

EXPLORING THE EVOLUTION OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN POST-COMMUNIST ROMANIAN BOOK PUBLISHING INDUSTRY: A HISTORICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

There is little scholarly research on the history of public relations in Post-Communist Romania with few exceptions. (Dolea, 2012; Rogojinaru, 2009, 2014) This study aims to fill the gap and explore the historical reconstruction public relations' development and role in the book publishing industry. This particular industry was chosen as it is considered emblematic for the effects of the Communist regime on a society: lowest book consumption in Europe with 1 book per capita per year (Barbu, 2015), almost half of the population has not read even a book during an entire year (Eurobarometer Cultural access and participation, 2013), while almost 40% of Romanian high school students have difficulties in reading and understanding a text for the first time (Programme for International Students Assessment, 2012). Building on social construction theory (Berger & Luckmann, 1966/2008) and, methodologically, on the historical sociology approach (L'Etang, 2004, 2014), this study explores the intertwined relations between different actors, practices and structures of public relations in an industry which aims to increase book consumption and reading habits. Moreover, it places these intertwined relationships within a historical context, tracing the evolutions of public relations in book publishing industry during a quarter of a century. This exploratory study shows how the industry itself witnessed a rebirth after decades of Communism, censorship and control. Consequently, public relations has followed a late and slow process of institutionalization and professionalization: the role of public relations has been largely technical, supporting marketing and sales through events management and editing press materials; it is after 2010 that the strategic, managerial role of public relations has started to be slowly understood, initially by (some) practitioners themselves, then by (some) directors of top publishing houses. Public relations is still in a legitimization phase aiming for recognition, professionalization and a greater role both within their organizations and within society. Moreover, if public relations practitioners would understand and assume a social role (focusing on public interest), they could influence, through public communication campaigns, public policies to address functional illiteracy; ultimately, these would be beneficial for both the book industry and their own organizations.

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**FILLING THE GAPS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS SCHOLARSHIP:
THE NEED FOR HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY**

During the last decades, there has been a growing preoccupation among public relations scholars to go beyond defining public relations and delimitating from related fields, to analyzing in-depth how it is practiced around the globe and what specializations have emerged with the development of the profession and of the field. This leads to a multi-level approach on the study of public relations: on the one hand there is a line of research on analyzing the specializations of public relations, that generated the emergence of other areas such as internal communication and public relations, corporate communication, crisis communication, health public relations or government public relations, etc. (e.g. Moss, Verčič & Warnaby, 2000; Tench & Yeomans, 2006); on the other hand, there is a line of research on how public relations are understood and practiced in different parts of the world (national/domestic vs. international/global), generating the country focused case studies (e.g. Zerfass, van Ruler & Sriramesh, 2008).

Initially, both lines of research were dominated by the functional paradigm aiming to answer the “Effectiveness Question” (why and to what extent public relations increases organizational effectiveness) and the “Excellence Question” (how public relations must be organized and managed in order to be able to make their contribution to organizational effectiveness). These questions were fundamental in developing the Excellence theory (Grunig, 1992), the dominant theory in public relations in the 1990s.

As the body of scholarship increased, scholars have begun to focus on developing common conceptual frameworks to engage in cross-national comparisons and international studies. It is the case of Krishnamurthy and Verčič, for example, who edited the first Global Public Relations Handbook and pointed out “there is also a dire need to extend our analyses of public relations in different regions by going beyond a couple of conceptual or theoretical underpinnings and also exploring how contextual variables external to the organization (such as culture, political system, economic system, and media system) influence public relations activities in various parts of the world.” (2003, p. XXVII)

In fact, such studies that take into account the contexts of public relations are paving the way for the wider socio-cultural turn coagulating in the last decade in public relations. (Bentele, 2008; Bentele & Wehmeier 2007, 2008; Edwards 2011, 2014; Ihlen & van Ruler, 2007, 2009; Ihlen & Verhoeven, 2009; L’Etang, 1996,

2005, 2009; McKie & Munshi, 2009; Moloney, 2006) Public relations is thus analyzed in the context of the promotional culture(s) (Wernick, 1991; Devis, 2013) that have spread as a consequence of globalization to serve the organizations' interests to compete on the neo-liberal market. Inspired by Critical Theory, critical scholars in public relations discuss also about *public space* and *public sphere* and not only about *market*, about *effects* and *impact* of public relations practices and not only about improving the process itself, more about *power issues* and various actors and less about *the power of a single, privileged actor*. (Dolea, 2015) In other words, they bring forward alternative discourses to complement the dominant managerial discourse in the greater conversation about public relations' current role in society. Moreover, they ultimately diversify the object of research, inviting for reflections on other (marginal, till then) aspects of public relations practice and theory, while proposing alternative paradigms, theories, and methodologies.

It is in this reflexive context in scholarship that the stream of research on the history of public relations has been emerging and growing (e.g. Bentele, 2013; L'Etang, 2004, 2008, 2014; McKie & Xifra, 2014), especially after the establishment of an institutionalized framework, a dedicated annual conference in Bournemouth in 2010. Thus, the series of six volumes edited by Tom Watson (2014, 2015) marks a milestone in the historiography of public relations, as it covers perspectives on the development of public relations in Asia, Eastern Europe, Middle East and Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Western Europe, as well as some theoretical essays on new and revised both the historiographical and the theoretical approach. They bring forward facts, events and phenomena from the past that can facilitate a much complex understanding of what shapes the practices of public relations in their different present manifestations all over the globe. More importantly, they historically contextualize the practices of public relations, placing them in various organizational, institutional, social, political or economic contexts. Of particular interest was to investigate how approaches and methodologies from history can be used in studies on the history of public relations and how collaborations between historians and public relations scholars can be developed for increased interdisciplinary and the advancement of this area of study. This exploratory study fits within this stream of research on the history of public relations in Eastern Europe aiming to investigate longitudinally how public relations developed as practice in the book publishing sector, in Romania. Assuming a critical perspective, such an analysis allows a discussion on the extent to which public relations plays or could play a social role contributing to a society that is undergoing a process of reconstruction on institutional, social, and identity level after the fall of Communism.

**SHIFTING PARADIGMS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS:
FROM EXCELLENCE TO CRITICAL THEORY**

While discussing the development and role of the public relations in the Romanian book publishing industry after 1990, this paper aims to reflect on the emergence of the critical paradigm in the study of public relations, complementary to the dominant functional one. Scholars who assume critical approaches privilege the contexts of public relations, rather than the practice itself: “the systems theories like those proposed by Grunig and his colleagues are incomplete since they ignore the context of public relations in terms of its origin in, and impact on, existing power relations in society. Generally, critical theorists argue that public relations practitioners perpetuate the ability of both corporations and government to maintain a privileged position in society, usually by dominating the news agenda and excluding minority voices from public debate.” (Edwards, 2006) Therefore, the critical approaches to public relations not only change the focus from organizations’ point of view to society at large, but also introduce other elements of analysis, such as the variety of actors in the communication process and their different power status. The relationship to be established, the negotiation and agreement to shared meanings is no longer a process only between an organization and its publics: it is a process taking place within society at large where various actors (organizations, governments, media, NGOs, experts, etc.) with distinct agendas are active, assume positions, negotiate and make use of their variable power resources. It is in this broad context that the research questions in critical public relations change from “how public relations can help organizations be more efficient” to reflexive questions concerned with “what is the role of public relations in society”.

Critical approaches represent clearly a paradigm shift: from understanding and analyzing public relations in terms of management theory that was sometimes taken-for-granted in public relations research with Excellent/Symmetry theory becoming a “dominant paradigm” (Botan and Taylor, 2004) to understanding public relations as a social force or social activity in society. Thus, public relations research has broadened both in terms of methodologies and approaches, as illustrated by the in-depth inventory made by L’Etang (2005): “there has been a major discursive turn within the field (Mickey, 2003; Surma, 2005; Weaver, Motion, & Roper, 2005); a re-orientation away from the U.S. towards other cultures and histories (L’Etang, 2004; Sriramesh and Verčič, 2003; Tilson & Alozie, 2004); and a merging with media sociology (Moloney, 2000)” (p. 522). There is also a trend towards a consistent European body of research in public relations that challenges the US approach to public relations focused on management theory: “Contrary to most public relations approaches, a socially oriented view is not oriented toward management problems, but rather toward the relationship that public relations has with the societies in which it is produced and with the social systems it

co-produces. However, we argue that sociological approaches to public relations can also give meaning to practices at the mesolevel of organizations and the microlevel of individual practitioners” (Ihlen & van Ruler, 2009, p. 3). Additionally, there are also debates on the specificity of public relations in Central and Eastern Europe, following the fall of the Berlin wall: these have been considered either transitional (Lawniczak, 2001), transformational (Grunig, Grunig & Verčič, 2004), or a continuum. (Bentele & Wehmeier, 2003; Bentele, 2010)

Within this critical turn in public relations, scholars have looked also at how sociology and the major works of sociologists may be used in studying the history of public relations: Jacquie L’Etang (1995, 1996a, 2010) and Gunter Bentele (1997, 2010, 2013) have been the most prolific European scholars embarking in such sociologically grounded studies on the history of public relations. L’Etang has particularly focused on issues, methods and politics in writing of the public relations history (2008a) and proposed a historical sociology approach (2004, 2014) that she used to analyze the history of public relations as professional practice and field of study in Great Britain. In turn, Bentele (2010) has analyzed the history of public relations’ practices in Germany and identified distinct periods in order to develop a theory of public relations (the functional-integrative strata model).

Conceptualizing public relations as a social activity, this study draws on social constructivism, particularly on the seminal work of Berger & Luckmann (1966/2008). They consider reality is a social construct and human beings contribute to the social construction of the world, negotiating meanings, interpretations and definitions. Fundamental for constructivism are the concepts of meaning and interpretation that are being created, constructed and reconstructed in the process of communication, which leads to social structures, organizations, and institutions. This *institutionalization* process emerges from the very *habitualization* of practices: “institutionalization occurs whenever there is a reciprocal typification of habitualized actions by types of actors. Put differently, any such typification is an institution. What must be stressed is the reciprocity of institutional typifications and the typicality of not only the actions but also the actors in institutions” (p. 81). Therefore, social activities that repeat and tend to follow a certain pattern lead to the emergence and further development of practices associated with these activities and, through typification, reciprocity and habitualization, they follow a gradual process of institutionalization. And this happens also because a symbolic meaning, of what those practices entail, is socially (re)constructed and shared by the ones who practice them.

If public relations are considered to be a social activity, the concept of institutionalization is useful in understanding how public relations practices have been articulated, have developed over time and have led to the emergence of certain structures and institutions. Through institutionalization can be traced the gradual emergence of a profession, a professional body of practitioners, education and curricula to form the future professional body and, of course, institutions. At the same time, since public relations itself is a dynamic process in which social

actors interact and construct new definitions, meanings and interpretations, these eventually generate new structures and institutions which, in turn, bring new significations and (re)interpretations about public relations.

Consequently, historicity is another key concept in social constructivism, because once the institutions have been established, they “imply historicity and control. Reciprocal typifications of actions are built up in the course of a shared history. They cannot be created instantaneously. Institutions always have a history, of which they are the products. It is impossible to understand an institution adequately without an understanding of the historical process in which it was produced.” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 82) Historicity in public relations requires on the one hand a longitudinal methodology to allow the investigation of the development of practices over wider periods of time and on the other hand the linking of this exploratory endeavor with the political, social, economic contexts of the periods of time envisaged by the research. By contextualizing and embedding the practices in the history of their times it is possible to obtain data that can provide explanations why public relations is understood and practiced in a certain way and, ultimately, to uncover the existing conceptualization of its role which actually shapes that understanding and practice.

In public relations scholarship, Günter Bentele and Manfred Rühl (1993) were the first to discuss about the application of social constructivist theories. Building on this perspective, Bentele (2008) proposes the reconstructive approach as a theory of public relations: “reconstructive processes take place in the processes of public communication that emerge through public relations as well as advertising and journalistic activities. In the process of communicative description of reality, social and natural reality is communicatively reconstructed. Within those processes, the principles of perspectiveness, selectivity and constructiveness are most relevant. The reconstructive approach combines social information and communication relationships.” (p. 19). Although Bentele’s functional-integrative stratification approach has the limit of focusing on linear explanations and functionality (see for example L’Etang, 2014, p. 657-658), the discussion on the reconstructive nature of communications particularly useful in this study. It highlights the very symbolic negotiations between different social actors in the making of public relations as a social activity: perspectiveness, selectivity and constructiveness are the stages in the dynamic process of negotiation through interaction between different perspectives of various social actors who select accordingly from reality and propose a constructed interpretation of it.

Building on a social constructivism and the (re)constructive approach, the main exploratory research question that structures this longitudinal study is: how did public relations develop in Romanian book publishing industry after 1990? The specific questions are the following:

(RQ1) What evolutions in the book publishing industry and in Romanian society facilitated the emergence and the institutionalization of the public relations practices after 1990?

(RQ2) What role has public relations been playing in the Romanian book publishing industry during 25 years?

(RQ3) How is public relations currently understood and practiced in the Romanian book publishing industry?

METHODOLOGY

To address these research questions, this study employs a historical sociology approach defined by L'Etang (2004) as “work that uses historical data to support sociological interpretation and analysis” (p. 233). In her view, “historical sociology uses historical data to support sociological interpretation and analysis, for example, seeing PR as part of social processes, structuration, discursive practices linked to historical developments and changes in those processes in ways that are contextual, interrogative and disruptive.” (L'Etang, 2014, p. 656) Furthermore, L'Etang (2014) argues that drawing PR histories using historical sociology implies the investigation of “nuanced dialectical histories that reflect the dynamic between the past that no longer exists, the history of thought and thinking, the imagination, the moment of writing, contemporary assumptions and the anticipations of the future”. (p. 659)

Combining a social constructivist and a historical sociology approach it is possible to trace not only the gradual institutionalization of public relations practices within book publishing industry, but also to show how different contexts influence this process of change: it incorporates socio-cultural and political contexts and transformations occurred at society level into a study on the reconstruction of PR history to allow an analysis that goes beyond causality and making links between different events and reveals a structural and processual dynamics. This ultimately contributes to a shift from a descriptive type of analysis to a reflexive type of analysis focused on the re-evaluation of public relations in society. Consequently, this study investigates (1) the practices of public relations, their habitualization and typification that have led to a certain institutionalization in the book publishing industry; and (2) incorporates these developments within different socio-political contexts in Romania's recent history in order to reflect on the social role of public relations. The historical sociology approach used by L'Etang (2004) to trace the professionalization of public relations in Britain, drawing on the sociology of profession, was adapted to correspond to the realities of Romania: public relations is generally considered to have emerged in Romania as practice after 1990 and the fall of the Communist regime. (Rogojinaru, 2009) There were, of course, communication practices in Romania also before 1990, but they served the dissemination efforts of the Romanian Communist Party and the propaganda of the regime. Instead, this study aims to reflect on and explore the public relations' development and role in the democratic Romanian society, in an

industry closely related to the very process of (re)making/ birth of a democratic society after 1990.

Operationalizing the historical sociology approach, this exploratory study builds on a mix corpus including: (a) in-depth interviews with representatives of publishing houses, journalists and experts in book publishing, (b) online materials on the evolution of the book publishing industry and (c) data from social documents (barometres).

This mix corpus brings valuable data that are analyzed using the following dimensions of research: the actors (mainly publishing houses, but also journalists and experts in the publishing industry), the practices of public relations and the communication products (e.g. campaigns) and the structures (departments of public relations within publishing houses). The analysis seeks to identify the significations attributed by the different actors to certain practices and the emergence of structures. It is correlated with the historical data on the development of the publishing sector and considered within a historical periodization – the three phases identified by Rogojinaru (2009) in the development of public relations, in general, in Romania: (1) the pioneer phase of the early 1990s (1991–1995) based on an amalgam practices of media, publicity and promotional events; (2) the exploratory phase in the second half of 1990s (1995–2000/2001) introductory for public relations studies and transient in practice; (3) the consolidation phase from 2001 and ongoing (p. 553).

The interviews were carried out in May-June 2016 with: representatives of Romanian publishing houses (Alexandra Florescu, the PR and Brand Manager of Nemira; Miruna Meirosu, PR Manager of Curtea Veche Publishing; Raluca Tirnauceanu, the Marketing Coordinator of Litera), specialized journalists on cultural topics (Marius Chivu, writer and cultural journalist at *Dilema Veche* cultural magazine, Marius Constantinescu, Senior cultural journalist at the Romanian Television, Doinel Tronaru, cultural journalist at *Adevarul* newspaper) and experts in the book publishing field (the Founder and Managing Director of Headsome Communication, Dr. Bogdan Hrib, Publisher at Tritonic Books). The interview questions were related to: how a book is currently promoted (including most frequent and efficient practices); how a book used to be promoted in the early 1990s, as of 1995 and as of 2000 – if there were changes in the practices, what moments or contexts influenced them and how; the naming of the function/responsible in charge of promoting a book within the publishing house, when such a function/ role was created within the publishing house and the context that triggered the decision; the main current responsibilities of the public relations department/practitioner; why publishing houses started assuming a social role by promoting actions and even campaign to increase the level of reading in Romania; the main problems in the book publishing industry – and comparatively, the problems back in the 1990s and in the 2000s; the future role of the public relations practitioners within the book publishing houses.

The initial aim of the research was to trace the gradual institutionalization of public relations in the Romanian book publishing industry and explore even further the professionalization the practices over a period of 25 years. Therefore, requests for interviews have been sent to the top 10 publishing houses on the Romanian market to the general managers and the responsible for promoting the book (be it public relations, marketing and/ or branding). The fact that all 10 had such practitioners or even a department in charge of promoting the books shows there is an institutionalization of practices of public relations in 2016. However, these are quite often mixed with marketing responsibilities, as their title shows. Unfortunately, only three publishing houses accepted to answer the interview questions, therefore the research needed to be recalibrated. Since it wasn't possible to trace the exact stages of the institutionalization process, the specificity of practices and their evolutions over time, the motivations behind the institutionalization that could reveal certain understandings, the study refocused on the practices of public relations and the contextualization of these practices. In other words, instead of privileging the perspective of publishing houses, the study looks at how different actors (publishing houses, experts, journalists) interpret these practices and integrate them within different contexts during the last 25 years: the historical developments of the country, the specificity of the Romanian book publishing industry and the evolution of public relations as profession after 1990.

To complement the 8 interviews, a corpus of 50 online materials was gathered to support a documentary reconstitution of these different contexts in the period 1990-2015. Although both industries (of publishing houses and public relations) have professional associations, there is a lack of studies, researches and archives that would have allowed the assessment of their development and professionalization. Consequently, media became an important documentary source due to its constant interest in covering news on the two industries and in carrying out its own studies and interviews in an effort to present the evolutions of the market. The corpus was selected via the search engine google.ro using key phrases such as "book publishing industry", "book publishing industry in 1990", "book promotion", respectively "public relations industry". From the results returned, there were selected articles in the first two pages of the search with the following criteria: cultural media (*Revista 22, Dilema Veche, Dilemateca*), general media (*Cotidianul, Hotnews, Voxpublica*), economic media (*Forbes, Capital, Ziarul Financiar, Wall-street.ro*), press agency (*Mediafax*) and specialized portal of news, articles and analyses in public relations and communication (IAA Romania website). The diversity of media was an important criterion to carry out a historical reconstruction from various sources, specializations and perspectives.

Additionally, data from national and international studies and barometers were included to provide contextual data on cultural consumption and book consumption in Romania: the Eurobarometer survey on cultural access and participation 2013 of the European Commission, the Barometer of Cultural

Consumption in Romania 2005 and 2014 editions. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) study 2012 of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) was also consulted and data regarding the reading capacity of 15-year-old students were also used, to bring forward other elements that could facilitate the understanding of Romanian Post-Communist context.

Summing up, this article explores the development of public relations in the Romanian book publishing industry by grounding the analysis of interviews and documentary sources within the historical contexts of the Romanian society's evolution after Communist. It seeks to offer explanations with regards to how public relations has been practiced and understood by different social actors and reflects on how it can ultimately serve, in the future, not only the purpose of the publishing houses, but also that of the Romanian society at large.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. THE ROMANIAN BOOK PUBLISHING INDUSTRY – A POST-COMMUNIST CONSTRUCT

The current Romanian book publishing industry is a rather young one: almost all publishing houses have been established after 1990. There were publishing houses before Communism, but they were nationalized in 1948 when the Communist state “expropriated all firms employing more than 100 people, and by 1950 the share of the state sector in industry reached over 92%”. (Berend, 1996, p. 73) Not only publishing houses, but also printing houses and private bookstores, have been affected: some were closed, while others became state owned companies. It was the time when also newspapers and cultural journals were banned in an attempt to marginalize the pre-communist high profile intellectuals who could criticize the system: they were expelled from universities and some of them were even imprisoned; others were also targeted for “recycling” if they agreed to promote the ideals of the social state and become party members. In addition, in 1949, the state created its own publishing houses and an institutional structure (the General Directorate for Publishing House, Printing Houses and Book Distribution) to supervise, monitor and control what was published: the aim was “to encourage the mass printing of Marxist-Leninist classics, of realist socialist literature, of various works of propaganda (political, cultural, atheistic scientific) and of school books”. (Vasile, 2011, p. 131)

Although there has been an emerging line of research on Communism in Romania (e.g. Giurescu *et al.*, 2010; Tismaneanu, 2011), including on aspects related to culture (Vasile, 2011, 2013), data are still rather scarce and difficult to find with regards to the exact dimension or evolution of the book publishing industry during Communism. Some overall figures are mentioned in the online

version of a book on Romania published by the Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress as part of the Country Studies/Area Handbook Series sponsored by the U.S. Department of the Army between 1986 and 1998:

“From 1955 to 1966 the number of titles gradually increased, reaching a plateau of about 9,000. In the following decades, however, book publishing declined dramatically, and in 1985 only 3,063 titles were published – about one-third as many as during the 1960s. Not only the number, but also the variety of books published during the 1970s and 1980s was reduced. By far the largest number of titles credited to a single author was attributed to Ceausescu, whose writings were published in Romanian and in foreign languages in large printings. [...] The number of publishing houses declined from about 25 in the early 1970s to 18 in the late 1980s”. (Bachman, 1989, Mass Media chapter)

Additionally, Ion Bogdan Lefter (2009) recalls that, during dictatorship, due to the closed society in which newspapers were controlled, the TV program was two hours and the options for going out were almost inexistent, reading became a way of entertainment, but only for a minority part of Romanians – the intellectual public:

“Only in the beginnings of Communism, when books were printed to fill the new rural libraries, there were hundreds of thousands of copies, but then literature was not literature, but in most cases pure propaganda. Things have stabilized during 1960-1970, when there were several tens of thousands of copies for prose and several thousands for poetry, then around 1.000–1.500 copies during the 1980s, and decreasing towards 500 copies at the end of the era.” (Lefter, 2009, para. 4 and 5)

In this context, immediately after the Revolution in December 1989, there was a boom in book consumption, largely facilitated by the general chaos and the lack of regulations that followed, including in the book publishing industry. Consequently, “in 1991 over 10,000 publishing houses were registered: publishing books (and media) was, in the first post-communist years, a good business”. (Vasilescu, 2006, para. 2) Recalling that period, the Publisher of Tritonic Books explains how this was possible:

“The 1990s were the years when it was easy to fill the holes on the Romanians bookshelves. Books circulated without being translated, they were even copied using xerox machines and titles that one just heard about were sold in number of copies that are unthinkable today. [...] editing books seemed an apartment business with guaranteed success.” (Dr. Bogdan Hrib, personal communication, June 26, 2016).

Therefore, „in 1990, a book could be published even in 50,000 to 150,000 number of copies was the demand delayed for decades because of the censorship and all editors were publishing what used to be censored till 1990”, as explained Gabriel Liiceanu, director of Humanitas Publishing House and president of the Romanian Editors Association in 2005. (Corlatan, 2005, para. 4) The types of books ranged from mystery novels, science fiction, romance novels, erotic novels,

adventure books and also documents, memoirs and journals. However, iconic for that period is considered the success of erotic literature symbolized by the „Sandra Brown phenomenon”: „one does not know for sure how many books of Sandra Brown have been published in Romanian – some say that there have been more books „translated” than she actually wrote: authors have quickly put together writings *à la manière de* and published them under the already famous name”. (Vasilescu, 2006, para. 3)

These accounts of the early 1990s show on the one hand the poor legacy of the book publishing industry, which basically emerged after the Revolution, and on the other hand a certain “hunger” at society level for everything that had been previously forbidden. Thus, they depict a society deeply affected by the censorship culture during the Communist regime in which being able to find and buy any book was a symbol of the new freedom. This consumption behavior and the particular social context were quickly manipulated by people who saw a business opportunity to make money capitalizing on a growing demand. This ultimately impacted the further slow development of the industry. Towards the end of the 1990s, the situation was radically different as the number of copies has diminished, due to several factors: „the production costs increased by 40% in 1998, the hyperinflation decreased the purchasing power, the supply became greater than the demand; therefore in 1999 the book production dropped by 80% as compared to the beginning of the decade. The number of copies reached a medium of 2,100.” (Vasilescu, 2006, para. 6)

After 2000, there were over 4,000 publishing houses registered in the data base of the Romanian National Library. In 2004, “only 200–300 publishing houses are actually active on the market and among them only 100 have a significant activity: there are over 10,000 titles per year and the medium number of copies is 2,400”, according to Doina Marian, executive president of the Romanian Editors Association (Corlatan, 2005).

At that time, the negative evolution of the market between 1990 and 2006 was considered to be normal after the chaos of the unregulated years of early 1990s. However, as the industry developed, several actors in the book publishing (editors, authors and journalists) pointed out to the lack of national infrastructure and governmental policies in the field as being a key structural factors contributing to this decline:

“The bookstores in small cities or in the districts of the big cities have been disappearing; in villages *there is no* network of distributing books, which means 40% of the population does not have direct access to books. Some figure from the National Statistics Institute: in 1990, there were 16,665 libraries in the country, in 2004 only 12,574; the school libraries also decrease (10,029 in 1990, 9,204 in 2003), as well as the public libraries (4,458 in 1990, 2,906 in 2003). [...] the state does not offer much: no long term cultural policies, no spaces of “socializing” such as bookstores and libraries, nor legislative regulations to stimulate consumption – which is, in our case, book acquisition.” (Vasilescu, 2006, para. 10)

In 2016, almost 10 years later after the status described above, the evolution of the industry seems to have continued its negative trend. Putting together statistical data from the last available studies, the cultural journalist and writer Marius Chivu characterizes the current book publishing industry as follows: “the overall turnover is about 60 million EUR (for comparison, in Hungary is 123 million EUR, while in Poland is 772 million EUR), with around 130 active publishing houses and 260 bookstores (although the number of cities is greater and 45% of the population lives anyway in villages with no libraries), and a medium number of copies around 1,000 per title.” (Chivu, 2016)

In this context, the national book fairs (Gaudeamus established in 1994 and Bookfest established in 2005) have been growing and became central to the industry, as places where readers can come, meet their authors and buy discounted books. This is another specificity of the Romanian book sector as in other countries the book fairs are places where editors and authors meet to discuss potential collaborations. In turn, in Romania, due to the gradual closing of bookstores, the book fairs are the main points of contact between readers and publishing houses. Ultimately, the book fairs are opportunities for the first to buy many discounted books and the later to score high sales (an important percentage of the annual turnover of a publishing house is obtained during the fairs).

Given these developments and figures, Romania ranks last in the European Union with the lowest book consumption: a Romanian spends a medium of 5 EUR per year on books and on average there is a book consumption of one book per capita per year (Barbu, 2015). The latest Eurobarometer on cultural access and participation (2013) shows almost half of the Romanian population has not read even one book during an entire year and frequently Romanians invoke the lack of access to cultural infrastructure in general (cinema halls, libraries, bookstores, etc.) as a reason for their lack of participation in cultural life. To complement these data, the latest Programme for International Students Assessment (2012) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) shows almost 40% of Romanian high school students have difficulties in reading and understanding a text for the first time, which paradoxically can be interpreted as both root cause and consequence of the situation of culture and book consumption in Romania.

However, it is very difficult to have an accurate evaluation of the book publishing industry and consumer behavior since there are hardly any studies. The Romanian Editors Association points to the little transparency in the industry as key reason for this situation, as most publishing houses don't want to publicize their data regarding the number of copies they sell. (Tiron, 2012). Consequently, media has come to play a significant role in the book publishing industry, through the constant efforts of some journalists who have followed closely its evolution overtime and have made their own studies and reports on the market. One of the latest series of interviews and analysis on the state of the industry is the one carried

out in March 2016 by Petre Barbu from *Forbes* magazine who has interviewed the directors of the major 10 publishing houses. Summing up the development of this industry and its status, the most representative editors in Romania point to the following key issues: the lack of access to books for a large percent of the population, the little involvement of the state in elaborating long term policies for the cultural and book sector and the precarious status of education in Romania (Barbu, 2016b; Chivu 2016). The latter is actually a frequently used argument in the discourse of publishing houses in order to legitimize their campaigns of increasing literacy and reading among children.

2. THE GENERAL CONTEXT OF PUBLIC RELATIONS' DEVELOPMENT IN ROMANIA

Public relations were officially recognized as a profession in Romania in 1997 when the title of public relations specialist was included in the national classification of occupations. But as a practice, public relations are considered to have emerged soon after 1990, although publicity and political propaganda preceded it (Rogojinaru, 2009). Similar to other countries in the former communist bloc, in Romania public relations has definitely undergone a process of development and institutionalization since then. For instance, a study of the history of the Romanian government public relations (Dolea, 2012) showed that the institutionalization process started soon after 1990, but its professionalization was still ongoing as there was a predominance of a technical role and a rather asymmetric model of public information.

In these 25 years, various actors contributed constantly to the way public relations was defined, practiced and understood in Romanian society. The first academic courses in public relations were introduced in the capital Bucharest in 1991 at post graduate level by the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, followed by the University of Bucharest which offered undergraduate courses in public relations as of 1992. Gradually, the education in public relations has spread all over the country and currently every university in the major cities and regions (such as Iași in Moldavia, Cluj in Transylvania, Timișoara in Banat, Constanța in Dobrogea) offers degrees in communication and public relations. Doctoral programs in communication sciences were approved and introduced in the educational system as of 2008.

In Romania, there is currently no national review of public relations, but there are several journals and reviews of various faculties of communication, journalism and/or public relations. Publishing houses have started to translate major handbooks and manuals of public relations, such as the ones of Wilcox and Cutlip, after 2005, and even to create book series dedicated to communication and public relations, such as Polirom (Public Relations series), Curtea Veche Publishing (International Public Relations series), Tritonic (Media series),

encouraging Romanian authors to publish their research and work. Yet, the research on Romanian public relations is rather scarce.

A major role in the development of the profession was played by the Romanian practitioners who established the first Romanian public relations agencies, such as Perfect Ltd. Co, in 1992, followed by DC Communication, BDR Associates and Image PR, all three in 1995 and PRAIS Corporate Communications in 1996. Foreign agencies and global communication companies also started to discover the potential of the emerging Romanian market and opened local branches (e.g. Saatchi and Saatchi PR, Ogilvy PR, Grafitti PR, McCann PR) or expanded their networks through affiliations with local Romanian PR agencies: Hill & Knowlton, Ketchum, Golin. This process accelerated after 2000 and the public relations market continued growing: in 2004 the first 16 public relations agencies had a cumulated turnover of around 10 million euro (Chilom & Barbu, 2005); in 2011, the overall public relations industry was estimated at around 20–25 million euro (Negraru, 2012); in 2015, the first 30 public relations agencies had a turnover of over 32 million euro, increasing by 7,1% as compared to the previous year and a net profit of 2,18 million euro, according to the data from the Romanian Ministry of Public Finance (Barbu, 2016a). Thus, looking from a historical perspective, the public relations industry tripled in the last decade and became more competitive with several top players. Yet, there are no data on how many practitioners in public relations there are in Romania.

Going back to the 1990s, the establishment of a professional association followed naturally after the setting up of first public relations agencies, in a common effort of practitioners from agencies, companies or public institutions, as well as scholars to gain social recognition for the new practice and field of study. The Romanian Association of Public Relations (ARRP) was created in 1995 and defined its mission as contributing to the development and consolidation of public relations in Romania. Its main achievement is the official recognition of the profession of public relations specialist and its inclusion in the national classification of occupations in Romania in 1997 (Bortun, 2005). ARRP is a founding member of the Global Alliance for public relations, follows the Code of Athens and has its own code of conduct created in 2008. From 2012, ARRP started a process of modernization and change of status, created a new visual identity, extended its activities and focus to include standardization and certification (Romanian PR Association, 2012).

Another professional association is the Club of Public Relations Companies (CCRP) founded in 2003 by agencies and companies activating in public relations. While ARRP gathered practitioners (thus individual members), CCRP gathered organizations with the assumed purpose to define and promote the activity and the interests of the public relations industry, as well as to contribute actively to the development of a professional environment that is ethical, sound and competent and also aligned with the international practices of the domain (“PR companies

established a club”, 2003). CCRP’s main achievements are the first two studies on the status and use of public relations within the private sector among the most important 200 investors and advertisers in Romania: the first in 2006-2007 (“Budgets allocated by Romanian companies for public relations services”, 2007) and the second in 2010 on the image and use of public relations (Muraru, 2010). Considering the lack of empirical research and studies on public relations in Romania, these two studies are valuable in providing data on how it was practiced and understood in some companies in that period.

This short overview of the development of public relations as a profession in Romania is useful for this study as it provides contextual data with regards to the degree of its institutionalization and professionalization. They add to the general data on the book publishing industry from the previous section, providing a valuable context for the discussion and analysis of public relations practices and role in this particular industry.

3. PUBLIC RELATIONS IN ROMANIAN BOOK PUBLISHING INDUSTRY AFTER 1990

The book publishing industry adopted public relations practices mainly after 2000, rather late if compared to the general evolutions of public relations in Romania (emerged in the early 1990s). The explanations of this late adoption are the post-communist context and the specificity of the industry: “In the 1990s, the “hunger” for reading books was so huge that promotion functioned from people to people and an important role was played by generalist publications, by monthly and even cultural magazines” (Dr. Bogdan Hrib, Publisher Tritonic Books, personal communication, June 26, 2016). Thus, journalists were the ones looking for information about new books and interested in writing about them in the context of an existent huge demand, while the focus of the publishing houses was only to ensure that books were physically on the market. Moreover, when publishing houses started to promote their books, incipient marketing strategies seemed to have prevailed:

“In this context (of the 1990s), there was no need for complex marketing strategies. For a title to be sold in tens of thousands of copies it was enough to follow some basic steps such as: translation, editing, printing and ensuring as wider a distribution as possible. After 1995, there were promotional campaigns: preferential exposure of book in bookstores, reviews in cultural publications, interviews with authors at television or radio, organizing book launches and book signing sessions.” (Raluca Tirnauceanu, Marketing Coordinator at Litera, personal communication, July 6, 2016).

These statements construct the image of an early post-communist society eager to read, as a symbol of the newly acquired freedom, while media are placed in a very powerful position: they facilitate the process of people to people communication and create early forms of success on the publishing market. In fact,

one of the oldest and most used practices in book promotion in Romania is the direct distribution of copies to journalists for review. This signifies the key role of journalists in this process of consecrating a book, even if in time and particularly after the economic crisis and the advent of social media there have been fewer and fewer cultural journalists in print media. Some have turned to blogs and social media and continue to review books, but their role has been reconfigured as well: their audiences are no longer general, are mostly people familiar with their signature and who have followed them in online, a new space where the journalists have created their own public cultural spheres.

It was only after 2000, as the market became increasingly competitive, that public relations practices were gradually institutionalized and graduates in public relations were hired:

“In our company, the position of PR specialist was created around 2007, when there was a dire need for a professional. (...) In 2007, it [PR] still was something of avant-garde. There was no knowledge about what a specialist in PR was, what were the responsibilities, how he/she could actually support the development of a company.” (Miruna Meirosu, PR Manager of Curtea Veche Publishing, personal communication, July 5, 2016).

The creation of a public relations role is thus linked with a need of the publishing house to develop the overall business: at that time, in the entire industry, the number of copies for a book was already very small as compared to the hundred of thousands of copies that were sold in the early 1990s. Therefore, the institutionalization of public relations is rather emerging from the desire to find a solution for growth in the overall book publishing industry, than from an understanding of its key role or potential within an organization.

Analyzing the overall evolution of the industry, the Publisher of Tritonic Books places into a wider context the establishment of structures dedicated to public relations within publishing houses:

“After 2000, the techniques of promotion in book publishing industry start to imitate the Western model. [...] simultaneous launches all over the world, including Romania, books are released together with the movies (even the cover of the book is taken from the movie’s ad), and the first Advanced Reading Copies appear. We can talk about a gradual professionalization of promotional activities and of departments with 2–3 people as of 2000, while between 2006 and 2008 the large number of copies and the wide variety of titles allowed the budgeting of public relations. (...) The emergence of communication specialists, graduates in this field, allowed the use of techniques specific to the field.” (Dr. Bogdan Hrib, personal communication, June 26, 2016).

Thus, the practices of book promotion are presented as following a Western imitation model or recipe that preceded the actual institutionalization of public relations. In fact, this role has originated in the US. Therefore, it might be willingness to import the successful format of promoting a book in the West that actually created a favorable context for setting up such a public relations role

within Romanian publishing companies. Consequently, because of this import of a “form without content” and despite these institutional advancements, there was a predominance of functions associated with a technical role of public relations within publishing houses during the 2000s:

“In the early 2000, doing PR meant ensuring good media coverage, editing press releases, drafting a speech, conceiving and editing of a brochure. Now, the activity of a specialist is much more complex: events organizing (book launches/ press releases), editing of annual reports, mediating possible conflicts, management counseling.” (Raluca Tirnauceanu, Marketing Coordinator at Litera, personal communication, July 6, 2016).

It was the growing number of education programs in public relations in Romania and its general development as a new profession that has slowly led to a reconfiguration of the role within publishing houses from a sole technical one to a more managerial one. Reflecting on what changed in the practices of book promotion after the establishment of public relations departments within the publishing houses, some journalists mention: “the more direct contact (...) the abandonment of classical chronicles, critiques, comments (due to the lack of readers, but also of specialized cultural journalists who can write them)” (Doinei Tronaru, cultural journalist at *Adevarul* newspaper, personal communication, June 24, 2016); “a plus of rigor, of professionalism, of correct and effective targeting of the public, as the communication specialist has a vital role in promoting a book that, beyond its aesthetic, moral, spiritual value, is a product that needs to be sold and a publishing house is, after all, a business” (Marius Constantinescu, Senior cultural journalist at the Romanian Television, personal communication, June 13, 2016). Other journalists point out that creating an institutional structure is not enough for the professionalization of the book publishing industry if these efforts are not sustainable:

“The executive director [is responsible for the promotion of the books in a publishing house] does not allocate budget for marketing and public relations, a department which, consequently, pays poorly its employees. Except for two-three big publishing houses, the public relations specialists leave after some months. There are no professional public relations practitioners, only amateurs and juniors. ... The publishing houses do not invest in editing to have good editors, not to mention public relations...” (Marius Chivu, writer and cultural journalist at *Dilema Veche*, personal communication, June 29, 2016).

From the perspective of cultural journalists who have followed closely the evolution of the post-communist book publishing industry over time, the professionalization of public relations is directly linked with the vision of the publishing houses’ management and a certain institutional understanding of its mission: the poor allocation of resources for the entire organization, not only the communication department, is due to this limited managerial vision that seems to prevail. Therefore, journalists point out that one of the problems in the industry is the quality of book editing process, not necessarily the lack of specialists.

The top publishing houses have nevertheless continued to diversify and improve their practices of communication, particularly after the recovery from the 2008 global economic crisis that affected also Romania and this small industry. That's the period with the most rapid transformations due to the technological and internet advent in Romania and publishing houses start blogs and open social media accounts, while websites are customized and upgraded to include online stores. Some publishing houses develop strategic campaigns of integrated communication that include interviews, media campaigns, launches and public lectures & readings, meetings with authors in big public spaces (e.g. at the Romanian Atheneum) outside the traditional book fairs or bookstores: Polirom and Curtea Veche, are even awarded for their communication campaigns at the national competition Romanian Public Relations Award. (Dolea, 2008) The practices become so complex that the integrated campaigns are correlated with theater plays, exhibits, the introduction of courses on human rights in the curricula for high school students, as it was, for example, the case for the Romanian translation of the book "Speak truth to power" by Kerry Kennedy (Gutu & Dolea, 2009). However, this was a worldwide program of human rights advocacy and the promotional concept was already created and tested in other countries before being implemented also in Romania. Therefore, these are rather exceptions and don't reflect a maturity of the industry as a whole:

"Currently, less than a quarter (circa 15%) of the active publishing houses have employed a communication specialist (...) Thus, [it is] a community with few people that is rarely talked about, that has an identity shared between the two worlds to which it relates, the one of the cultural people and the one of communication consultants, without the feeling of really belonging to either of them. (...) the communication specialist might end up completing tasks that are actually of the book editors or of the sales specialist and so on..." (Founder and Managing Director of Headsome Communication, personal communication, June 28, 2016).

Thus, experts in the book publishing industry highlight also the important aspect of the professional identity of public relations specialists in this industry: they need to negotiate and construct their identity within their organization. In other words, they are placed in a position of advocating and legitimizing their communication role in relation with book editing and sales, which are different roles. This links back to the point expressed by journalists related to certain limited organizational visions within Romanian publishing houses that actually define this role in a narrow manner which ends up by imposing "boundaries" in exercising the public relations profession.

In 2012, the first public relations agency dedicated entirely to the book sector (Headsome Communication) was established by the former Public Relations Director of Polirom Publishing House. The agency continues up to date to contribute to the professionalization of public relations within the book sector, initiating dedicated events that became annual: "Approved for Printing. The Gala

of the Romanian Book sector” and “The Bucharest International Literature Festival”.

The need for continuous professionalization within and outside publishing houses is illustrated also by the fact that, in 2016, publishing houses employ a variety of public relations tools, techniques and instruments, but mix these with marketing and sales, in order to promote their books:

“We try to involve as many opinion leaders as possible, we use testimonials, we partner with actors [...] who can, in turn, support with communication towards the communities they have access to. We use radio commercials through partnerships with the biggest stations in the country [...] banners on the most relevant blogs and websites, to be visible and thus generate sales. Promotions and preferential exposure in bookstores are also tactics we use along with direct mailing.” (Miruna Meirosu, PR Manager of Curtea Veche Publishing, personal communication, July 5, 2016).

There is also a tendency towards social media and particularly Facebook and some publishing houses even hired an online specialist:

“the department of communication and promotion includes a Marketing Coordinator (who works closely with sales for commercial campaigns, for strategic partnership with suppliers, for participating at book fairs and other events), a Public Relations and Brand Manager (who handles media and online communication, events organization, the branding strategy and the promotion of books/collections) and an Online Manager (who takes care of our online presence and of the communication with our public through our communities on Facebook, blog and other online partners).” (Alexandra Florescu, PR and Brand Manager Nemira, personal communication, June 27, 2016).

These descriptions of instructional structures and promotional practices in place in 2016 show how much the audiences, the media and the Romanian society, in general, have changed, as compared to the early 1990s: from the people to people model of communication and the key role of media, the promotion of books has become a strategically managed communication process targeting different segments of people, using various channels and practices. The reconfigurations in media, the rapid development of internet and social media and, especially, of their users, has ultimately pressed the public relations specialists to push not only the boundaries set by the managerial vision within their organizations, but also their own: the profession of public relations is rapidly changing in this interconnected world, therefore practitioners need to constantly reposition and redefine their role in relation with global trends, technological developments and their impact on people.

From their perspective, the journalists highlight the importance of: (1) the direct meetings between authors and the public – “I believe in public lectures, in multiple launches (book fairs, festivals, events...) ...it is an art” (Marius Constantinescu, Senior cultural journalist at the Romanian Television, personal communication, June 13, 2016); (2) the “street banners for whoever can afford, contests at radio and TV according to the type of the book. By far, the most efficient are the mentions on the blogs of an influencer in online” (Doinel Tronaru,

Cultural journalist at *Adevarul* newspaper, personal communication, June 24, 2016).

On the other hand, experts in the field point to the issues that actually limit the practices of public relations:

“Given the lack of budget and the lack of professionalization of those who practice this job, the most efficient practices remain, in fact, the ones that come in handy: the press release, arranging interviews with the author, the events (when the author is available) and, of course, some social media “artifices”. (...) Unfortunately, publishing houses did not include in their organizational charts an online specialist (...) therefore, there are all sorts of campaigns that appear and are signed by people outside the field – some are successful, some others are really inadequate.” (Founder and Managing Director of Headsome Communication, personal communication, June 28, 2016)

In other words, even if books have become brands heavily marketed in order to be sold, cultural journalists bring to the front not only the argument of efficiency in promotion, but also the specificity of this industry and its highly symbolic value: books have been turned into neoliberal merchandise, but they are cultural one, they are art. Thus, one of the polemics within the industry and, largely, within the cultural world is illustrated: to what extent is or should a cultural product be marketed as any other commodity? Are there or should there be some limits given its symbolistics?

Adding to this, there is another new trend among publishing houses: the launch of corporate social responsibility programs meant to make books more accessible and to increase reading habits among young Romanians. These practices are legitimized in terms of: (1) responsibility – “it is our responsibility to increase the book market and we decided to start from the only point where we can really make a difference, which is from children, because this is the age when reading habits form” (Miruna Meirosu, PR Manager of Curtea Veche Publishing, personal communication, July 5, 2016); (2) duty – “In our capacity as cultural operators, we feel it is our duty to do something in order to change this situation, so we organize campaigns to bring people closer to books” (Raluca Tirnauceanu, Marketing Coordinator at Litera, personal communication, July 6, 2016); (3) need of intervention to replace the state – “the reading campaigns (...) come to replace the lack of a national, coherent and relevant program elaborated by authorities, as it happens in other European countries and not only. (...) Therefore, publishing houses assumed part of reading promotion in the communities they have access to and in the format they considered most appropriate.” (Alexandra Florescu, PR and Brand Manager Nemira, personal communication, June 27, 2016).

Such initiatives to promote reading and increase literacy directly to children illustrate a preoccupation of publishing houses for tackling social issues in Romanian society and intervene where the state has failed to provide a long term development program. This idea of trade of identities and roles between private companies and state is not new in the neoliberal view of the world (see Olins,

1999). However, from a critical perspective, the key question is to what extent the publishing houses embarking in such social responsibility programs aim to produce change at society level or instrumentalise this situation in order to obtain visibility for their own business? In other words, do they aim to create readers and reduce illiteracy in Romania or they aim to increase the pool of buyers for their own books? The answer to such questions resides in whether these are long term programs with measurable objectives beyond public relations one (e.g. number of articles/ posts/ interviews). More precisely, we have in view objectives that tackle social change.

Summing up, the evolution of public relations in the book publishing sector over a quarter of a century can be illustrated by a shift in the perception of the book: if in the 1990s the book was a major mean of entertainment till commercial televisions appeared, after the 2000s, the book becomes a cultural product and brand, promoted as any other globalized product. Yet, there is a constant need of professionalization in the promotion of books, all the more as they have such an important social relevance and symbolic value.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Similar to a puzzle, this exploratory study reconstructs from different perspectives the emergence and evolution of public relations practices in the Romanian book publishing industry during a quarter of a century. It shows how the industry itself witnessed a rebirth after decades of Communism, censorship and control and how the huge demand for books in post-communist years did not need any professional communication: there were still used the informal networks developed during Communism to spread the word about new products being available for purchase; additionally, journalists were the ones to promote the books in their columns, without any input received from publishing houses; particularly cultural and social journalists were, thus, supporting the reconstruction of the nation. In this context, public relations practices emerge rather late in the book sector: if related to the phases of public relations general development in Romania (Rogojinaru, 2009), it can be said that the first, pioneer phase based on an amalgam practices of media, publicity and promotional events spreads from 1990 to the 2000/2001, the second, exploratory phase covers the period 2001–2009 and the third, the consolidation phase starts after the economic crisis and the social media advent, mainly 2009/2010 (RQ1).

Publishing houses have started to discover the potential of public relations largely after 2000, as the market became more competitive. However, this is a very fragmented market, with thousands of publishing houses officially registered, but only some tens being really active. Due to the lack of transparency in this industry and the absence of official studies, doubled by the reluctance of the publishing

houses in providing data about their communication practices and their historicity, this study has limited findings: it can not depict an overall picture of the institutionalization and professionalization of public relations in this sector during these 25 years. Instead, employing historical sociology and a constructivist approach, this exploratory study offers perspectives from different actors (public relations practitioners in the book sector, cultural journalists, and experts in the field) and different historical contexts in the development of the book sector, as well as the Romanian society at large. Thus, it is possible to understand the phenomenon of gradual emergence and development of public relations in this industry and not to identify or evaluate the exact stages, characteristics, type of functions and discuss how they varied from a publishing house to another or from a period to another. To address that, future studies should target all publishing houses with public relations practitioner and design a mix quantitative and qualitative methodology, combining survey to define and map practices with interviews to obtain in-depth explanations for those practices.

Putting together these different pieces of puzzle, this study shows that the role of public relations in the post-communist book publishing industry has been largely technical, supporting marketing and sales through events management and editing materials for media (RQ2). It is after 2010 that the strategic, managerial role of public relations has started to be gradually and slowly understood, initially by (some) practitioners themselves, then by (some) directors of the publishing houses. However, this is valid for the top publishing houses and even if the practices have diversified and become more professional, public relations is still in a legitimization phase aiming for recognition both within and outside publishing houses (RQ3). Moreover, the fragmentation of the book publishing industry and the exploratory nature of this study do not allow for generalization. But they can offer premises for future quantitative studies that can explore further these aspects and provide representative data. Public relations practitioners from the top book publishing houses in the industry seem to be in a process of defining their professional identity between what they could do and what the industry and their organizations actually allow them to do. This coincides with the tendency of publishing houses assuming corporate social responsibility programs to increase reading. It is precisely this new focus that could offer public relations practitioners a platform to advocate for a greater, social role for public relations both within organizations and society. Yet, this is rather missing: practitioners still largely legitimize their educational campaigns in terms of their companies' interests for developing a future market of readers and not in terms of addressing a social need they could contribute to. If public relations practitioners understand and assume a social role of public relations that places public interest before the business interests of their companies, they might trigger public policies and develop their own long term responsibility programs. These can ultimately produce social change and increase literacy, which in turn will benefit both their companies and the book publishing industry.

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