been mounted against the practice, primarily on the basis that it essentially calls for journalists to participate in conflict resolution, rather than the traditional approach of simply covering efforts – or non-efforts – in conflict resolution that might already be occurring (Hanitzsch, 2004). Some have described peace journalism as “a journalism of attachment,” though even this characterization has drawn a variety of differing opinions (Hanitzsch, 2004, pp. 486-487). While some see attachment in journalism as a news organization siding with the victims of a war, for example, others characterize the approach as taking sides in the struggle between good and evil (Hanitzsch, 2004). Some have advocated that peace journalism violates the traditional approaches to the craft that involve some degree of detachment of personal feelings or taking sides in a conflict, no matter the scope or stakes involved (Hanitzsch, 2004). However, it is important to note that most discussions about peace journalism – a relatively young phenomenon, as compared to other theories in the field – are primarily normative, and many have expressed that more research and analysis must be done on the topic (Hanitzsch, 2004). Nevertheless, the conversation has sparked much reflection on the part of journalists and has brought to the surface more insightful considerations of the role that journalists and news organizations should play in global society.

Hallin and Mancini's Theories on Politics and the Media

A landmark publication – and the basis for this study's theoretical framework and the subsequent analyses – is *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*, authored by Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini. Through an analysis of media systems in different regions of the world, Hallin and Mancini present these three distinct models, which are couched in considerations they argue are critical in shaping press systems: the development of market structures for the press; the role the state plays in the media system; professionalism of journalists; and political parallelism (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Their scholarship has come to be relied upon by many students of media systems across the globe seeking to better understand and explain the behaviors and attitudes that describe press systems. A brief description of the three models will be presented here, while each will be analyzed more thoroughly in the context of this thesis in the Analysis and Discussion chapter.

The first model described by Hallin and Mancini is the “Mediterranean or Polarized Pluralist” model of the press – hereafter referred to as the Polarized Pluralist model (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 89). This model is derived from the concept of polarized pluralism as it is applied in a political context – with one example cited by Hallin and Mancini being the wide political spectrum and the sharp political differences that developed and remained in Southern Europe – defined by the authors as Greece, Portugal and Spain (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). The political context resulted, in Southern Europe and elsewhere, in a particular relationship between politics and the media that is differentiated further in transitional democracies in parts of Western Europe as well (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). In the latter case, media systems throughout the region's history have had high levels of involvement in and interaction with politics and the public sector (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). The model is derived

from the oft-complex relationship between the media and politics, notably when the two institutions become even further intertwined when the weak market structure of the media results in dependence among news organizations upon political parties, wealthy figures, religious entities or the state itself (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). This trend can inhibit the independence and professionalism of the mass media, though the authors argue that the problem is becoming less pervasive in some of the nations that fit within this model (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

The second body of theory presented by Hallin and Mancini is the “North/Central European or Democratic Corporatist Model” – hereafter referred to as the Democratic Corporatist model (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 143). This model traces its roots to theoretical approaches derived from the mutual influences of cultural and political entities and models, which over time have had an impact on media development and function (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). The model, the authors indicate, was derived from portions of Northern and Central Europe – namely, Scandinavia, Germany, Austria and Switzerland (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Hallin and Mancini describe three “coexistences” that link the countries and respective media systems that fall into the Democratic Corporatist model, the first being high rates of political parallelism – described by the authors as the tendency of media firms “to express partisan and other social divisions” (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 144). In this model, the press sometimes acts as an advocate in some of the abovementioned divisions (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). The second “coexistence” relates to high levels of professionalism among members of the news media, with notions of a commitment to standards for journalistic practices, the duty to inform the public and provide a service, and significant autonomy from other forces – social or otherwise (Hallin & Mancini,

2004). The third “coexistence” focuses on the tendency within applicable nations and regions to have self-governance and an emphasis on freedom of the press (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

The third model presented by Hallin and Mancini is the “North Atlantic or Liberal Model” – hereafter referred to as the Liberal model of the press (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 198). Press systems that can be described by this model tend to exist in the United States, Britain, Canada and Ireland, and are characterized as strong systems that developed early and carved their independence (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). In such systems, an “informational style of journalism” dominated historically, with a continued emphasis on neutrality and objectivity in coverage (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 198). Even further, the print media has a tendency in these systems to overshadow special interest, political or industry publications (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Given the wide application of the abovementioned models offered by Hallin and Mancini, this thesis will consider how applicable each is to the case of the Romanian press. Through this analysis, the chapters to follow will seek to better understand the factors that influence the effectiveness of media systems in post-authoritarian democracies – relying on Romania as a case study.

Transitional Press Systems in Central and Eastern Europe

While some of the abovementioned models were crafted with western media systems and cultures in mind, similar theoretical underpinnings have guided press systems in the nations of the European Union (EU), albeit to varying extents. Some countries presently have a free and independent press like that of the United States, while others have experienced cultural and political barriers to implementing and supporting such an institution. This can be attributed to a number of barriers related to

politics and some cultural elements, which make press systems in emerging EU nations vastly different from their western counterparts. These differences have led many to question whether traditional, western-oriented models of the press suffice in explaining or shaping media systems in different contexts – whether European or otherwise (Huang, 2003). This point is made in an analysis of the media in parts of China, where Huang argues that the standard *Four Theories of the Press* are not entirely applicable (Huang, 2003). The analysis calls, in part, for a reconsideration of applying traditional, normative theories to transitional press systems (Huang, 2003).

Huang describes normative press theories as useful in comparing media systems in different countries because they tend to account for the typical characteristics of the most common forms of press systems (Huang, 2003). However, these tend to be less dynamic or flexible in nature (Huang, 2003). The author writes,

A transitional media approach is a nonnormative thinking that views human communication as a history of transition and makes change and adaptation its primary orientations. Transition is a general and universal media phenomenon and all media systems should be analyzed as more or less dynamic and complex. A certain society's media system is a dynamic and complex body that is connected with, and fundamentally determined by, that society's changing political and socio-economic environment and cultural tradition (Huang, 2003, p. 454).

In essence, Huang argues that transitional press systems often change as actively and frequently as do their host cultures and societies – and thus, an appropriate model, beyond the traditional media theories that more accurately describe western systems, should be adopted to analyze and interpret such media systems

(Huang, 2003). A similar recommendation is made in a discussion about the applicability of journalism curricula in education programs of emerging democracies – in which the authors assert that special considerations must be made to determine if the unique contexts of transition democracies lend themselves to models and theories that may apply well in other regions of the world (Freedman and Shafer, 2010).

Focusing more specifically on Central and Eastern Europe, scholars have discussed and debated cultural traditions and norms that can acutely affect societies and systems in that region of the world, with media being a prime example. Haugton (2011) writes that “Central and Eastern Europe has been a laboratory of change in the past two decades,” seeing periods of democratization, the growth of market systems, state building and development, and integration and accession into organizations like the North American Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (p. 323). After the collapse of Communism and as many European nations turned towards different forms of governance, journalists in those nations were confronted with the task of redefining – and in some cases, defining for the first time – the true role of press systems in their respective societies (Lauk, 2009). This has presented a slew of challenges and opportunities for both news organizations and their host cultures and societies, as the process that some have deemed “Europeanization” stretches to include press systems (Lauk, 2009, pp. 69-70). This concept has become understood to refer to reporting on EU matters within member states that have a seat at the regional table, as well as the adoption of some tendencies of western press systems (Lauk, 2009).

Lauk describes some of the typical developments in the “Europeanization” of media in nations of Central and Eastern Europe as tenants of the “liberal” model of journalism, or attributes of western media systems (Lauk, 2009, p. 71). Centered on

the concept of participatory democracy and an acknowledgement of the role of the media in supporting this governmental development, such discussions typically include mentions of transparency, separation of powers and accountability (Lauk, 2009). According to the researcher, “the development of journalistic professionalism [in Central and Eastern Europe] is also closely tied up with certain democratic practices” (Lauk, 2009, p. 71). These include limiting the opportunity for regulatory intervention on the part of the government, as well as putting in place provisions to limit monopolization of the media and prohibiting forms of censorship (Lauk, 2009). The result has been the development of press systems in some EU member states that closely resemble western predecessors, with similar structures and legal support systems in place, and even similar objectives in terms of the relationship between a strong, free and independent press and a democratic government (Lauk, 2009). However, the varying levels of progress made towards this “end” in various European nations can be attributed primarily to the variations in the countries themselves: “there does not...exist one pattern to follow for all of these countries, but each of them creates their nationally coloured journalism culture based on their historical and cultural traditions and mentality. New professional values and standards will be gradually adopted when favourable conditions for their introduction emerge” (Lauk, 2009, p. 79).

The Initial Transformations

In the days following the fall of Communism, journalists and media organizations found themselves in a difficult position – with significant blame going to the strong influence the authoritarian system had in nearly every aspect of press activity. As Gross (2002) writes,

The anomie created by Communism, which spilled over into the post-Communist period, was consciously and subconsciously inculcated into the population by, among other means, the mass media...to a greater or lesser extent, depending on which Eastern European nation's media one scrutinized, journalists were 'public officials' (p. 17).

Before the fall of Communism, the information flow, and even the content of messages disseminated, was controlled – by the Communist leadership, the state, the government and even party leadership (Gross, 2002). Censorship was paramount, and self-censorship became a common factor as well (Gross, 2002). Journalists became de facto extensions of the Communist leadership as they shared with their audiences what amounted to little more than approved propaganda (Gross, 2002). In essence, the confusion surrounding the transformation of the nation's system of governance extended, to an extent, to the mass media.

As the media paid acute attention to the demise of Communism in various Central and Eastern European nations, the industry was almost immediately affected by the shift in power and governance (Gross, 2002). New media firms were launched, and “economics, special interests and audience likes and dislikes created a revolving media door with scores of newspapers, radio stations, and even television stations” (Gross, 2002, p. 25). Thousands of new journalists also joined media organizations, including former Communist reporters as well as those who had previously operated underground opposition media outlets (Gross, 2002). The reporting from the new plethora of firms was biased, opinionated and incomplete, with some information stemming only from unsubstantiated rumor (Gross, 2002). Some of this, it has been reported, came from the desire on the part of journalists to essentially fill the vacuum

that existed by using news content to shape ideologies and influence audiences according to their personal beliefs and traditions (Gross, 2002). And the shift did not only spur battles to control content, but also to control organizations themselves: “When the media monopoly of the Communist Party evaporated, a battle for control or influence over the new media outlets was joined by governments, states, political parties, politicians, ethnic and civic organizations, organized religions, and businesses, among others” (Gross, 2002, p. 25).

Developments and Challenges of EU Press Systems

In a discussion about the rapid transformation of the media in Central and Eastern European countries after the fall of Communism, Coman (2000) shares that literature studying such transitions has essentially been unable to keep up with development: “too often, after just a few months, an analysis becomes ‘history’” (p. 35). Even some research studies seeking to establish theoretical frameworks for studying transitional media systems have fallen short of the task, both due to the pace of change and the lack of access to primary data on the subject (Coman, 2000). Part of the dynamic nature of such press systems is the seemingly uncontrolled growth in the number of individuals working in the field – Coman makes a distinction that while there are more employees of media firms, this does not necessarily equate to an increase in the number of trained journalists (Coman, 2000). Nevertheless, and despite the relative difficulty in studying such an industry in constant flux across many Central and Eastern European states, some research studies and analyses have provided useful concepts and generalizations about media in transitional EU member states.

In many nations, growth in the number and variation of media firms has been coupled with a pronounced decentralization in the press industry, resulting in the birth

and development of many local and specialist outlets that have attracted newer and larger audiences than their predecessors (Coman, 2000). However, despite this growth, the state remains a strong source of power and influence over many of these press systems and individual media organizations – though, in many cases, this form of control stems from party elites, rather than a central figure or leader (Coman, 2000). This partially stems from the conception of the media among many as a convenient tool for elite-to-elite or elite-to-mass communication (Ornebring, 2012). There is some degree of debate among researchers regarding the levels of control a social or political context can have over the development of a media system, however. Mungui-Pippidi (2008) acknowledges the impact that social control can have on the media, but argues that globalization has exposed such press systems to ideas and ideologies that can effectively combat any domestic influences. Regardless, the press is seen as being very closely connected to politics and political development in Central and Eastern European countries, inviting concerns among academics and practitioners that the product disseminated by such an industry will fall short of traditional, albeit western, standards – to say nothing of journalism’s historic role in shaping and supporting democracy (Mungui-Pippidi, 2008). As Coman states, “in these conditions, the promotion of democratic political strategies including the elimination of political pressures on the media is still a distant objective (Coman, 2000, p. 47).”

The challenges facing emerging press systems in Central and Eastern Europe are not limited to political influences or the inhibited capacity of media firms to effectively support democracy. Sukosd and Bajomi-Lazar (2001) describe the “highly creative” ways in which politicians worked to apply pressures to the media, but also describe a host of other shortcomings of the transitional press systems, including a

slow-paced technological evolution, diminished minority access to the media and issues related to public service broadcasting (p. 13). In addition, the authors describe the virtual monopolistic nature of several corners of the media industry in various nations, with few large and relatively strong firms controlling most of the news dissemination in light of the few, if any, substantial competitors in the respective markets (Sukosd & Bajomi-Lazar, 2001). Closely related to this factor is the tendency for journalists to fall short of professional standards, notably in allowing personal ideologies or political identities to trump professional obligations and practices when it comes to reporting the news (Sukosd & Bajomi-Lazar, 2001). And while some self-regulation has emerged in particular countries among journalists, the levels of accountability that journalists are held to from within the industry leaves much to be desired (Sukosd & Bajomi-Lazar, 2001). And finally, some nations have experienced significant and noticeable levels of nationalistic or hate speech included in some news coverage, particularly in cases of anti-Roma or anti-Semitic slants being injected into purportedly objective accounts (Sukosd & Bajomi-Lazar, 2001). This trend also became apparent in the Hungarian-Romanian clashes of 1991, notably in Tirgu-Mures (Sukosd & Bajomi-Lazar, 2001).

The Case of Romania

Romania, a formerly Communist, Eastern European nation, has spent roughly the past quarter century developing its democratic form of government following a particularly bloody revolution in 1989. Romania provides a convenient basis with which to study the media in post-authoritarian democracies, both due to its locale and the various struggles experienced by the press in the wake of the revolution.

Romania's Emerging Democracy

To this day, Romania continues to struggle with remnants of its oppressive, authoritarian past, as well as its former status as a Soviet satellite. Due in part to the Soviet Union's "aggressively expansionist territorial policy," Romania's relationship with the power had always been contentious – with the nation becoming Communist as a result of Soviet military intervention (Ciobanu, 2010, p. 6).

The most recent chapter of the nation's Communist past was guided by Nicolae Ceausescu (Carothers, 1996). While the nation experienced a period of moderation within its Communist context through the 1970s, the country's leader later imposed "an increasingly repressive, arbitrary and dictatorial rule...Ceausescu transformed the Communist Party apparatus into a tool of his erratic megalomania and reduced Romanian political life to a tragi-comic cult of personality centered upon himself and his almost equally powerful and capricious wife, Elena" (Carothers, 1996, p. 9). A secret police force investigated missteps on the part of the public, and violations of the leader's mandates were prosecuted relentlessly – in some cases, with offenders being exiled from the country (Carothers, 1996). Economic and political deprivation persisted through the 1980s, resulting in a severely damaged society and a repressed people (Carothers, 1996). As Carothers states, "Ceausescu's political cruelty and economic failures produced a highly demoralized, atomized society" (Carothers, 1996, p. 10). Citizens were powerless and isolated from the rest of the world, doing what was required of them only to get by, with a resulting distrust of government and even one another (Carothers, 1996).

Everything changed in 1989, when protests surrounding the religious exile of a minister who spoke about human and religious rights escalated, ultimately leading to an anti-Ceausescu rally in the nation's capital, Bucharest (Carothers, 1996). After

attempts to quiet the large, angry mob that was forming, the Ceausescu fled by helicopter as a group of prominent Romanians declared themselves in command of the nation – forming what has since become known as the National Salvation Front (Carothers, 1996). Ceausescu and his wife were promptly captured, tried by a military tribunal and executed on Christmas Day in 1989 (Carothers, 1996).

The 1989 revolution in Romania was markedly different from similar political movements in other Eastern European nations (Carothers, 1996). As Carothers writes, “it came about very suddenly, with no intermediate phase of liberalization or gradual political decompression. It was violent, with at least a thousand people killed in the fighting during December 1989” (Carothers, 1996, p. 11). The formal departure from Communism would begin in early 1990, when the first democratic elections – though flawed in countless ways – were held and the nation began to forge its way into its non-authoritarian future (Carothers, 1996). Even then, many of the same political and governmental leaders of the Communist and Ceausescu eras remained in power, and institutions – including the secret police – remained at least partly in tact (Carothers, 1996). A new constitution was adopted in late 1991, and local elections held in 1992 were viewed as more free and just than their 1990 predecessors (Carothers, 1996). It was in the years that followed when newly elected leaders of the nation would inch towards the national goals that had begun to be set (Carothers, 1996). Today, many scholars consider 1989 as the nation’s “end of history,” in that the country shed its dark past in favor of a more promising future (Boatca, 2006, p. 574).

Another key development came in December 2006, when then-Romanian President Traian Basescu officially condemned the Communist regime that ruled the country during an address to a joint session of the nation’s Parliament (Tanasoiu,

2007). The statement was the first of the sort throughout the previous communist bloc, and was followed by a report detailing the crimes of the Communist regime (Tanasoiu, 2007). The Tismaneanu Report, as it came to be known, was authored by a presidential commission that characterized the actions of the Communist regime as “illegitimate and criminal,” displaying clearly “that communism left a deep imprint on Romanian politics and that further legislative and judicial action is needed if closure is to be achieved” (Tanasoiu, 2007, p. 60). The report detailed the progression of the Communist party over time, analyzing how it attained legitimacy and maintained its power (Tanasoiu, 2007). Another key portion studied the communist repression – referred to as “genocide” – and the nation’s prison system, the “gulag” (Tanasoiu, 2007, p. 63). The “genocide” spoken of in the report was structured to include collectivization and the ensuing destruction of the country’s social system, as well as the economic collapse and environmental catastrophes, among other violations suffered by the Romanian people (Tanasoiu, 2007). The report also detailed the experiences of prisoners and investigated “the use of ideology for terror purposes” (Tanasoiu, 2007, pp. 64-65). Even forms of religious and educational reform employed by the communist regime were discussed in the report, which was endorsed by Basescu before the Parliament (Tanasoiu, 2007). During his endorsement, the president described the regime as built upon a “fanatical, systematic hate-fueling ideology for which class warfare and the dictatorship of the proletariat symbolized the essence of historical process” (Tanasoiu, 2007, p. 66). The report and the president’s endorsement received mixed reviews and its share of criticisms, but the move made history in its condemnation of the Communist crimes of Romania’s past (Tanasoiu, 2007).

The Romanian Press

It should be noted that there is a relative dearth of studies focusing specifically on the Romanian news media. While scholars have published studies and written books on the topic, most of the sources relied upon in this paper take a more general approach to studying media systems at the global level, or more precisely in Central and Eastern Europe. This could be attributed in part to studies that reveal more effective media systems to be most frequently the subject of academic inquiry, but nevertheless the point should be made that the Romanian news media is not as well-researched as its counterparts in other cultures and societies (Burt, 2006). This is partly why this thesis utilizes semi-structured interviews to compose a case study, as such field research is arguably the most efficient way to obtain information on issues of interest related specifically to the Romanian news media.

The mass media was left in a unique position following the developments of 1989 and the subsequent progressions towards democracy. During the communist legacy, the nation's press system was a particular target of influence for party officials (Granville, 2010). Editorial staffs were packed with loyal party supporters, and in the event that a staff was not dominated by party members or sympathizers, "competent activists" were dispatched to assist in keeping the newsrooms on track with the appropriate party lines (Granville, 2010, p. 90). The regime would also censor what information would be released to media outlets, cropping the flow of information to the organizations and regulating what messages would be disseminated to the masses from that information (Granville, 2010). At various points, printing presses were limited, personal computers were hard to come by and typewriters had to be registered with the police (Carothers, 1996).

In the immediate years that followed the revolution, roughly half of the daily and weekly publications in the nation were party operations, while the rest were business ventures that in many ways fostered strong connections with party officials or ideologies – though not as apparent or as official as those falling in the first category (Gross, 2002). Media were considered partisan and politicized, and the press could be divided into two groups: the group that supported the new government and tended to sympathize with, or outright support, the parties in power; and the group that supported the opposition parties and those not in power – the “press of opposition” (Gross, 2002, p. 38). As one author writes, “the news media, ‘instead of being teamsters carrying information...to readers,’ transformed themselves ‘into political gunslingers’” (Gross, 2002, p. 38).

The initial days of post-authoritarian Romania saw rather drastic changes in some media outlets, with editions on the last day of the communist regime appearing as they had for the many decades that preceded, and the editions on the first day of the nation’s democracy offering “real” journalism (Gross, 1996, p. 40). One publication in particular, which bore the name *Scinteia* (The Spark) in the days of communism, had quickly instituted a change in its moniker to *Scinteia Poporului* (The People’s Spark) that appeared the very same day, replacing what would be the final copy of the publication in its communist format (Gross, 1996). In a society that had just begun a period of certain change, the changes in the press came as a tangible symbol of the cultural and governmental transitions that were underway (Gross, 1996). The transition from a communist to a democratic press was also a transition from a press being controlled by the state to an industry being controlled by the market (Frumusani, 2013). This evolution also brought about changing roles for the individual journalist,

who essentially found himself or herself shifting from “an anonymous cog in the vast propaganda machine” to “the mediator between event and information” (Frumusani, 2013). It was during this period of vast and rather rapid change that the duties of reporters and editors changed significantly, as the responsibility of shaping a strong press capable of supporting the nation’s evolving democracy began to fall on the shoulders of journalists (Frumusani, 2013).

Central to the development of Romania’s post-communist media industry are considerations of press freedom and government transparency – factors that constituted significant discussions in the immediate years following the revolution (Berry, 2003). The transition from totalitarianism to democracy resulted in a strong evolution of the press, “which has produced a new social condition that can be broadly characterized as an information society” (Berry, 2003, p. 165). In the decades prior to 1989, laws limiting press freedom were strict and severe, with strong measures taken to censor media organizations and the information that could be disseminated (Radulescu, 2013). The presence of legal challenges that faced reporters did not simply disappear in the years after Ceausescu’s ousting and execution, however (Berry, 2003). One of the most notorious cases of legal struggles encountered by journalists came in the case of Dalban vs. Romania in 1999 (“Dalban vs. Romania,” 1999). Dalban, a lifelong journalist, published in 1992 a report in his magazine detailing a series of alleged frauds committed by the leader of a State-owned agricultural firm (“Dalban vs. Romania,” 1999). Following the story’s publication, Dalban was tried in court and found guilty of libel – a ruling that carried a three-month prison sentence and a fine of 300,000 Romanian lei (“Dalban vs. Romania,” 1999). After his conviction, Dalban continued to publish information on the firm’s chief

executive, also amending his conviction (“Dalban vs. Romania,” 1999). The appeals court stayed the conviction in light of Dalban’s death, while his widow later filed an appeal to the European Court of Human Rights to have her late husband’s conviction erased on the grounds that it violated his freedom of expression – a finding with which the court unanimously agreed in a ruling handed down in September 1999 (“Dalban vs. Romania,” 1999). The case resulted in the Court of Human Rights issuing “a series of damning judgments against the persistence of the Romanian state and the Penal Code for the suppression of information so vital for a democratic civil society to exist” (Berry, 2003, p. 168). While journalists continue to face struggles with state intrusion or political interference, there have been signs of progress in paving the way for stronger legal protections for working journalists (Berry, 2003).

The press was also the subject of strong criticism, however, as it evolved into its new political, economic and social contexts. Gross (1996) describes the development of the media into a populist tool, which over the period of just a few weeks became more specialized – in many cases – and began to be characterized by sensationalistic coverage of many matters. As Gross explains,

Journalism was first applauded, then damned. It was first considered an essential tool of surveying the *mélange* of political views, contending realities and near-realities and the recovering of Romania’s long-suppressed history. Then it was viewed increasingly as entertainment with some dubious informational value, and highly sensationalist (Gross, 1996, p. 126).

In another piece of research on the topic, Gross (2008) describes the media as a product of a transition from a past devoid of democracy, ethics and even positive models in the country’s press history that it could emulate. Such a past offers a set of

strong barriers to development, Gross argues, and leads to many concerns that the Romanian media more closely resembles its communist heritage than its democratic present and future (Gross, 2008).

Shortcomings of the Romanian Press

While it was no longer subjected to the overt controls of an oft-cruel, communist regime, the governmental transition came far short of presenting a cure-all of the press system's ills. Even the nation's accession to the EU in January 2007 did not solve some of the remaining problems being faced by journalists and media organizations (Gross, 2008b). Significant barriers still exist, including: attacks on the freedom of press organizations by some governmental agencies; continued attacks on and threats against reporters; media consolidation and shifts in ownership; efforts on the part of some public officials to either block pro-press legislation or craft ways to access the notes or records of reporters and news organizations; the manipulation of news entities for political or personal gain; the lack of organization and camaraderie between members of the news media; and the poor pay that reporters receive (Gross, 2008b). In addition, the press continues to be seen by many as a tool for influencing the masses – much like it was during the communist era (Gross, 2008b). Presently, the majority of news organizations are also owned by powerful businesspeople or politicians, who often utilize the mediums to further their personal and professional interests (Gross, 2008b). The end of the communist era in Romania brought about not only drastic new opportunities for the country's media system, but at the same time it erased the decades of rules, organizational systems and practices that had become commonplace (Coman, 2004b). For better or for worse, this led to a shuffling of many aspects of the industry with realities that have fallen far short of the idealistic image of

the post-communist press that emerged in the days following the nation's bloody revolution (Coman, 2004b). As Gross (2008b) states, "the Romanian media have not established themselves as an institution in its own right, a necessity in any democracy" (p. 145).

Other barriers to overall press effectiveness come in the behaviors and attitudes of journalists themselves. In nearly any society, journalists are subjected to a duality of contexts – they are influential and have a prestigious position in society, but are constantly barraged with political pressures and market-related confines (Coman, 2004). This has resulted in an identity crisis, of sorts, for journalists that is dominated by the clash between two groups that offer conflicting ideologies of purpose, context and control (Coman, 2004). Coman (2010) describes a subculture, of sorts, that has since developed within the Romanian media – consisting of journalists and media firm owners who have realized the power of press systems and employ nearly whatever means necessary to maintain power and prominence. Successful media directors use their organizations' platforms for personal ambitions and to promote ideologies, and seem to have no qualms with forging allegiances and relationships with political and economic interests that hold significant stakes in media coverage of public or private entities (Coman, 2010). It is this group of journalists and media directors that Coman describes as former "heroes of the revolution," now harnessing the powers afforded to the press in Romania to bolster their power and influence as "media moguls" (Coman, 2010, p. 587).

A related conversation revolves around the role that media systems have played in state-building processes and theory related to the interrelations between government and the media (Waisbord, 2007). Such inquiries are couched in the

difficulties encountered by journalists and media organizations based upon the levels of government intrusion or development that define the context within which they operate (Waisbord, 2007). As Waisbord claims, “for journalism, an intrusive state is as problematic as a tenuous, chaotic and absent state” (Waisbord, 2007, p. 117). In the latter cases, some governments fail to provide even the most basic enforcement of property rights, let alone provisions allowing for and protecting press organizations (Waisbord, 2007). Journalists in such environments often put themselves at risk of personal harm in covering stories, notably those about illegal activities or criminal organizations that operate unfettered by governmental intrusions or law enforcement (Waisbord, 2007). As one scholar concludes, “in those areas, attacks against journalists, reporters and editors in bullet-proof vehicles and heavily guarded newsrooms are unmistakable signs of statelessness” (Waisbord, 2007, p. 119).”

At the same time, however, journalists have an undeniably significant role in helping to support and foster development in such “stateless” regions (Waisbord, 2007, p. 122). In many of these cases, supporting the development of an independent press has been recognized as a requisite for successful state building, and so media systems are seen by some as tools in building and supporting emerging democracies (Waisbord, 2007). The press offers opportunities for encouraging civic engagement and catalyzing participation and expression, and does wonders to capture and facilitate development of cultural and social systems, to speak nothing of providing frameworks for political discourse (Waisbord, 2007). As Waisbord puts it, “the press has played a crucial function as a builder of both nations and civic societies. It is widely accepted that the press has made unique, remarkable contributions to nation-building” (Waisbord, 2007, p. 122).

A 1999 study also revealed another potentially troubling deficiency of the Romanian press – the lack of professionalism among its ranks (Stark, 1999). Respondents reported a lack of understanding among colleagues of a “seriousness of purpose and an understanding of the role of the press in a democratic society” (Stark, 1999, p. 34). This, coupled with a lack of formal education in journalism, the study found, contributes to a trend of many reporters serving partisan rather than public interests in their reporting (Stark, 1999). Sensationalism and rumor would permeate news content, and ethical codes were far from prominent (Stark, 1999). It also appears that, notably in the lead-up to the nation’s accession to the European Union in 2007, Romanian journalists are not very well informed about issues related to the European Union, at least in the opinion of a set of journalists and media managers interviewed in a 2006 study (Lazar & Paun, 2006). The vast majority of respondents in that study indicated that many journalists have only basic understandings of EU institutions and the various functions they perform (Lazar & Paun, 2006). In the earlier days following 1989, there also existed material deficiencies that plagued media outlets – including limited space and shortages of newsprint itself (Grosskurth, 1991).

Another structural challenge that has confronted news organizations is a shift in audience patterns, with declines in print consumption and expanded networks of distribution for non-print mediums (Coman, 2009). Distribution numbers for most print publications have declined significantly, not coming close to the numbers reached in the early 1990s (Coman, 2009). There has been noticeable growth, however, in the audiences of television and radio platforms (Coman, 2009). At the same time, there has been significant consolidation among media firms, a factor that Coman describes as a threat to the capabilities of the press to support the nation’s

democracy (Coman, 2009). Financial independence, while a critical element for a watchdog and independent press, was not included in early discussions of the country's burgeoning media system, and now the fight for control of both the media and its messaging apparatus have come down to the dollars of powerful interests vying for control over the mediums (Coman, 2009).

Following along this path of inquiry into the Romanian media, much attention has been paid to the relative lack of transparency among press industries – referring to details of media firm owners and their various political and economic interests and affiliations (Nitulescu, 1996). Studies concerning media ownership have discovered ties among media owners as well as political connections to outside entities (Nitulescu, 1996). Some television stations are owned by the same individuals as rival radio stations, with cross-ownership of media firms across the country in some cases (Nitulescu, 1996). This can be problematic in removing competition in a given market, and also when a particular media firm might be facing critique and is defended by other firms with common ownership or close ties – familial, in at least one case – with the particular organization (Nitulescu, 1996).

Of course, no discussion of the Romanian news media and its challenges could exclude concerns related to external influences on press coverage – either stemming from ownership and leadership pressures or even payments and bribes (Klyueva and Tsetsura, 2010). Research has revealed that owners and publishers, as well as the political affiliation of Romanian news organizations, can have the greatest impacts on media firms – whether related to news coverage and information, or internal functions and processes (Klyueva and Tsetsura, 2010). In addition, both direct and indirect payments and influences have been found to be quite common within the nation's

media system, with an absence of disclosures of either monetary or material receipts in related news coverage (Klyueva and Tsetsura, 2010). A 2010 study found that a variety of outside entities have proven to be influential to the mass media, including the national government, political parties, local governments, advertisers and the sources of particular stories or reports (Klyueva and Tsetsura, 2010). This all takes place, Coman and Gross (2012) argue, within a corrupt political society in which more political figures are coming to own media firms. In short, the 2010 study that analyzed influences on the media concluded, in light of both the pressures imposed on outlets and the non-transparency issues plaguing the media in Romania, that “journalists need to be more critical of their professional actions” (Coman & Gross, 2012, p. 22).

Each of the abovementioned factors, as well as other cultural, social and economic considerations, set the Romanian media apart from its counterparts in both Europe and the western world. While conversations in the United States and other western nations have, over time, touched upon objectivity in reporting, journalists in Romania did not have such ambitious goals in the years following 1989 (Gross, 1996). Levels of professionalism in the Romanian press continue to lag far behind those of its western counterparts, and the long-standing communist tendencies and patterns of former’s media industry continue to play significant roles in the daily operations of news outlets (Gross, 1996). In short, “there is a telling difference between Western journalists and journalism and their East-Central European counterparts, the context from which they come and in which they operate, their professional attitudes and perceived roles” (Gross, 1996, p. 93).

It is precisely this conclusion that captures the rationale behind the present thesis. Considering the variety of factors that influence the journalism industry

in Romania, the chapters to follow will seek to establish a methodological and theoretical framework, within which the country's news media can be evaluated through the models presented by Hallin and Mancini. This thesis will also address how effectively the various models account for the activities, successes and shortcomings of the Romanian press. The subsequent chapters will introduce the methodology for this study, as well as findings and an analysis that will address each of the abovementioned questions seeking to better understand the Romanian news media and how applicable traditional models of the press are in assessing its performance and effectiveness.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

This study aims to better understand factors that determine or relate to the effectiveness of the mass media in post-authoritarian democracies. This will be approached through the lens of the theories presented by Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini, and assessing the applicability of aspects of their assertions to post-authoritarian nations. Given the complexity of the topic, this study employs a mixed-methods approach comprised of both a review of relevant documents and literature and a case study of the Romanian press, assembled through two periods of semi-structured field interviews conducted over a period of 13 months.

Research Questions

RQ₁: To what extent, if any, can the conditions impacting the effectiveness of the Romanian news media be explained by Hallin and Mancini’s “Mediterranean or Polarized Pluralist Model” of the press?

RQ₂: To what extent, if any, can the conditions impacting the effectiveness of the Romanian news media be explained by Hallin and Mancini’s “North/Central European or Democratic Corporatist Model” of the press?

RQ₃: To what extent, if any, can the conditions impacting the effectiveness of the Romanian news media be explained by Hallin and Mancini’s “North Atlantic or Liberal Model” of the press?

RQ₄: Based upon factors found to have influence in the effectiveness of the Romanian news media, what factors could be taken into consideration when evaluating press systems in post-authoritarian democracies?

Theoretical Approach

The first component of this methodological approach will feature an intensive review of previous literature on the subject, couched in a review of theories put forth by Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini in *Comparing Media Systems*. Using their theories as a starting point, this analysis will include discussions related to published literature and prior studies, including a variety of reports issued by both public and private entities. Sources will include, in some cases, scholarly reports concerning media performance, public trust of the press and government transparency. The purpose of this review is to help establish a theoretical framework, within which the findings of a case study of the Romanian news media can be evaluated. This will be presented in the Analysis section of this report, found in Chapter 5.

Case Study

The second component of this report consists of a case study of the Romanian press. This qualitative approach consists of a series of interviews with well-informed individuals, seeking to shed light on the nature of the mass media in Romania and the various factors impacting the performance of press organization as well as individual

journalists. Employing a qualitative, rather than a quantitative, research design is appropriate given the nature of the subject under study. According to Frankel and Devers (2000), “qualitative methods are needed when the questions being asked pose puzzles that are difficult, if not impossible, to address using conventional [quantitative] research approaches” (p. 253). Qualitative methods differ from quantitative research approaches in the sense that the former involve inductive reasoning, and such studies commonly seek to find explanations for “people and groups’ particular situations, experiences, and meanings *before* [original emphasis] developing and/or testing more general theories and explanations” (Frankel & Devers, 2000, p. 253). Such research designs provide greater levels of flexibility, and allow researchers to employ a variety of techniques in attempting to gather data through observation of a trend or phenomenon (Frankel & Devers, 2000). The development of the present case study is also appropriate for analyzing the topic at hand, given the goal of conducting a descriptive study seeking to better understand an issue through the spectrum of a single, particular group (Babbie, 2007).

Interview Procedures

Over the course of 13 months, two sets of semi-structured field interviews were conducted in the city of Cluj-Napoca, Romania. The multicultural municipality of Cluj-Napoca, which serves as the seat of Cluj County, is the second largest city in the country and the home to eleven major higher education institutions and an evolving business climate (Cluj Business, 2014). With the goal of becoming the European Capital of Culture in 2020, public, private and nonprofit leaders in the city are working to foster development opportunities and increase the profile of the city (Cluj Business, 2014). Cluj is second in size only to the nation’s capital, Bucharest,

and the various corporate and governmental offices based in the city make it an ideal location for such a case study (Cluj Business, 2014).

A total of 18 interviews were conducted with well-informed respondents during the course of two visits to Cluj-Napoca, with ten taking place in January 2013 and the remaining eight in January 2014. Both rounds of interviews were conducted individually and in person, facilitated by the author and a research partner, a graduate student in the Public Administration Department in the College of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences of Babes-Bolyai University, which is based in Cluj-Napoca. While most of the interviews in the first set were conducted in Romanian, more than half of the interviews in 2014 were in English. Respondents were given the opportunity to choose which language they felt most comfortable with using for the interview, and the survey instrument was translated from English to Romanian for this purpose.

Respondents

Through the assistance of faculty members within Babes-Bolyai University, contact was made with the selection of well-informed individuals included in the sample as respondents. Suggested contacts and respondents were identified by faculty members and researchers within the university's College of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences based upon their knowledge of the field and the various individuals recommended for the study. The research team initially relied upon the faculty's evaluations as to the qualification of respondents, a factor that was later affirmed during each of the interviews as respondents proved to be informed on the various subject matters under study. Given the qualitative nature of the methodological approach, purposive – rather than random – sampling was employed.

According to Devers and Frankel (2000b), “purposive sampling strategies are designed to enhance understandings of selected individuals or groups’ experience(s) or for developing theories and concepts” (p. 264). In this way, so-called “‘information rich’ cases” are identified in respondents with the goal of capturing voices and vantage points that would best inform the study (p. Devers & Frankel, 2000, 264). In this way, respondents were selected and their comments organized into the four categories presented below. Respondents were not compensated in any way for their participation in the study, and each provided verbal agreement to the terms of participation.

It is important to note that respondents were granted confidentiality, so that they would in no way be linked to their responses. This guarantee of confidentiality is an element that has proven critical in securing and conducting interviews in this study. Given the complex nature of the topic and the sensitive nature of many of the questions presented in the survey instrument, respondents will only be identified by their general professional position – including by the respondent categories presented in the subsequent sections – with the goal of ensuring that no response, whether paraphrased or presented as a direct quotation, can be linked to an individual respondent.

This approach was taken with the understanding that the study, and hence the survey instrument, poses questions about issues of government transparency, the relationship between the media and government, political ties to media ownership and leadership, and the freedom of the news media in Romania. Given the oft-complex relationships that exist, and some of the patterns detected in prior research, the study was approached with the understanding that respondents could potentially face personal harassment or professional harm if they were to reveal information or

opinions related to these topics. There also exists a body of research that indicates confidentiality is a useful tool in enhancing response quality and, in some cases, response rates. According to Singer, Von Thurn and Miller (1995), “assurances of confidentiality will increase or improve response” in qualitative studies involving survey research (p. 70). The study revealed that assurances of confidentiality, whether verbal or written, were shown to positively affect response rates as well as the quality of responses received – though the impact on response rates in the study conducted by the authors was relatively small (Singer, Von Thurn & Miller, 1995). The authors did, however, discover a stronger connection between assurances of confidentiality and response rates in relation to sensitive questions (Singer, Von Thurn & Miller, 1995). Factors involved in affecting response rates or quality relate to respondent considerations of the social desirability of topics or practices being discussed, as well as potential consequences that could come from their being connected with particular responses (Tourangeau and Yan, 2007). The assurance of strict confidentiality, therefore, is critical for purposes of this study in securing data from respondents that is not skewed according to considerations of social desirability or potential repercussions.

It should be noted that several respondents questioned whether responses would be kept confidential upon their first contact with members of the research team, before even allowing the researchers to explain the basic parameters of the study or the planned assurance of confidentiality – which was included in the initial explanation of the study presented to respondents when attempting to secure interviews. In addition, some respondents verified the confidentiality agreement at several points throughout interviews prior to answering questions of a particularly

sensitive professional or personal nature. In short, the sample of respondents would be much smaller, and arguably less informed, if not for the granting of confidentiality of individual responses.

The context of this study presented various challenges for the research team. Chief among these obstacles was the authoritarian past of Romania, and more particularly, the struggles encountered throughout the country as it has evolved into a democratic state. While this political and historical context provided for a rich research environment, it also played a strong role in confining the methodological approach. Traditional approaches to social science research and the building of a case study, notably formal interview procedures and human subject review, were not feasible in the case of this inquiry. Given the nature of the political atmosphere in Romania and the sensitive nature of many of the topics investigated in this study, a vast majority of the respondents would not agree to sign documentation or paperwork indicating their participation in the study – notably, an informed consent document. Already wary of participating in a study that could reveal politically charged and controversial attributes of Romanian society, respondents were careful to ensure their identities would not be made public in any formal, written paper for that would come of the study. This presented the research team with a challenge: imposing a formal research study structure upon respondents in requiring signed forms and more formal processes would most certainly lead to a severely diminished, if not entirely vacant, pool of respondents. Therefore, the team had to adapt to the existing context in order to carry out the study – both in the abovementioned confidentiality procedures and in the broader methodological approach.

In consultation with faculty members both at the University of Delaware and Babes-Bolyai University, the research team devised a plan for approaching potential respondents, which most often took place through cultivating connections that already existed with members of the faculty in Cluj-Napoca. The potential respondents were provided with a brief overview of the study, as well as the topics that would be included in the semi-structured interview. Each was told how the interview would take place and how the results would be used, as well as the anticipated final format of the data gathered – a series of academic papers, culminating in this thesis report. This also included the guarantee of response confidentiality. Each respondent agreed to the conditions prior to making arrangements to meet with members of the research team. A second consent was obtained prior to the start of the interview, when members of the research team again reviewed the parameters of the study. Respondents were advised that they could opt not to answer particular questions, and were again reassured of the confidentiality of their responses. At that time, and before the first question was asked, each respondent again provided verbal consent. Verbal consent was also obtained in the event that a tape recorder was used to temporarily capture the conversation before responses could be organized into aggregated notes stripped of identifying characteristics of each individual respondent.

While formal human subject review procedures are always preferred in social science research involving this type of methodology, the research team had to adapt to the institutional culture within which the various respondents operate. The cultural differences between Romania and America would make it impossible to conduct a study by traditional means in the former nation, and this consideration was weighed heavily as the team prepared for the two periods of field research. Quite simply, the

vast majority of respondents would not agree to any formal process that would require written forms or any other paper trail that would reveal their identity as a participant in the study. Therefore, the research team was forced to respect the confines of the cultural and political context in Romania, as well as the sensitivities and concerns of the respondents, in order to carry out the present study. While not ideal, this methodological approach was determined to be the only viable approach that could be taken to effectively carry out this research.

Respondent Categories

For the purposes of this study, each of the 18 respondents was reclassified into the following four categories, which identify the vantage point from which the various respondents approach the relationship between the media and government in Romania.

Elected Official

Individuals selected to participate in the study in this classification consist of governmental officials elected through democratic procedures to public office in either the city of Cluj-Napoca, or Cluj County, the seat of which is Cluj-Napoca. The six elected officials who participated in the study represent a range of offices and positions, from city councilmembers to senior county officials.

Appointed Official, Spokesperson

Respondents in this category are appointed or hired, non-elected staffers for public agencies at the city or county level whose job responsibilities dictate contact with the press, or who, in the course of fulfilling their prescribed duties, interact with members of the news media on a routine basis. These contacts are both formal and informal, and while some of the respondents in this category are official agency

spokespersons for their respective governmental offices, this is not a requirement to be placed in this category. Quite simply, individuals in this group – five in total between the two rounds of interviews – have regular contact with the news media in the course of their public duties, and as such, have insights regarding the performance of the news media as well as the relationship between government and the press.

Journalist

The survey also included interviews with a total of five journalists between the two rounds of interviews. Individuals in this category are actively working in the field of journalism across various mediums, with representation of print, television, radio and online journalists. Both reporters and editors are included in the sample, with members of the latter category in this classification having personal experience working as a reporter prior to securing a position as an editor. Several of the respondents in this category have experience in multiple media organizations across various mediums, with some now running their own media enterprises.

Media Researcher, Former Journalist

The final category includes two respondents – one participant from each round of interviews – who presently serve in teaching and research capacities revolving around the news media, and have prior experience as journalists themselves. Aside from their background as reporters and editors, these respondents have unique perspectives to offer as a result of the time they have spent studying the media and its interaction with government.

Survey Instrument

This study employed two distinct survey instruments – included in Appendix 1 – that were utilized during the interviews. The first, employed when speaking with respondents in the “elected official” and “appointed official, spokesperson” categories, contains a set of questions related to the interaction between the media and government. There were 14 questions included in the survey instrument for the first round of interviews, and 17 for the second round. The change resulted from the addition of three questions that more gradually draw a respondent into existing questions. The questions added to the survey instrument do not represent the addition of other topics to the study, but rather demonstrate an effort to present a better-structured list of questions.

The second survey instrument was employed when speaking with respondents in the “journalist” and “media researcher, former journalist” categories. The first set of interviews included 23 questions, and the second was comprised of 26. Similar to the first survey instrument, several additions were made simply to improve the flow of the semi-structured interview and to add clarity in what type of information was being sought in each of the questions. One question employed during the first set of interviews – which asked respondents to rate the willingness of particular, named public officials to speak with the press – was stricken from the results of the first round of interviews as well as the survey instrument for the second round of interviews, as several respondents did not provide complete responses to the question. In addition, there was significant turnover in many public offices over the course of the year between the rounds of interviews, and so such a question would not provide consistent or complete results for the study.

In the case of both survey instruments, the questions – primarily open-ended lines intended to facilitate a guided discussion about the topics being studied – were used by members of the research team to guide the semi-structured interview with each respondent.

Recording Procedures

During each of the interviews, members of the research team took notes on the respondent's comments as they responded to the questions. In many cases, when permission could be secured, a recorder was also used to capture the responses to ensure accuracy and provide a secondary outlet for notes to aid in the transcription process. Following each interview, responses were transcribed and recorded in a central location that was used in subsequent data analysis efforts. Copies of any notes and audio files were later destroyed, and individual responses have been organized into the respondent categories to which they belong. This process assisted in data analysis and has helped to ensure that responses remain completely confidential and that no individual respondent is identified in the study with any details beyond his or her respective respondent category and professional position.

Chapter 4

FINDINGS

Through a series of 18 field interviews conducted over a period of 13 months, a case study of the Romanian news media was conducted. The following discussion presents the findings of the interview responses, broken down by category and distinguished by the professional vantage point of various respondents.

The Media in Romanian Society

Throughout the course of the study, respondents expressed a variety of viewpoints regarding the significance of the role the mass media plays in Romanian society. Most of these opinions were couched in the challenges faced by reporters and various prohibitions imposed upon journalists due to informal constraints placed on media organizations – factors that will be discussed throughout this chapter. For the most part, public officials – both elected and appointed – shared the belief that the media is a powerful force in Romania, and one that captures the attention of a significant number of civilians. This reach seems to be expanding in recent years, the public officials reported, as press coverage of elections and political developments have captured the attention of more Romanians. For the most part, this reach has proven to be influential in shaping the opinions of audiences, a factor that led one elected official to remark that:

The media today is the most powerful tool in the social life of Romania (Cluj-Napoca city elected official, personal communication, January 31, 2014).

Several elected officials shared the view that the media is a critical channel for information to be communicated between government and citizens, though it was noted that this passage of information is trending towards virtual channels as fewer households subscribe to print publications. Rather, news is communicated via television programs, radio shows or, most commonly, through online news platforms. While some of these are managed by professional news organizations, others are more opinionated sites that might not necessarily gather and disseminate news with the same level of integrity as more traditional media firms.

In the case of many appointed government officials who commonly interact with the press, media organizations are commonly viewed as a tool for sharing information with the public. In many cases, this is the primary means with which public agencies can share plans, developments or policies with constituents. In some cases, public employees said that media organizations have the ability to compromise certain public plans or processes by revealing information at times which, in their opinion, might be inopportune from a business standpoint – as in the case of revealing investors or developers in negotiations with public entities for projects. However, the overriding opinion of public employees is that media organizations and individual journalists play an important role in communicating information from the government to the citizenry. One Cluj County staffer commented,

[The media] is very important, especially for us as a public institution and a local institution. We have a lot of projects that people need to know about. Through the media, through the journalists...the people, the citizens know about these kinds of projects or investments (Cluj County official, personal communication, January 21, 2014).

The Responsibility of Journalists

Most of the study's respondents offered roughly the same responses when discussing the responsibilities of journalists in Romania. Quite simply, as one Cluj-Napoca city employee remarked, the goal of reporters should be to objectively inform the public, to be transparent regarding the source of information, and to adhere to strict ethical principles in the process. The official spoke of the three-source rule – a doctrine dictating independent confirmation of significant facts from three separate parties, or sources – as one element of responsible reporting, and alluded to the need for journalism to serve as a watchdog of democracy – the fourth power, per se, in Romanian society. A governmental employee at the county level emphasized the importance of covering politics effectively, notably during election periods. One city elected official remarked,

The most important thing [for the media to do] is to inform the citizens and the people, and also to let the people make their own opinions (Cluj-Napoca city elected official, personal communication, January 30, 2014).

That elected Cluj-Napoca official echoed the comments of several journalists in asserting that reporters should not only inform citizens, but to do so in an objective manner. Published reports should not include the biases or opinions of the news organization or journalist, but rather present facts and allow the audience to draw its own conclusions.

The Performance of Journalists in Romania

There are several significant factors that have shaped the opinions of journalists and media organizations shared by respondents, including elected and appointed officials. In some cases, these factors inhibit the effectiveness of the mass

media in Romania. One such factor is what several appointed officials describe as a pattern of laziness among some reporters. Some officials stated the view that journalists are not as persistent as they were in the past, in some cases failing to ask even basic follow-up questions or truly pursuing information. One spokesperson reported that particular journalists simply copy and paste content directly from press releases or statements into their stories – a practice that can make it quite easy for a public agency to almost completely control the message that is conveyed to the journalist’s audience. This particular governmental employee, who has an extensive background in journalism, expressed a sense of disappointment in the lapse in professionalism that such practices constitute for members of the news media. One of the journalists included in the sample characterized some reporters as simple spectators during press conferences or public events, describing their habits of just writing down the information provided to them by officials without asking questions or demanding detail or clarification when it could benefit their story. A city official expressed the opinion that many Romanian journalists perform their job satisfactorily:

I think there are very serious and dedicated journalists who do their job well
(Cluj-Napoca city employee, personal communication, January 23, 2014).

However, that official couched this opinion in a laundry list, per se, of improvements that could be made in the performance of reporters. Chief among these is refraining from tabloid practices, a problem they note as being a common trend among many publications, and one that must be avoided for the media to be effective.

Some respondents, notably appointed officials who commonly interact with the media, suggested that better and more thorough training programs for journalists could assist in changing these patterns. Better funding streams within organizations could

also allow more time for reporters to work on individual stories, alleviating some of the time pressures that could cause journalists to rush to file stories, and perhaps not include as much information as they could if they had more time. There was also significant agreement, however, that the ability of journalists to effectively cover news is heavily dependent upon the institutional culture within which they operate.

Press Independence

Nearly every journalist included in the sample – including individuals with past experience reporting who now serve in governmental or research capacities – spoke of the informal, yet pervasive, pressures that inhibit the ability of reporters in Romania to cover the news objectively. These pressures manifest themselves in various ways – in some cases, an entire news organization has a clear slant or political agenda that is exercised in all of its reporting, while in other cases individual journalists might lean in a particular ideological direction. And they come both from within news organizations – through unofficial mandates or unwritten rules about how coverage should portray particular individuals or institutions – and from outside entities, which can use threats or other forms of coercion in an attempt to exercise control over the messages disseminated by reporters. Despite how prevalent such pressures or biases are in particular institutions, they are detrimental to the industry as a whole. One elected official serving a constituency in Cluj-Napoca summarized this trend related to coverage of public administration and politics:

Unfortunately, almost all media that covers politics and administration is biased. Unfortunately, journalists in Romania are not journalists; they are militants, which support the political parties or economic...groups that support

political parties (Cluj-Napoca city elected official, personal communication, January 31, 2014).

Such results emanate from political and financial ties to media ownership and leadership, ties that make it difficult, if not impossible, for individual journalists working for these publications to operate in a completely objective fashion. When it comes to covering politics, many of the respondents stated that some media firms provide only one side of the story, or feature a particular politician or political party in a consistently positive or negative light, despite the reality of a given situation. Fewer media organizations are truly independent, according to a sentiment shared by government officials and journalists alike. As one staffer for Cluj County stated,

[A newspaper or television program] has someone behind the scene (Cluj County employee, personal communication, January 21, 2014).

This can vary according to medium, however, as print newspapers – though in a fairly steady decline – tend to be more independent than television programs, for example. One elected official made the argument that financial independence is the greatest need of the Romanian news media – if organizations did not have to depend upon financial support from wealthy politicians or political operatives, the official claimed, the media outlets could pursue the truth in every story without fear of jeopardizing the careers of employees or the financial stability of the organization itself.

The challenges facing media outlets across the globe, however, have also touched the news industry in Romania. Respondents indicated that financial pressures from decreased subscription bases and increased digital competition have resulted in shrinking staffs, more job responsibilities for the few reporters left in newsrooms and

the folding of some publications altogether. What results from the combination of political pressures and financial restraints, respondents said, is a growing distrust of messages disseminated by many media outlets, as well as a perception that reporters are not very efficient or effective in performing their duties. One elected official commented that there is no professional organization that allows journalists and media organizations to self-regulate their own activities:

The media...maybe it is the only profession in Romania that has no honor or disciplinary councils of their [own]...The written media has no internal or external organism, and unfortunately, many times there [is] information [published]...with no context or reality, but nothing happens (Cluj-Napoca city elected official, personal communication, January 31, 2014).

Without such protections, the official asserted, information lacking context and reality can be published, and the only result is that the trust in the media among members of the audience is further diminished, and the power of the media as a tool in the country's evolving democracy continues to wane.

Investigative Reporting

When discussing the state of investigative journalism in Romania, journalists and editors expressed concerns that there is typically not enough time for reporters to effectively pursue such enterprise reporting. In addition, a lack of funding to support the investment of staff hours into long-term, complicated features also compounds the problem. Respondents also commented that pressures placed on reporters by the political interests connected with media ownership and leadership can severely impact the success or failure of an investigation. What results is a dearth of investigative stories, with the few that are completed being featured primarily on television

programs. Of these, according to a journalist, the features typically identify the extent to which an already known problem exists, rather than revealing a new issue altogether. It should also be noted that, although rare, interviews revealed very isolated examples of journalists using blackmail or other techniques to influence public officials, though few respondents provided comment on this matter.

What seem to be more pervasive are instances in which powerful officials or operatives utilize threats or actual force to inhibit the activity of journalists. Many respondents remarked that journalists do not occupy a particularly high social class in terms of their occupation, as the profession is not viewed as admirable in modern Romanian society. Many individuals view journalists with a sense of distrust, a factor that could explain why some reporters have spent years out of work, the result of potential employers learning of their past as journalists and denying them employment. One respondent, who previously worked for several organizations and now operates an online news service in a media research capacity, spoke on this:

You have to be very careful here in society when you go and say you are a journalist, because they can be very severe and savage sometimes with you (Media researcher and former journalist, personal communication, January 29, 2014).

Many journalists expressed the sentiment that an individual reporter is only as effective as his or her organization is supportive. This adage rang true for many of the journalists interviewed in the study, who stated feelings that they are, in large part, acting alone when pursuing investigative assignments. The researcher and former journalist also told a story of an instance in which they were abused by police officers while trying to report on a story about a relatively routine development. The journalist

shared details on the abuse they suffered at the hands of the officers, who refused to respect the laws allowing journalists to pursue stories:

They used their power against me. They used false witnesses, and false evidence, only because I said I was a journalist, and I had my rights...it is difficult to be a journalist here. The society is not fully democratic (Media researcher and former journalist, personal communication, January 29, 2014).

The incident ultimately resulted in a complaint being filed against the officers, though no real conclusion came of the matter in terms of disciplinary or punitive relief. This particular respondent shared their frustrations that reporters are often left to pursue stories on their own, without any strong support from their media organization to back them. This, they claim, can result in dangerous situations in the case of investigative reports or stories that powerful interests would prefer not be disseminated to the public through a journalist.

One elected official did offer the opinion that the Romanian news media is fairly effective in exposing corruption within public offices in the nation – particularly at the central government level. The official described corrupt officials as one of the chief challenges for progression in Romania’s civil society, and applauded the media for its role in helping to expose instances of such acts.

The media in general – it is effective in discovering the corruption of politicians, which [has been] Romania’s biggest problem for years (Cluj-Napoca city elected official, personal communication, January 31, 2014).

However, the official added that many journalists can uncover such corruption because of sources tied to the political ideology of their respective news organizations. In a sense, therefore, journalists become propaganda wings of political parties or

operatives, serving the cause by conducting opposition research and publishing negative stories, dirt, on their opponents.

Many respondents connected the challenges facing journalists to the authoritarian past of the nation, and the country's relatively young and still-evolving democracy. A media researcher and former journalist summarized the difficulty of the sentiments that reporters have to tolerate:

We are in the European Union now, but we have part of the society that is mentally communist, and they deal with you from that point of view (Media researcher and former journalist, personal communication, January 29, 2014).

Journalists Transitioning to Politics

While the internal and external pressures from political forces have a significant impact on the media industry in Romania, another practice has contributed to the erosion of journalism as a profession – and the challenges faced by reporters in maintaining the trust audiences place in them and their work. Several respondents revealed details about the fairly common practice of journalists who move into careers in politics or government after their years spent as reporters and editors. According to the study's respondents, two of the predominant incentives for this type of a transition are the higher salaries and the greater levels of respect paid to individuals working for elected and appointed officials. At the same time, politicians might be more likely to hire journalists due to their experience in the field, particularly for roles that involve regular communication with the news media.

This trend, however, leads to skepticism as to the behavior of the individual journalists while they were in their reporting careers. Particular scrutiny is paid in hindsight to the nature of stories they covered related to the party or candidate they

eventually find employment with, as well as their party affiliation. One working journalist lamented the significant threat that influenced or enrolled journalists pose against the nation's democracy, as the coverage of such reporters would likely reflect such connections and, thus, fail to provide an objective account of news events to audiences. Another journalist, with more than fifteen years of experience as a reporter, commented that it is fairly unlikely that someone who has spent a lifetime in journalism would suddenly have the desire to pursue a second career in politics, making the argument that a prior connection must have been made long before the actual job change took place. This trend is perhaps the basis of the comments of one appointed official, who spoke about journalists who serve the president or other high-ranking government officials while posing as objective reporters – in a sense, infiltrating media organizations to pursue the agenda of political agents.

The Relationship between Government and the Media

Interviews also revealed details about the complex relationship between government and the media in Romania. Overall, respondents expressed opinions of a rather sensitive relationship between the two entities, and one in which government officials tread very lightly. According to the study's sample, spokespersons responsible for representing a governmental agency or entity to the media are careful to be fully transparent and to avoid accusations of being secretive – an all-too-common characteristic of the nation's authoritarian past. They also relayed their cautions about waging wars with the media, asserting that it is impossible to be successful in such an endeavor. Politicians, in the opinion of two appointed government officials and one journalist interviewed, are generally fearful of the media and watch its coverage very carefully. One elected official at the city level explained

that, while some politicians and public figures opt only to speak with, or answer questions from, particular reporters who might share their ideology, such a practice can prove detrimental. The official explained their practice of commenting to all journalists who contact the agency – regardless of their political allegiances, known or unknown, or even the slant of their publication or the tone of the story itself – in the hopes of informing audiences by making his opinions or experiences known through the media outlet.

Another official at the same level in Cluj-Napoca expressed the difficulties faced by public officials who see the political leanings of journalists and media firms, and can detect the biases in all of their works. The issue, according to the official, is one of the most pervasive in the nation's media industry. An employee of Cluj County who frequently interacts with members of the news media, both formally and informally, went so far to say that some public agencies have the tendency to shape or craft messages given to the press, depending upon the political leanings of the particular outlet. The official used the example of a newspaper reporter contacting the agency for comment:

When we speak with a journalist, we ask from what newspaper [they are from]...we know what is behind that newspaper, who is behind that newspaper. It is necessary to know...the perspective of how you talk with that guy, about what, and what to say and what not to say (Cluj County employee, personal communication, January 21, 2014).

Aside from political affiliations among journalists, public officials in Cluj-Napoca and Cluj County also expressed frustrations that reporters do not allow themselves enough time to work on long-term investigations, and that they do not

fully understand the timeline allowed for documents to be provided pursuant to public records requests. Hence, the reporters do not always receive documents in time to include in stories, and ultimately, consumers of the news do not always get the entire story. And with predominately young, relatively inexperienced journalists packing most newsrooms, the gap between theory and practice widens in regard to hard-hitting news stories.

Transparency

Central to discussions of the media industry in Romania and its relationship with government are considerations of transparency in public processes. Respondents expressed relatively mixed opinions on the topic, with some arguing that transparency is strong and others asserting that there is ample room for improvement. They made it clear in most of the interviews, however, that there are wide disparities in the levels of transparency – as well as accessibility – between various levels of government. While several journalists and government officials described relatively strong levels of transparency in city and county affairs, sentiments related to transparency in the nation’s central government were of the polar opposite. Reporters told tales of the relative ease with which they would speak with local and county officials, or obtain documents from small and regional public agencies. But when it comes to the central government in Bucharest, journalists volunteered only complaints and frustrations related to the inability to secure interviews or get comments from many officials, and the sluggish pace at which public information requests were fulfilled.

When asked about transparency, most respondents included a reference to Law 544 in their response. In 2001, the nation passed this law, which guarantees free access to public documents and information. Interviewees revealed a consensus among both

government officials and journalists that the law is a positive step towards higher levels of transparency, and that it has had a real impact on levels of transparency since its passage. This study revealed high levels of access to many public buildings and offices in Cluj-Napoca and Cluj County. In fact, in some locations journalists – or any member of the public, for that matter – can simply enter a public office during the day and remain in most locations without an appointment. One spokesperson related a story of a journalist who would spend eight hours each weekday just sitting in various city hall offices, trying to eavesdrop and learn about the activities of various officials. While some governmental officials considered this a hindrance to professional productivity – with one staffer reporting the need to work from home – most tended to concur that such a literal open-door policy has helped to ensure greater transparency, and was a necessary element of relations with the mass media. A general consensus of public officials interviewed points to such transparency as a positive step towards more effective governance.

Transparency has, in large part, been connected to considerations of the nation's evolving democracy. One Cluj-Napoca city staffer explained that government in Romania cannot afford the perception of being secretive, and added that the nation's accession to the European Union has helped to expose the country not only to higher standards, but also best practices in fellow EU states. However, such developments do not come without exceptions. One elected official in the city explained that, while most major decisions are made publicly, some officials in the central government have the tendency to make sweeping decisions of high importance in a short period of time, often with significant portions of the process being kept secretive. The official stated,

The formal decisions are mostly transparent, but the present government has the bad habit of making major decisions in one or two days, in secret, without consulting the civil society (Cluj-Napoca city elected official, personal communication, January 31, 2014).

This type of behavior could be attributed to what one media researcher described as remnants of the legacy of Nicolae Ceaușescu, the nation's former communist leader who ruled the country until 1989, when he was ousted and executed during the nation's revolution (Carothers, 1996, p. 9-10). The interviewee described this legacy as being personified in the attitudes and actions of some lingering officials in positions of power and leadership who expect only positive coverage of select issues to make it into the news.

While examples of poor transparency were reported, there was a general consensus among respondents that conditions are gradually improving in the nation. Public officials are generally accessible to reporters, and are often eager to provide comment – albeit more eager to speak on matters not involving their personal activities. More public documents are also being made available online, making the job of journalists easier in some cases. One Cluj-Napoca elected official asserted that the news media is responsible in helping to push for such levels of transparency in government, while a county staffer remarked that there are also agents of change working within the halls of public institutions:

The government is more transparent every year, from my point of view. I think it is about people who work in these organizations. They are...younger, more educated, and also they know about the importance of transparency in this

public domain (Cluj County employee, personal communication, January 21, 2014).

In terms of Law 544 and its effectiveness, some challenges have been voiced both by journalists and government officials alike. Some reporters relayed complaints that crafty politicians comply with the law by providing a response within the required timeframe, but they do not always reply with information specific or even relevant to the request. There was some agreement among the journalists and editors interviewed that the law is not as respected by officials as it should be, a trend detected in the time it takes to turn over documentation as well as in the incomplete responses sometimes provided. On the other hand, spokespeople for government offices that frequently interact with the news media expressed frustrations that journalists are not often as aware of the law as they should be, notably related to the timeline provided for responses to requests.

The Practicality of Watchdog Journalism in Romania

Each of the interviews conducted in both phases of this study contained a set of questions related to media as a watchdog of democracy. There was a universal understanding of what this concept means, and how it could be applied in the case of Romania, though opinions as to how effective journalists in the country are at presently fulfilling this role varied significantly.

While several respondents spoke of the decline in readership of traditional media outlets, notably print television stations, one elected official noted that the news media still has an extensive reach in Romania, albeit through different channels. The official asserted,

The people are more informed about politics, about what the politicians are doing. The people are more informed, with the good things and also the bad (Cluj-Napoca city elected official, personal communication, January 30, 2014).

The official attributed this awareness, concentrated around political information, to the power of the news media.

Going beyond the general reach of media outlets and focusing on the traditional view of the media as a watchdog of democracy, journalists interviewed tended to believe that such a watchdog role is important, and one to be followed and respected. However, this varied according to experience in the field. While veteran journalists tended to consider this role increasingly more difficult to fulfill, younger journalists generally had more optimism. There was virtual consensus, however, that the overall ability to serve as a watchdog media organization revolves more around the particular orientation of the news organization, more so than individual reporters. This has been attributed to the strong impact of environmental factors on newsroom productivity and effectiveness. Journalists see “enrolled” colleagues – those who have unofficial, yet binding, connections to political candidates, parties or organizations – as a major threat to this traditional role.

One journalist described the watchdog ideology as a convenient formula within which they can couch their professional activities, but emphasized that informing the public is the most important objective of reporters. This reporter stated that greater levels of context are necessary in news stories, and that objectivity needs to be stronger in coverage from mainstream media organizations – namely television stations. The respondent argued that, while the press is free in Romania, economic constraints and difficult business conditions for media outlets have led to some firms

essentially selling out to whomever is willing to pay the bills – regardless of the political ideology of the parties that assume control of the organization.

Another journalist spoke of the dangers of watchdog journalism, particularly in relation to covering the misdeeds of public officials at any level of government. The dangers of writing about such occurrences are compounded by the smaller teams that comprise newsrooms, and the all-too-common result of a reporter working on such features alone, and frequently without strong levels of institutional support. In short, journalists tended to comment that the role is important, but not a practical option in the daily operations of the news business in Romania given the constraints placed upon the industry by primarily informal mechanisms.

For government officials in Romania – both elected and appointed – the theory of a watchdog media was one they considered critical to protecting the nation’s evolving democracy. One official remarked that the media has the responsibility of guarding against abuses of power, and helping politicians to avoid making mistakes with the threat of making such errors or missteps public. Others expressed the importance of the press in inhibiting corruption and holding officials to high standards of conduct and performance. A Cluj-Napoca city staffer commented that most politicians are fearful of media attention, making it less likely that they will become engaged in corrupt activities or other behavior that would draw coverage – a set of circumstances that several public employees described as positive for government and the population as a whole. An elected official who described the political party structures spoke about parties that are in power, and those in opposition, at any given time based upon the results of elections. The city official linked the press to a permanent opposition party, of sorts:

The media has become a constant opposition in Romania, no matter who is in power, which is very healthy (Cluj-Napoca city elected official, personal communication, January 31, 2014).

However, several officials spoke about the shortcomings of the media in Romania as strong detriments to its ability to fulfill the watchdog ideal of journalism. In particular, the tendencies towards copying and pasting content from official releases into stories, and the passive listening techniques at press conferences were referenced as behavior patterns that do not mimic an active guardian of the country's democracy. In short, officials for the most part agreed with reporters in stressing the importance of the watchdog role of journalism in countries like Romania, but did not express confidence that the media is currently living up to this standard.

Chapter 5

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In a discussion about the applicability of applying traditional, western-derived theories of journalism to transitional democracies and media systems, Chengju Huang challenges the assertion among some scholars that a single set of press theories can explain any given system (Huang, 2003). The author discusses the various contextual elements of a given society that not only differentiate that culture, but its media system, from counterparts elsewhere (Huang, 2003). Advocating for a “transitional media approach” rather than a simple adaptation of traditional, normative theories, Huang asserts that:

A transitional media approach attempts to revisit or balance the normative media approach by questioning its theoretical sufficiency in conceptualizing the changing media systems in the real world. Particularly, it challenges the wisdom of the idea that tries to put certain media systems into well-defined normative pigeonholes (p. 455).

It is this very argument that drives the present thesis, and provides the justification for the subsequent analysis. In this chapter, the three models of the press and politics presented by Hallin and Mancini in the duo’s landmark 2004 work will be analyzed in the context of the aforementioned case study of the Romanian news media. Taking each model separately, the results of the case study will be applied in an effort to determine how well the Romanian press can be explained by the various

models. The intent behind this work is to determine how best researchers and practitioners can evaluate the mass media in post-authoritarian democracies.

The Polarized Pluralist Model

The first model presented by Hallin and Mancini, the Polarized Pluralist model of the press, paints the picture of media systems with intimate ties to their surrounding political and cultural contexts (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Even further, such press systems have historically become tools in political conflicts that came as such societies evolved and developed, with media being used for political and ideological mobilization (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Because of a weak market structure that developed within the press industry in these systems, media organizations were left vulnerable to influence from political parties, religious entities and wealthy or influential individuals – and in many cases, the press became dependent upon the support of these entities (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). These factors served to inhibit growth among such press systems, limiting autonomy and stunting professional development (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Under this model, the theory of political parallelism is notably high, with media firms being heavily engaged in political conflicts and messaging (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Content was often influenced by some authority or individual, and in many cases prominent stories included comments from the journalist about the matter (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). In terms of state involvement in press activities, various nations experienced different levels of intrusion and interference, ranging from authoritarian controls to rather liberal, laissez-faire approaches (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Thus, the concepts of an independent, autonomous press system free of state intrusions that are revealed in the Democratic

Corporatist and Liberal models are not common to the Polarized Pluralist model presented in the authors' volume.

With this in mind, it is appropriate now to revisit the study's first research question:

RQ₁: To what extent, if any, can the conditions impacting the effectiveness of the Romanian news media be explained by Hallin and Mancini's "Mediterranean or Polarized Pluralist Model" of the press?

Analysis

This model is perhaps best suited of the three presented by Hallin and Mancini to account for the characteristics of the Romanian press. First, the model captures the intimate connection between the media and political development that is common in Romania. In the days following Ceausescu's execution, the evolving media system was closely tied to politics – a phenomenon that became more pronounced as political figures and parties began to use the new, purportedly democratic press to advance particular goals and ideologies. This trend continues to the present day, as revealed by respondents who indicated that political ties to media ownership and leadership frequently skew the coverage of particular press organizations. In this way, portions of the mass media in Romania continue to operate as tools, per se, of elite interests. To take this a step further, the pattern also adheres to Hallin and Mancini's model in that many media firms, even in present-day Romania, have become fiercely dependent upon the support of interests that seek to influence coverage – whether it be a political party or ideology, or powerful and wealthy influences who essentially purchase media outlets to further their interests.

This model is also applicable to Romania, in the sense that the press system has been subject to authoritarian intervention and intrusion on the part of the state. While this was of course something that was far more pervasive in the days of Ceausescu, even the post-communist Romanian press has been subject to periods of regulation, intrusion and attempts on the part of government officials to control what the press disseminates. In some instances, efforts to enhance governmental transparency have been blocked, and in others, legislative measures that could provide the government with access to the notes and records of reporters and news organizations were introduced and given substantial support at the national level.

The ability of this model to effectively account for and explain patterns in the Romanian mass media could perhaps best be described in the tenant of a weak market for the journalism industry – a factor that allows for the abovementioned influences, pressures and intrusions to exist. As journalists and public officials in the case study indicated, the Romanian press industry is weak and poorly organized – both factors that allow for its vulnerability and susceptibility to outside influences. This factor captures the rationale behind what most respondents described as the media system’s greatest flaw – its connections to powerful, influential political interests that serve to drive news coverage and control the messages being disseminated by media outlets.

The Democratic Corporatist Model

The second research question revolves around the extent to which the conditions impacting the effectiveness of the Romanian news media can be explained by the second model presented by Hallin and Mancini, the Democratic Corporatist Model. This is perhaps best addressed through the three “coexistences” described by the authors as characteristics common to press systems that can be explained by this

model. Before delving into the components and discussing their relevance to the case of Romania, it is useful to return to the associated research question:

RQ₂: To what extent, if any, can the conditions impacting the effectiveness of the Romanian news media be explained by Hallin and Mancini’s “North/Central European or Democratic Corporatist Model” of the press?

Analysis

The first “coexistence” is defined as “a high degree of political parallelism, a strong tendency for media to express partisan and other social divisions,” a factor identified by the authors as typically existing in conjunction with a strong mass-circulation press system (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 144). Such political parallelism, Hallin and Mancini explain, can be manifested in a variety of fashions – through ownership of media firms; in patterns of readership; in the media content itself; and finally, in the affiliations or allegiances of journalists themselves (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Under this tenant of the model, press systems go beyond serving just an informational role for their respective societies: they also serve as a means for forming, shaping and cultivating public opinion (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Media systems were used for the purpose of advocating on behalf of political, social and religious entities – with the latter institutions coming at the forefront of the development and spread of printing presses themselves (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). These practices, in some senses, contributed to the high distribution levels of the press, in that they catered to the highly religious, oft-politicized nature of the population in relevant countries (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). For these individuals, reading the

newspaper became an extension of their active role in such affairs (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

This first tenant of the Democratic Corporatist model closely resembles some elements of the Romanian press, in the sense that media firms often express partisan or social ideologies and stances in news content. Political elites and powerful interests own media organizations, and strong affiliations still exist between individual journalists and particular political figures and authorities. Some of these firms use their positions in an attempt to influence their respective audiences, and thereby consumers of news could see such media as a means for staying informed about the particular ideology or the respective religious, cultural or economic entities with which they align themselves. Respondents in the study identified political influences and pressures as among the greatest challenges facing journalists in Romania – a factor that connects with the notion of this first “coexistence.”

The second also contains references to high levels of political parallelism, in this case connected to strong professionalism among the press (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). This component of the model could be seen as ironic, given the advocacy stance of such press systems (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Nevertheless, codes of professionalism were quick to develop in many systems under this model (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). This could be attributed, in part, to the decent salaries afforded to journalists – a factor that allowed them to act as reporters and editors in a full-time capacity, rather than leaving them with a small salary and searching for additional income and outside work opportunities that could jeopardize independence or professionalism (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Such press systems also had strong forms of self-regulation within the journalism community (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). A result

of this was the early development of a sense of autonomy for the press, as it began to be viewed in many ways like a social and public institution – and beyond a mere private industry (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

This tenant of the Democratic Corporatist model is not applicable in the case of Romania, as the industry suffers from a relatively universal lack of professionalism. Journalists included in the study described a lack of cohesion among reporters within individual news organizations themselves, to speak nothing of the nearly complete dearth of unification or unity between various media outlets. Some journalists and media researchers described the relative isolation within which reporters operate, lacking institutional support for investigative journalism and in many cases working on even the most mundane stories with little collaboration with colleagues. Another deviation from this model comes in the low pay journalists receive in Romania, as well as the relatively low social class they occupy in terms of respect for their profession in society. According to the sample, one of the chief concerns among many active journalists arises when colleagues leave the news business for political or government jobs, and the main rationale offered for these transitions related to the desire to earn decent wages and perhaps to have slightly higher levels of respect in the broader community. Such respect is more frequently afforded to government employees or political operatives, they said, while journalists receive no such recognition. It could be argued that the Romanian media could benefit from higher levels of professionalism if reporting jobs would pay better wages, as journalists could remain more independent of outside influences aimed at either applying pressure for particular news to be covered – or ignored – or courting journalists for future careers in the public sector.

Finally, the third “coexistence” relates to the role of the state, and the commonality among media systems falling into this model of having firm limits on state powers, most often manifested through granting freedom to the press (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Traditionally, this model captured media systems that were protected from governmental intrusion and high levels of access to public documents and processes (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). However, it should be noted that many of the countries that Hallin and Mancini present as fitting within this model, have experienced some degree of an expansion in welfare policies to support press systems (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). This is perhaps most clearly displayed in direct state subsidies for media organizations among many of the countries, with others offering low-interest loans for press firms (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Such subsidies or loans are distributed in vastly different ways across national borders, with some passing out subsidies to all outlets and others employing various criteria to determine handouts – in some cases based upon need, in others ideology (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Another characteristic of the model is government regulation of some media activity, based on the presumption that it is a social institution rather than a private enterprise (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

The Romanian news media falls short of fitting into this third component of the model, primarily in terms of limits on the powers of the state to intervene in press activity. While the initial months and even years after the nation’s revolution brought about a sense of empowerment surrounding the emerging press, the period that followed has been characterized by a return, in many cases, to some of the same attempts to control media content and coverage that were all-too-common during the country’s authoritarian past. In fact, the press in Romania is considered – at least by

many of the respondents in the study – to be falling far short of being a true institution in the national society. At the moment, some public officials shared the view that the media is essentially “for sale” to whichever interests can pay the bills.

The Liberal Model

The third research question revolves around how well the factors influencing the Romanian media system can be explained by, or attributed to, Hallin and Mancini’s Liberal model of the press. Under this model, press systems are powerful and independent of state control or intrusion, a side effect of the deep connections between national development and the emergence of media institutions in nations with press systems that fall under this model (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). In such countries, media organizations “became overwhelmingly dominant, marginalizing party, trade union, religious and other kinds of noncommercial media (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 198).” A key tenant of this model is the importance of the media’s role of informing citizens with a “fact-centered discourse” (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 207). This type of content is vastly different from the politically charged content disseminated by press systems under the Democratic Corporatist Model – through which content is also meant to inform, albeit in the interest of particular religious, political or social ideology (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). This model is also posited in part on the strong professionalism of the industry, notably in the pursuit of neutral coverage and activity on the part of journalists (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). While the role of the state in these media systems cannot be ignored, it is typically characterized by a relative lack of interference, and strong objections to censorship or other direct forms of government-imposed control (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

It is now appropriate to return to the research question associated with this model of Hallin and Mancini:

RQ₃: To what extent, if any, can the conditions impacting the effectiveness of the Romanian news media be explained by Hallin and Mancini’s “North Atlantic or Liberal Model” of the press?

Analysis

This model does not accurately capture or explain the activities of the Romanian press. Quite simply, respondents described characteristics of the mass media that paint the picture of a press that is far from independent and powerful. While there are some positive elements of the mass media – particularly, the routine unveiling of instances of corruption or incompetence in government – such steps forward are mired in the political nature of such reports, namely when press organizations investigate only the party opposite of the ideology that supports their bottom line. Respondents spoke of some exceptions, but in general the Romanian press is far from being free from state intrusion or outside influences. While the “fact-centered discourse” that Hallin and Mancini describe is certainly the goal of journalists and the hope of many public officials – according to those interviewed in this study – the system as a whole is far from reaching such a milestone. Objectivity is the ideal, most of the journalists asserted, but the subjective, opinionated coverage that is disseminated from many news outlets only erodes what steps the industry has taken towards enhanced independence and professionalism in its near-quarter-decade of a democratic press.

Factors Affecting Media Performance

Finally, this analysis will turn towards an attempt to identify factors should be taken into consideration when evaluating the Romanian press, and by extension, press systems in post-authoritarian regimes. The final research question seeks to identify these elements:

RQ₄: Based upon factors found to have influence in the effectiveness of the Romanian news media, what factors could be taken into consideration when evaluating press systems in post-authoritarian democracies?

Analysis

While the formal, overt controls that had previously exerted influence and pressures on every aspect of the press during the rule of Ceausescu have dissipated, they have since been replaced with oft-covert restraints that inhibit the work of journalists in Romania. Nearly every journalist included in the study's sample spoke of political pressures and controls that are levied against media firms, which in many cases are owned by political figures or others who are heavily influenced by the same. This has resulted in many outlets having a clear slant or bias in reporting, and has contributed to an overall sense of distrust among audiences of the news media. This is a significant factor holding back the press from achieving its goal of acting as an institution, and providing a service to the people of Romania – objectives shared both by journalists and public officials interviewed in the study. And because the pressures are applied to media firms themselves, the challenge goes far beyond the individual reporter or editor, who is arguably powerless to effectuate change without risking professional standing.

Following the abovementioned factor is the lack of training and support afforded to Romanian reporters and editors related to thorough, in-depth reporting and investigative journalism. Journalists and some public officials included in the study sample expressed concerns that most reporters – notably younger and newer staff members – lack the formal training to effectively conduct investigative reports. Furthermore, in most cases there is a general absence of institutional support for reporters doing such work, so the fairly common trend of threats or other actions being taken against journalists from outside entities can go without any repercussions because individual journalists must often act alone, and without the proverbial backup, from their news organizations. Along these lines, it is not only very possible – but relatively common – to silence journalists in Romanian society, and thus to deprive the public of information pertinent to maintaining and protecting their relatively young freedoms.

It is possible to extend these limitations imposed upon the press in Romania, to the broader population of press systems in post-authoritarian regimes. The following factors could be taken into consideration when evaluating the effectiveness of such mass media infrastructures:

Cultural tendencies contribute to some of the restrictions placed on press systems in post-authoritarian regimes. Following the example of Romania, the very same political party influences that had formally controlled media firms in authoritarian nations in the past can continue to exert significant influences on press coverage in the present day. This trend can go virtually unchecked, arguably because of the cultural tendency to accept such influences as innate and uncontrollable. It is further complicated by the presence of members of the former authoritarian

governmental regime in the now-democratic administrations in such nations.

Therefore, it is appropriate – and critical – to evaluate the cultural factors and habits that might have a role to play in inhibiting the activities of press systems in such societies.

Institutional constraints can also impose significant barriers on the newsgathering and dissemination processes. Many media institutions in post-authoritarian democracies continue to operate in similar fashions as they did in the days of the Soviet Union, with Romania being a prime example. While some changes might have come immediately upon the dissolution of communism in these respective Central and Eastern European nations, some habits have remained the same within news organizations. Assessments of the mass media in such societies must include considerations of what internal, institutional patterns or practices might serve to maintain the repressed nature of the news media during the days of authoritarianism.

Outside influences and pressures also continue to restrict the activities of media systems in post-authoritarian nations, with the oft-weak press industries in the respective countries making individual firms vulnerable to powerful and influential interests applying pressures to drive and control news activities. Therefore, evaluations of such press systems should include assessments of the various political, social and cultural factors that might influence the activities of journalists and perhaps inhibit the successful performance of their duties.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

Conclusions and Implications

A growing body of theory has been developed, over time, to account for the behavior of press systems in democratic states across the globe, and to capture the objectives such systems can have in free societies. These models tend to have roots in western nations, and while they have traditionally been relied upon extensively to evaluate the effectiveness of the mass media, the limits of their applicability are tested in the case of some regions of the world. The nations of Central and Eastern Europe have undergone radical transformations in the past quarter century, with many departing from totalitarian governmental regimes in favor of democratic republics. Progress in achieving these new public structures varies across national boundaries, and the region has encountered its share of challenges in this period of change. What has remained relatively consistent throughout Central and Eastern Europe, however, is a dependence on the news media to support the growth of these emerging democracies – a trend that has drawn the analysis and research of scholars and practitioners alike. In the quest to assess just how effective these systems are in preserving the newfound freedoms of citizens in each respective society, some researchers have called for a new model to evaluate these transitional press systems.

Through an examination of the Romanian news media and the factors that influence its effectiveness in shaping the nation's civil discourse, this study has identified factors that are, in many ways, foreign to the media markets and industries

of the western world. The pervasive political connections to media ownership and leadership, as well as the relative lack of professional association or support for individual journalists, are factors that significantly hamper the ability of reporters and editors to objectively gather news and report such content to their audiences – common tasks of the global press – but these barriers are not accounted for in traditional theories of the news media. While the theories and models of Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini – presented in the landmark publication, *Comparing Media Systems* – provide insight into some of the aspects of the Romanian news media, they fail to fully explain the nature of the press system and its role in the nation’s emerging democracy. Because Romania is not unlike its neighboring countries in the shared struggles of press development in post-communist society, this paper, as several that have come before it, posits that the factors identified in Romania could be applicable in neighboring states that are likewise emerging from totalitarian pasts.

It is critical for both practitioners and researchers seeking to better understand media development and the role of the press in free societies to fully understand the context within which a media system develops and operates. In the case of the nations of Central and Eastern Europe, scholars have grappled with the constraints imposed on such analyses by traditional models and theories of the press derived from studies of western nations. In turn, many have suggested that a new body of theory be developed to better capture the characteristics of press systems in such nations that are, in some ways, unique to the region. The factors identified through the preceding study of the Romanian news media present further evidence that the “one-size-fits-all” approach to studying global press systems that is perpetuated by existing theory falls far short of accounting for the development of the mass media in post-authoritarian regimes. By

incorporating these factors into a new model for evaluating transitional press systems, researchers and practitioners can work towards developing a more effective means with which to analyze the performance of these media systems, and to better understand the complex role they play in shaping and supporting the growth of democracy in post-communist society.

Limitations

It is worthwhile to include a discussion here about the various limitations of this study. First, it should be noted that the relatively small size of the sample relied upon for the findings presented in previous chapters restricts the ability of this study's conclusions to be generalized to the broader journalism industry in Romania, or for that matter, the Central and Eastern European region. The intent of the present work has been to evaluate traditional models of journalism theory using insights gained from a small case study of the Romanian media, in order to determine if there are characteristics of Central and Eastern European media systems that make the application of traditional models a difficult task. In short, this was found to be the case: more traditional, primarily western models and theories of journalism and press functions fail to take into account some rather pervasive trends that are present in media systems in parts of Central and Eastern Europe. The preceding chapter outlines a selection of factors which, based upon the case study of the Romanian press, could be taken into consideration in devising a model that could more accurately capture and account for the activities of media systems in post-authoritarian regimes. However, this list is presented neither as a complete accounting of vital factors nor a universal set of standards.

This study was also limited by cost considerations, which restricted the case study to two rounds of interviews in the city of Cluj-Napoca and Cluj County, Romania. The cost of traveling to Romania to conduct field research can be prohibitive with a limited research budget, and so interviews were conducted in conjunction with teaching and consulting engagements in the city that provided support for airfare and lodging. This also limited the scope of the study to the greater Cluj County area. While this served to limit the study to assemble a more realistic and attainable case study – isolating interviews to a single major city, rather than attempting to conduct interviews in cities and towns across the entire country – also limits the generalizability of its findings and conclusions.

The foreign nature of the very topic of study also presented inherent challenges related to cultural traditions and language boundaries. Both factors were addressed through a partnership with a Romanian graduate student – the other member of the study’s research team. This individual assisted in coordinating interviews and translating during interview sessions in cases in which respondents preferred to have the discussion conducted in the Romanian language. The graduate student also provided insight into various cultural norms and barriers related to such an inquiry. It is worth including here another mention of the study’s greatest obstacle – asking sensitive questions to a population that, save for the past quarter century, was accustomed to a lifestyle in an authoritarian state. Many respondents were wary about answering questions in the semi-structured interviews, and others were careful to meet with members of the research team in locations outside of their professional sphere. Many potential respondents did not respond to requests for interviews or declined to participate in the study altogether, presenting perhaps further evidence of these

concerns. This presented the aforementioned difficulty in pursuing traditional research protocol related to obtaining written consent from interview subjects – something they would simply not be willing to do in most cases because such a document would create a paper trail linking them to the content of this report and subsequent published works on the topic drawn from this study. It is precisely this reasoning that required assurances of confidentiality and the careful protection of identities in the preceding discussions of interview results. This study represents one of the first studies on the topic utilizing semi-structured interviews to gain insight into the Romanian press – at least according to this study’s review of previous literature – and it could be argued that, if not for these safeguards, this paper could not have been written.

Directions for Future Research

Future studies on this topic could benefit from an expanded scope, perhaps in Cluj County itself or even beyond the county’s borders. Including a wider range of respondents could increase the number of insights yielded in such a research study, while also considering expanding the types of respondents could provide additional perspectives not represented in the current treatment. This could include interviews with consumers of news, who might have opinions about the quality of news coverage that could prove useful. Including media outlets and public officials in the nation’s capital, Bucharest, could also yield enriched results – especially as respondents in Cluj-Napoca noted differences between the media performance among outlets in Cluj and counterparts in Bucharest.

Finally, the case study could be expanded to include other nations in Central and Eastern Europe. The present study was confined to Romania for a number of reasons, with resources and access to respondents being primary factors that were

taken into consideration when shaping this research. However, previous literature suggests notable differences among nations in the region, which could be accounted for in studies that encompass a number of cultures and countries. Such a study would also provide the opportunity for comparisons to be drawn between the nations of the region, allowing for conclusions not only about media systems in post-authoritarian regimes, but also for comparisons among countries of how individual cultures and societies fared the shift towards democracy in terms of press systems and structures.

Moving Towards a Model to Explain Transitional Press Systems

Given the indications drawn from existing literature and the findings of the present inquiry, it is worth briefly exploring elements that would characterize a model aimed at accounting for the complexities of transitional media systems. Such a model would consider cultural tendencies that could impede the performance of journalists – in a post-authoritarian context, this would encompass the disincentives to challenge authority or practice that could be present at the societal level, and thus, by extension, in various news outlets as well. Such considerations would account for the culture of acceptance that might exist among the general public as well. Several respondents in the current study indicated that relatively little has changed in some aspects of Romanian society, and so a body of theory aimed towards explaining such systems would have to consider such parallels between the communist-era practices and the present day status in various aspects of daily life.

Such a model should also include factors that capture the impact of institutional constraints on the effectiveness of media organizations. Similar to the abovementioned cultural tendencies, it was made clear by several respondents that some newsroom structures have remained largely unchanged despite the governmental

shift, notably in the relative lack of support provided to individual reporters in their job performance. When reporters are not provided institutional support, content can suffer – particularly in cases when a reporter is hesitant to engage in an investigation due to lack of newsroom protection against external threats or claims. Therefore, a transitional media model would have to account for levels of institutional structure and support and the relation to general performance among journalists.

Finally, a model would require some consideration of the presence and pervasiveness of influences and pressures imposed upon reporters and news organizations from outside the confines of a media firm. Such factors have proven to be detrimental to press freedom and journalist performance in Romania, and should be encompassed by such a model. Because of the relative lack of organization among media firms in some post-authoritarian societies, individual media outlets can be left vulnerable to controls or influences from powerful and wealthy interests seeking to take advantage of the existing media platform and its audience as means to their own ends.

In sum, a model that would effectively account for the intricacies of press systems in post-authoritarian democracies would have to encompass some elements of a number of existing theories, and work to capture the abovementioned factors that have been shown to have an influence on press performance and effectiveness in such societies.

Concluding Remarks

Whether derived from the tremendous potential for sharing information and shaping thoughts, or the unique expectations imposed in the context of a democratic state – or perhaps a combination of the two – it is clear that press systems have played,

and will likely continue to play, a critical role in the development of post-authoritarian societies. Such a role presents the possibility of significant implications both for the health and security of democracy in these nations, as media organizations work to inform audiences and hold the powerful accountable. The various impediments and occurrences of the first quarter century following the widespread demise of communism as the dominant political ideology in the nations of Central and Eastern Europe have made the topic one worthy of scholarly inquiry and debate. And if the first period of development of these relatively young media systems is any indication, academic and professional interest in the matter is not likely to perish from the pages of books or journals in the next quarter century.

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Appendix
SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Legend

- Questions that were added for clarity for the second round of interviews are indicated in boldface, italicized font. (*Example*)
- Questions that were removed from the survey instruments for the second round of interviews are indicated in font with a single strikethrough. (Example)

Question Set 1 – Journalists; Former Journalists and Media Researchers

1. How long have you been a journalist?
2. Do you have a specific beat? If so, what is it, and how long have you been assigned to this beat?
3. What types of stories do you typically cover?
4. *Does your job involve speaking with, or interacting with, public officials – both elected and appointed?*
5. Do you routinely work with public officials to obtain information for stories?
6. How easy is it for you to access public officials?
7. How willing are elected officials to talk to you? Could this be improved? If so, how?
8. How willing are appointed government officials to talk to you? Can this be improved? If so, how?

9. How willing are these officials to talk to you?
 1. County Council President Marius Nicoara
 2. County Council President Alin Tise
 3. County Council President Hore Uioreanu
 4. Mayor Emil Boc
 5. Former Mayor Sorin Apostu
 6. The prefect Gheorghe Vuscan
10. Do you ever run into trouble getting information from government?
- 11. Has this changed at all in the past year, in your experience?**
12. **Do you find government in Romania to be transparent?** If so, how transparent do you find government to be?
13. Do you believe in the “watchdog” role of journalism? And do you think this is possible to adhere to in Romania?
14. Do you believe that reporters have an obligation to the government? The public? **Please explain.**
15. How are stories selected for writing and publication? Are there political considerations in the editing and story selection/newsgathering processes?
- 16. Has this changed at all in the past year, in your experience?**
- 17. What is the tone of most stories you write?**
18. Are stories you write primarily positive, negative **or neutral?**
19. How do your stories typically portray politicians and appointed governmental officials?
20. Do you feel comfortable pursuing stories that portray officials in a negative light?

21. Do you have political ambitions?
22. Have you had the chance to be a candidate for public office?
23. Have you seen reporters you have worked with transition from journalism to government, or elected office? If so, how common is this, and why do you think it happens?
24. What type of product do you hope to provide to your readers, *listeners or viewers*?
25. Do you have any recommendations as to how the media could better perform in Romania?
26. How “free” is the press in Romania, in your opinion?
27. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Question Set 2 – Elected Officials; Appointed Officials, Spokespersons

1. How long have you been a spokesperson? What positions did you hold prior to your current position?
2. Have you ever worked in the field of journalism?
3. ***Does your job require you to interact with reporters? If so, how often?***
4. Do you talk to reporters in an informal way?
5. Are there any guidelines for when you speak with the media?
6. Are there any political considerations that influence your dealings with the news media?
7. How important is the media in Romanian society?
8. What do you think the media should do?
9. Do you believe the government is transparent, and that reporters have access to public documents, information and processes?
10. ***Has this changed at all in the past year, in your experience?***
11. ***What is the tone of stories written about your agency?*** Are most stories positive or negative?
12. ***What is the primary duty of journalists in Romania?*** Do you think it is important for reporters to inform the public?
13. Do you think the media fulfills its role in Romania?
14. How “free” is the press in Romania?
15. Do you have any recommendations for how the media could function better?
16. Do you believe the media in Romania serves as a watchdog of democracy?
17. Is there anything else you would like to add?