

The Relationship between journalists and PR practitioners in Romania – Somewhere in between co-operation and conflict

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Abstract: One constant idea emerges from all of the studies regarding the relationship between journalists and PR practitioners: this relationship is a complex and ambiguous one. It is quite obvious that both participants aim at holding control over the production and distribution of information; despite this aim, it is certain that none of the two can develop a monopoly over such a process. The inter-dependency between the actors involved in this game is based on the interest in

mutual co-operation showed by each of the participants. This very study stands for the fact that by means of the values they referred to, the Romanian journalists and PR professionals express attitudes that are similar to those of their colleagues from other countries where these two professions have a longer tradition behind.

Keywords: professional culture, journalists, public relations practitioners, professional control

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*La relation entre les journalistes et les professionnels de Relations
Publiques en Roumanie : coopération ou conflit*

Résumé : Une idée constante traverse les études portant sur la relation entre les journalistes et les praticiens de relations publiques : cette relation est complexe et équivoque. D'une part, il est évident que les deux participants envisagent prendre le contrôle de la production et de la distribution de l'information. D'autre part, il est certain que ni les uns, ni les autres ne peuvent avoir un monopole sur un tel processus. L'interdépendance entre les acteurs impliqués dans ce jeu est fondée sur l'intérêt de coopération mutuelle

montrée par chacun des participants. Cette proposition souligne que si on prend en considération les valeurs des deux groups, les journalistes roumains et les professionnels de relations publiques ont des attitudes semblables à celles de leurs collègues d'autres pays (y compris des pays ayant une longue tradition dans ces professions).

Mots-clés : culture professionnelle, journalistes, praticiens de relations publiques, contrôle professionnel

Introduction

One constant idea emerges from all of the studies regarding the relationship between journalists and PR practitioners: this relationship is a complex and ambiguous one. It is quite obvious that both participants aim at holding control over the production and distribution of information; despite this aim, it is certain that none of the two can develop a monopoly over such a process. The inter-dependency between the actors involved in this game is based on the interest in mutual cooperation showed by each of the participants. However, the dependency on one another varies in terms of the available alternatives: a) PR practitioners are less dependent on journalists, if they can connect to other means of communication: letters, posters, brochures, the internet, etc; b) journalists are less dependent on PR practitioners if they are able to find more sources, that is, to get information from elsewhere.

Jean Charon (1991, p. 12) defines the relation between journalists and PR practitioners as based on double sided negotiation: over *the exchange of resources* (journalists are granted access to information, whereas communicators and political leaders, whom they represent, are granted access to the public), and over *the regulations* that rule over these exchanges: "this relation can be defined as an interplay of negotiation between inter-dependent actors; this interplay involves a

relation of influence that alternates co-operation with conflict. (...) Therefore, we may identify two areas of such negotiation: first, the actors negotiate the exchange of resources (information and visibility/exposure), and, second, they negotiate the rules that co-ordinate such exchanges."

In their frequently quoted study, Michael Ryan and David L. Martinson (1988) defined this relation in terms of a love/hate type ("love-hate relation"), stating that this configuration had existed ever since the beginnings of PR practice. On the one hand, journalists assign the role of source to PR practitioners, a source that they most frequently do not check (as regulations of work with traditional sources in information providing journalism require). On the other hand, they do not trust PR practitioners because they think of them as being prone to introducing self-promotion elements inside the messages. The journalists' advantage lies in the fact that they may check the information from parallel sources, but when such sources are not available they entirely depend on PR practitioners. Public Relations practitioners accept the role of information distributors, but at the same time they accuse journalists of publishing incomplete information most frequently, and according to subjective criteria. However, PR practitioners are at one advantage: the competition between press enterprises increases the importance of the news taken over from a press institution, the other ones would take it over so as not to seem less informed. This mechanism offers manifold possibilities of placing the messages and provides certain strategic advantages to PR practitioners. Nevertheless, it is worth remembering that, under the avalanche of messages sent from the numerous existing press offices, the mass media organizations may ignore much of the information disseminated by the PR-ists.

Other research analyses on this topic (Aronoff, 1975, Berkowitz, 1997, Bovet, 1992, Charon et alii, 1991, Cline, 1982, Donsbach, 2005, Lichter et alii, Kopenhaver, Tison, Ryan, 1976, Patterson, 1994, Vasquez, 1996, 1986, Weaver, 1986, Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996, Weaver et alii, 2002) constantly emphasize the fact that the relation between the two professional categories is based on *ambiguity of roles*.

1. An X-ray for a Negative Picture

The reference study on this issue is the one by Craig Aronof in 1975. He did a survey both on a group of journalists and on one of PR practitioners (both of them from Texas) using the same set of questions/questionnaire. The results emphasized both the outspoken negative attitude of journalists towards PR practitioners, and the contradictions and ambiguity that defined each group's representations with regard to one another.

Thus:

- 59% of the journalists agreed that “the PR and the press are partners in disseminating information”; the same opinion being shared by 89% of the PR practitioners;
- on the contrary, 72% of the journalists disagree to the fact that “PR is equal in terms of status to journalism”; however, 72% of the PR practitioners agree with the statement;
- 48% of the journalists support the idea that “PR practitioners assist the press in getting complete, realistic information in due time”; 91% of the PR practitioners confirming the idea;
- 84% of the journalists deem that “the materials that come from PR practitioners is advertising disguised into news”, whereas only 29% of the PR practitioners agree with this fact;
- 78% of the journalists feel that “PR practitioners quite often try to cheat on the press with pseudo-events and false statements”; whilst only 42% of the PR practitioners adhere to this idea;
- 89% of the journalists supported the idea that “PR practitioners do not understand some of the journalism issues like drawing the interest of readership, submitting materials on time or optimal using of the space to fit in”; only 38% of the PR practitioners adhere to this opinion.

Within the same study, C. Aronoff asked both journalists and PR practitioners to place the six most important characteristics of news in a hierarchy. Both categories deemed that “accuracy” and “interest in the readership” were the most important characteristics. Nonetheless, when Aronoff asked the two groups to present the same kind of hierarchy from the point of view of the other professional group, he noticed that PR practitioners held that the same two values were most important for journalists, whereas journalists stated that these two values were least important for PR practitioners and that they would place “presentation of the subject from a favorable viewpoint”, and “quick publishing of the topic” on top of the hierarchy.

Commenting on this research findings, Baskin and Aronoff (1992, p. 206) argue that journalists are willing to admit to their dependency on PR (as a source of information), but at the same time they disagree to what is considered to be standard procedure of PR practice. What is more, journalists see PR practitioners as being very different (even opposite in terms of their attitude towards the news), and as being persons who attempt at manipulating the press.

In 1984, Lilian L. Kopenhaver, David L. Martinson and Michael Ryan took up the majority of the questions in Craig Aronoff’s questionnaire and surveyed 101 editors from various publications in Florida, and 100 PR practitioners from the same state.

The survey results confirmed almost identically the data that C. Aronoff had gathered. In the conclusion to their article, the researchers above stated: "If journalists erroneously perceive the PR practitioners' attitude towards the news, this could seriously amend the process of news broadcasting. A journalist who would not use information from a public relations person just because he does not trust PR practitioners, would miss interesting news. A PR practitioner who would notice that he/she cannot rely on journalists' trust just because he/she works in PR, would encounter difficulties in his/her activity and would be tempted to use unethical means in order to promote some messages. None of these situations works for either the press, the PR, or the entire society" (1984, p. 884).

In their turn, Michael Ryan and David L. Martison (1988) tried to identify the causes that brought about the negative picturing of PR practitioners among the press people. The researchers surveyed a random sample of 200 PR practitioners, selected from the *Public Relation Society of America* membership list. At the end of the survey they received 118 filled out questionnaire forms (59% of the initial sample). Gathering more data from the readings in the field, Ryan and Martison focused their research on the following issues/questions:

- what are the reasons (from the PR practitioners' viewpoint) why many journalists dislike PR?
- what is the extent to which PR practitioners feel responsible for the negative attitude of journalists towards them?
- in the opinion of PR people, what is the extent to which the negative appreciation from journalists is justified?
- what is the extent to which the journalists' individual opinion about PR practitioners, matches the general attitude of journalists towards PR?

Answering to the first question, 90% of the PR practitioners declared that the negative attitude of journalists mostly emerges from the negative experiences of unprofessional or ineffective PR practitioners.

Another cause invoked in 30 % of the answers, was the conviction of journalists that their work was more important to society than the PR-ists' one. More than 50 % of the PR practitioners also indicated another possible reason for their negative picturing among the journalists: the feeling of being "used" by the PR practitioners, that journalists have. Less than 50 % of the interviewees related this picturing to the way journalists are trained at colleges in the field, and to the intense media coverage of cases when PR practitioners adopted an un-ethical behavior.

In terms of the second question, more than 65 % of the professionals deem that the field of PR is responsible itself for the negative opinion of journalists. Thus, more than 80 % argue that public relations did not succeed in taking control over the selection (accession, evolvment, and exclusion) of its members, being unable to

eliminate “the rotten apple” which led to creating a bad reputation to the field. What juts out, even if they do not say it explicitly, is that these representatives of PR feel that the pre-professional stage of organizing this activity is to blame for the lack of success that journalists pinned on it.

Moreover, 75 % of the PR practitioners consider themselves to blame for not having succeeded in training journalists so as to offer the exact co-ordinates to their profession. Last but not least, 66 % have confirmed that the error is rooted in the fact that many persons who work in PR are not concerned enough of the journalists’ needs and cannot offer clear, precise, exact information.

The PR practitioners indicated for the third question that the journalists’ negative opinion are, to a large extent, not justified by facts, by the way the dialog between the two professional groups is developed. The PR practitioners claim that the few cases of on the job clumsiness, which got intense media coverage, are not typical, and that journalists should not generalize. More than 95 % agreed that those who generalize on the few sensational cases are not honest, and bring un-merited blame on the PR practitioners’ guild.

At the fourth question, the PR practitioners answered that the individual’s personality and behavior are important in shaping the journalists’ opinion about PR practitioners. All the interviewees agreed that the journalists’ perception of the PR practitioners whom they know and often get into contact with is far much better than the one regarding PR in general.

At the end of their study, Ryan and Mortison reached the conclusion that the resentment that many journalists feel towards PR is deeply rooted into journalism culture, and that the gap between the two professional areas influences their communication process. Synthesizing their research findings, the two authors deem that an in-depth analysis of the relationship between journalists and PR practitioners, and the exact identifying of the reasons why journalists have a negative perception of PR practitioners, would mean an important footstep towards eliminating such prejudices.

2. The PR Practitioners’ Picturing by Romanian Journalists

We performed surveys based on Aronoff’s already classical questionnaires on press and PR representatives for the research regarding the two professional categories in Romania, in 1997, 1999, 2003 and 2009¹. Our questionnaire is an

¹ I would like to thank my former students Elyante Parichi, Vasilica Slabu, Luminița Amoșei, Anca Teodorescu and Elena Prodan for helping my in applying the survey to journalist and PR practitioners

adapted version of the ones used by the above mentioned American researchers, actually adapted to the Romanian specific system of communication with the press (we have not used all of the questions in the original surveys, because some of them were not relevant for the Romanian specific background).

We made up lists of journalists who would frequently get into contact with press offices (working for the political, economical and social departments of media institutions), by means of preliminary discussions with public relations practitioners in the public departments.

We could not perform proper sampling of journalists, because there are no strict law provisions, trade unions, or unified professional associations for journalists; no institution is able to provide exact data regarding the numbers and socio-demographic structure of Romanian journalists. In addition, the Romanian press is characterized by significant turn-over rate which makes any statistical data basis regarding the structure of this professional group rather impossible. This high turn-over rate is obvious both in the overall system (journalists migrate from a newsroom to another), and within the press institutions (journalists are moved from one department to another).

An average of 150 questionnaire forms were sent within each survey; 40 print press journalists from the most important national dailies (*Adevărul, Cotidianul, Curierul Național, Evenimentul zilei, Libertatea, România Liberă, Ziua*) answered in 1997 survey; 59 journalists from print press and audio-visual outlets were surveyed in 1999: they worked for the *Adevărul, Azi, Cotidianul, Curierul Național, Curentul, Jurnalul Național, Național și România Liberă* newspapers, and for the *Radio Romania Actualități, Radio Total, Radio PRO FM, TVR-1, Antena, Prima TV* stations. The 2003 survey was answered to by 40 journalists from the newspapers and stations we have already mentioned above. In 2009 we received 100 answers from journalists from national and local media: *Adevarul, adplayers.ro, Azi, Campaign, Cotidianul, Click, Evenimentul Zilei, Glasul Maramuresului, Gazeta de Olt, Gândul, Info Pro, Jurnalul National, Libertatea, Mediafax, Monitorul de Alba, Monitorul de Sibiu, News IN, paginamedia.ro, PRO TV Magazin, Radio Guerilla, Radio Gold FM, Realitatea Tv Romania Libera, Star, Story, TV Mania, Telegraf Online, Ziua de Cluj, Ziua*.

2.1. Survey Findings

Consequent to data gathering we obtained the following distribution of answers to relevant questions for our issues at stake:

- 1) What is your attitude towards spokespersons

	1997	1999	2003	2009
Positive	19%	26%	32.5%	67%
Negative	34%	19%	10%	2%
Neutral	47%	55%	57.5%	31%

Table 1: *What is your attitude towards spokespersons?*

2) Which of the following spokesperson's job description issues seem essential in your opinion? (more alternatives were available)

	1997	1999	2003	2009
To set good co-operation with the press?	89%	69%	65.5%	79%
To meet the information-gathering needs of journalists?	75%	77%	85%	76%
To counsel the organization management?	61%	55%	75%	38%

Table 2: *Which of the following spokesperson's job description issues seem essential in your opinion?*

3) According to your experience, how many of the spokespersons meet the requirements above?

	1997	1999	2003	2009
....%	12%	28%	41,7%	51,78%

Table 3: *According to your experience, how many of the spokespersons meet the requirements above?*

4) Do you think that the relationship between journalists and spokespersons is a co-operation one?

	1997	1999	2003	2009
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Yes	45%	54%	65%	74%
No	50%	42%	25%	26%
I don't know	5%	4%	10%	0%

Table 4: *Do you think that the relationship between journalists and spokespersons is a co-operation one?*

5) Do you think that the relationship between journalists and spokespersons is a conflict one?

	1997	1999	2003	2009
Yes	72%	20%	27.5%	4%
No	25%	72%	62.5%	95%
I don't know	3%	8%	10%	1%

Table 5: *Do you think that the relationship between journalists and spokespersons is a conflict one?*

6) Do you think that spokespersons manipulate the press?

	1997	1999	2003	2009
Yes	61%	47%	40%	77%
No	22%	42%	52.5%	15%
I don't know	17%	11%	7.5%	8%

Table 6: *Do you think that spokespersons manipulate the press?*

7) Do you think that spokespersons are a credible source?

	1997	1999	2003	2009
Yes	33%	52%	65%	41%
No	56%	35%	25%	32%

I don't know	11%	13%	10%	27%
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Table 7: *Do you think that spokespersons are a credible source?*

8) Do the press offices that you work for inform you well enough?

	1997	1999	2003	2009
Yes	50%	3%	10%	1%
No	34%	59%	65%	74%
I don't know	16%	38%	25%	25%

Table 8: *Do the press offices that you work for inform you well enough?*

9) Do you think that in time of crisis, there is information that organizations would not divulge?

	1997	1999	2003	2009
Yes	100%	98%	100%	98%
No	0%	0%	0%	1%
I don't know	0%	2%	0%	1%

Table 9: *Do you think that in time of crisis, there is information that organizations would not divulge?*

2.2. Data Interpretation

The journalists' answers abound in contradictions, but, all in all, they seem to indicate, throughout the 7 years, a change from a generally negative attitude towards the PR practitioners towards a more balanced and more positive one. This shows that the de-professionalization process that is obvious both for PR and for journalism leads to a better understanding of the job requirements and responsibilities of each of the two professional categories.

The negative attitude towards PR practitioners decreased at a spectacular rate from 47% to 2%, and the positive one increased from 19% to 67%.

Though most of the journalists tend to adopt either a neutral or a positive attitude towards the PR practitioners, a large deal of them feel that they manipulate the press (61% în 1997, 47% în 1999 și 40% în 2003, 77% in 2009) and that there is a conflict relationship between one another.

However, the latter aspect pins the significant difference between the attitude in 1997, when 72% claimed the conflicting character of the relationship, and the one in 2003, when only 27% claimed the same.

The number of those who claim that the relation with spokespersons is a co-operation one has increased significantly within this time interval (45% in 1997, 54% in 1999, 65% in 2003, 74% in 2009); nevertheless, the surveyed journalists are totally convinced that in times of crisis the spokespersons do not offer them the necessary information (100% in 1997, 98% in 1999, 100% in 2003, 98% in 2009) – which means that they deem that their partner does not abide by the rules of honest co-operation.

The majority of the journalists say that PR practitioners should have the mission to set a good communication relationship with the press (89% in 1997, 69% in 1999, 65.5% in 2003, 79% in 2009), and to meet the journalists' information needs (75% in 1997, 77% in 1999, 85% in 2003, 76% in 2009). Relating these attitudes to an increase in positive evaluation, the explanation that emerges has to do with the growing flow of information and of the quality of the materials that the PR practitioners hand out to the press. It is quite possible that this has contributed to the sensitizing of journalists and to a change in the perception of the activity of PR practitioners. Another explanation lies in the fact that the journalists who are sent to appointments with PR practitioners are young people most of them, and quite very many graduated from the college of journalism, and owing to the knowledge in the field that they acquired in university, they are aware of the basic concepts that may make them better understand and appreciate the role played and the activity of PR practitioners.

Though the number of journalists who claim that spokespersons are a credible source is increasing in the time interval we surveyed (33% in 1997, 52% in 1999, 65% in 2003), but strangely decreased for 2009: only 41% support this idea. The rate of those who declared they got good information from them is quite fluctuant: in 1997, 50% answered 'yes', in 1999 only 3%, in 2003 only 10%, and in 2009 only 1%! Weak information from PR practitioners was blamed by 34% of the journalists in 1997, 59% in 1999, and 65% in 2003, 74% in 2009. This change stands for the fact that journalists question the competencies of spokespersons and they consider them to be biased in serving the interests of the organization they work for, and incapable to offer (even when they have it) all the information that the press wishes to get (56% of the journalists in 1997, 35% in 1999, 25% in 2003, 32% in 2009 do

not consider the spokespersons a credible source of information. What should not be forgotten is that the period we studied was full of numerous crises (political, banking, industrial, social, international, etc) when journalists could only manage to get the craved information only partially from the press communication department representatives: and this experience reinforced their conviction (strongly coined within the ideology of the guild, anyway) that PR practitioners do not give out the required information in times of crisis.

The number of journalists who declare that the relationship with the spokespersons is a conflict-based one, has decreased from 72% in 1997 to 4% in 2009; however, 45% (1997), 54% (1999), 62.5% (2003) and 74% (2009) claim the opposite idea, stating that this relationship is based on co-operation; it is obvious that the journalists show ambiguous attitudes, probably brought about by the quality of their personal record of experiences in relating to PR professionals.

Although they hold a rather neutral or even positive attitude towards spokespersons, and though they deem they are well or partially informed by the press offices, the majority of the journalists claim that the PR professionals do not meet their job requirements (only 13 % in 1997, but 28 % in 1999, 41 % in 2003 and 52% in 2009) according to the ideal pattern, also described/defined by journalists (question number 2).

3. The Image of Journalists across the PR Professionals' Social Environment

3.1. Presentation of answers to the questionnaires

In order to coin the opinion of spokespersons on their relationship with the press, generally speaking, and with the journalists that they particularly co-operate with, we identified the most important departments of communication at the government, presidency, and in public administration; because of the low rate of public communication activities in private firms (and, implicitly, low number of specialized offices) no questionnaires have been sent to the very few employees in the field. We processed 40 questionnaires for professionals in the field in 1997; 54 questionnaires were handed out to the same kind of PR professionals and were returned correctly filled out. In 2003 we received questionnaires filled in by 40 PR professionals from public institutions; in 2009 we got 100 questionnaires. The answering rate varied from approximately 1 to 5 to 1 to 2 (200 questionnaires were sent each time).

Our research was hindered by the fact that we do not have a data basis available that would offer information regarding the PR professionals or the existing press departments or offices. Therefore, we cannot claim that the study was focused on a representative sample. However, we deem that we have picked institutions that develop an intense communication activity with the press, and with well-known professionals, so that the data we obtained be most relevant.

1) Please assess the quality of the communication of your organization with the press.

	1997	1999	2003	2009
Unsatisfactory	5%	0%	0%	6%
Satisfactory	25%	33%	12,5%	29%
Good	40%	40%	67,5%	41%
Very good	30%	24% (3% no answer)	20%	24%

Table 9: *Quality of the communication of your organization with the press*

2) How would you define the relationship developed by your organization press office with the mass media?

	1997	1999	2003	2009
Co-operative	75%	75%	90%	52%
Neutral	20%	16%	10%	45%
Other	5%	9%	0%	3% (conflictual)

Table 10: *The relationship developed by your organization press office with the mass media*

3) To what extent do you think that the PR practitioners depend on the mass media?

	1997	1999	2003	2009
To a very large extent	40%	40%	50%	29%
To a large extent	45%	48%	50%	64%
To a small extent	15%	3% (9% no answer)	0%	7%

Table 11: PR practitioners dependences on the mass media

4) To what extent do you think that the journalists depend on the PR practitioners?

	1997	1999	2003	2009
To a very large extent	45%	29%	40%	9%
To a large extent	50%	55%	52,5%	71%
To a small extent	5%	11% (5% neutral)	7,5%	20%

Table 12: Journalists dependence on the PR practitioners

5) What do you expect from journalists for good co-operation?

- 1997 - 25% professionalism; 25% accurate information; 15% comprehension on the specifics of PR work; 12% objectivity; 22% human qualities like openness, patience, honesty, common sense, etc.
- 1999 – 33% ethical conduct; 24% accurate presentation of the facts; 20% objectivity; 18% knowledge of the specifics of PR activities; 16% knowledge of the specifics of PR work; 16% professionalism.
- 2003 – 40% seriousness; 22,5% fair-play; 17,5% fairness; 15% professionalism; 12,5% accurate rendering of the received information; 12,5% more understanding; 10% competency; 10% to respond to invitations from PR practitioners; 7,5% honesty.
- 2009: 43%- professionalism and objectivity; 17% - respect for an ethical code; 17% - understanding the PR practitioner work; 20% - responsibility and fairness.

6) What would you blame journalists for?

- 1997 - 30% lack of professionalism (weak training in the field); 50% being after the sensational; 10% political bias; 10% twisted interpretation of some news, and proneness to speculative approaches;

- 1999 – 37% lack of professionalism; 18% lack of ethics; 14% being after the sensational; 14% lack of trust in PR; 9% being unfair; 10% - lack of knowledge about PR work specifics;
- 2003 – 37,5% emphasis on the sensational; 32,5% using unchecked information; 20% subjectivism; 20% nothing; 12,5% lack of consistency; 7,5% unbalanced information presentation; 5% distorting information.
- 2009: - 29% tabloidization; 30% the lack of professionalism; 46% ethical misconduct; 35% the lack of trust in PR.

7) What is the key to gaining credibility in the eyes of professionals?

- 1997 - 75% open and honest conduct, transparency; 10% professionalism; 10% ability to persuade, conciseness; 5% never lie.
- 1999 - 33% provide accurate information; 24% prompt broadcasting of information; 18% competency; 18% honesty; 18% good relations with journalists;
- 2003 – 73% seriousness and honesty; 30% provide accurate information; 12% fairness in giving out information; 15% prompt offering of information.
- 2009: - 39% professionalism; 21% fairness, 13% decency, 39% transparency, sincerity, rapid answers to journalist demands, 7% pragmatism.

8) What are the reasons why some journalists do not trust PR practitioners, in your opinion?

- 1997 - 45% their proneness towards positive presentation of facts; 20% insufficient knowledge by journalists of the field of PR and of the specifics of spokespeople's activity; 10% fear of getting manipulated; 10% lack of a common type of language; 5% preferential treatment offered to journalists.
- 1999 – 22% blocking communication; 16% insufficient knowledge by journalists of the field of PR and of the specifics of spokespeople's activity; 11% fear of getting manipulated; 11% lack of professionalism from the PR practitioners part; 9% lack of transparency; 7% distrust in the PR; 5% distrust in the official information.
- 2003 – 52% lack of professionalism from the PR practitioners part (lack of promptness, providing information preferentially, lack of kindness, etc); 30% prejudice that PR practitioners only present information that is favorable to the institution that they represent; 20% journalists trust PR practitioners; 10% lack of specialized culture from the part of journalists who do not know the specifics of PR work.
- 2009: 44% - the lack of professionalism of some PR practitioners; 15% - the ethical misconduct of PR practitioners; 28% - journalists do not know, nor understand, the specificity of public relations activities; 15% - journalists' fear of being manipulated.

9) Have you ever felt guilty when you noticed the fact that the organization that you represent does not gain the trust of journalists?

	1997	1999	2003	2009
Yes.	50%	35%	10%	12%
No.	45%	52%	90%	88%
No answer	5%	13%	0%	0%

Table 13: *Guiltiness when the organization that you represent does not gain the trust of journalists*

- Among the reasons/causes: failure in holding good communication with the press because of lack of time and abilities; lack of transparency; promoting a false image of the institution; lack of professionalism from the part of journalists; inadvertence in the versions presented by the PR department; insufficient preparation of promotion strategies)

10) Do you think that journalists are supportive in conveying the message to the public or hinder your work by distorting the message?

	1997	1999	2003	2009
Supportive in conveying the message to the public	65%	98%	100%	100%
Hinder our work by distorting the message	28% (7% no answer)	2%	0%	0%

Table 14: *Journalists support in conveying the message to the public*

3.2. Data Interpretation

It may be inferred from the PR practitioners' answers that the relationship with the press improved sensibly throughout the six years: the majority deem that the organization that they represent holds good and very good relations with the press (40% and 30% in 1997, and 40% and 24% in 1999, 67,5%, 20% in 2003); but in 2009 only 24% believe they have a very good relation and only 41 sustain that they have a good relation with the press. Moreover, the majority define the relations between the press office of the organization that they represent and the mass media as being co-operative (75% in 1997, and 1999, 90% in 2003, 52% in 2009), and leave aside the possibility of any conflict relations. Therein, we may infer that there

should be a trust and co-operation environment/atmosphere in between journalists and PR practitioners.

Difficulties surge when PR practitioners have to define the values and the means to attain such objectives. The answers to open questions offer a great variety of terms that we made great efforts to quantify into a coherent inventory of key words. Quite often these terms partially overlap (professionalism in journalism involves objectivity and accurate presentation of facts – see question no. 5). Moreover, ever since 1997 and up to 2009, new terms and new values emerged, that reached over the journalists' manner of reasoning which makes data comparison and assessment. The majority of those who were interviewed claim that this relationship of trust should be based on: honest conduct (75% in 1997, 72% in 2003, but 39% in 2009!), professionalism or competency (10% in 1997, 18% in 1999, 39% in 2009), quality in conveying information (10% in 1997, 33% in 1999, 30% in 2003). Nevertheless, PR practitioners are aware of the fact that their prestige is tampered with by: insufficient knowledge by journalists of the specifics of PR work (20% in 1997, 16% in 1999, 10% in 2003, 28% in 2009), fear of getting manipulated (10% in 1997, and 11% in 1999, 15% in 2009), as well as the conviction of journalists that PR practitioners only present the good sides of the activity in their organization (45% in 1997, and 30% in 2003), blocking communication (22% in 1999), lack of a common type of language (10% in 1997), lack of professionalism from the part of PR practitioners (11% in 1999, 52% in 2003 and 44% in 2009).

The majority of the values that were mentioned stand for elementary flaws of PR work; the fact that PR practitioners are aware of them is positive. On the other hand, their lacking of the ability to correct flaws that they can define clear enough, can only stun us. What is more, PR practitioners who admit to their own blame for failure to communicate with press, place first herein semi-professionalism, ineffective communication within the organization, difficulty in building a climate of trust in relating to the press. This self-assessment raises the issue of questioning their ability to counsel their managers effectively, and to persuade them to allow conveying of accurate, not tampered with information. PR practitioners are aware of the importance of the press in attaining the communication objectives that they strive for. Thus, 95% (in 1997), 88% (in 1999), 100% (in 2003) and 93% (2009) deem that PR professionals depend to a *very large*, and *large* extent to the activity of the press. Anyway, we admit to the fact that PR practitioners also claim that journalists depend on their work, as well (95% to a large and very large extent, in 1997, 84% to a large and very large extent, in 1999, 100% to a large and very large extent, in 2003, 80% to a large and very large extent, in 2009). They also claim that journalists support them in conveying the messages (65% in 1997, 98% in 1999, 100% in 2003 and 2009). However, often they simultaneously admit to the fact that journalists can distort messages.

From the answers that were given we may infer that the PR professionals know that they depend on the quality of the journalism activity, and they consequently feel more vulnerable. This is why they feel that the blame should rather be put more on the conduct of journalists, and less on their own failing to accomplish targets – which could account for the raising number (45% in 1997, 52% in 1999, and 90% in 2003) of those who declare that they do not feel guilty for the fact that the organization that they represent does not cherish the journalists' trust. PR practitioners reproach journalists their lack of professionalism (30% in 1997, and 37% in 1999, 46% in 2009), looking for the sensational (50% in 1997, 37,5% in 2003 and 29% in 2009), lack of accuracy and subjectivism (10% in 1997, 9% in 1999, 20% in 2003), as well as their lack of ethics (18% in 1999, 7,5% in 2003 and 35% in 2009), etc. These reproaches are the negative correspondents of the values that PR professionals would like to encounter in the conduct of journalists: the ability to convey information accurately (25% in 1997, 24% in 1999, 12,5 % in 2003, 43% in 2009), objectivity (12% in 1997, 20% in 1999, 17,5% in 2003), professionalism (25% in 1997, 16% in 1999, and 15% in 2003), comprehending the specifics of PR work (15% in 1997 and 16% in 1999), etc. By correlating the two sets of data we may infer that PR professionals believe that journalists do not lead a professional conduct, that the latter do not take up and then give out the provided information objectively. They distort the information to make it match the sensational pattern of news that they have on their mind.

Consequently, it is obvious that it is very hard for a relation of co-operation based on trust to be developed because the PR practitioners feel betrayed by the way that journalists “process” and alter the information received from the departments of communication with the press. This brings about a situation of uncertainty (regarding the effectiveness of the act of communication with the specific publics by means of the mass media).

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